



Spring **FEVER**

Hunting, Fishing & Outdoors Guide

March 27, 2024 | Pages 1B-12B
A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO THE

OSAGE COUNTY
Unterrified Democrat

Sasquatch's Fishing Charters

BY ELISE BROCHU
UD WRITER
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Bryant Rackers started fishing with his dad and grandpa on the Osage and Missouri rivers, when he was 13 years old. Now, at 33, he is a US Coast Guard licensed Captain with twenty years of fishing experience, who caught five state-record fish (blue sucker, skipjack herring, white perch, sauger, and short head red horse) before starting Sasquatch's Fishing Charters. "I am the only person and the only guide to hold that many fish state records at one time in Missouri," Rackers said.

The business name was taken to honor his dad, Bruce, who, at 6' 7" and 340 lbs, is nicknamed "Sasquatch." "My dad is very proud that I took over the Sasquatch name and turned it into a business," said Rackers.

Sasquatch's Fishing Charters offers year-round fishing experiences. Depending on the time of year, charters are offered for rod and reel, bow fishing, snagging, or gigging. Bryant even provides equipment and cleans the fish. Clients are welcome to bring their own equipment and anything they'd like to drink (in addition to the bottled water he provides), however all they need to bring is their fishing license.

"They just bring themselves, a fishing license, have a great fun time, and I'll take care of all the rest," Rackers said.

Charters are offered on the Osage, Missouri, and

Gasconade rivers, and also on Lake of the Ozarks for crappie. "I'm a multi species guide down here on the river, so pretty well whatever species lives in the Osage and Missouri River, I do chase and go after," Rackers said, then added "I don't guide for Lake Sturgeon. I can't target or pursue them, because they are an endangered species."

His boat is an 18 1/2 foot Alumacraft Semi V, 80 inches wide, with a 115 Yamaha SHO (super high output). Rackers has both a jet and a propeller unit that can be swapped out based on water depth.

Rackers said the Garmin Livescope he added this year has been a game changer for snagging spoonbill.

"In past years, I would use my big my big sonar, and I would use my side imaging or my down imaging, or 2d sonar also, to scan for the fish then, before the Garmin Livescope, and that would determine if I would fish that area or (if) I need to keep looking around and scouting around for more fish," Rackers said.

"I use my Garmin Livescope to individually target my spoonbill, so you'd see your fish actually swimming on the screen, throw your line and your sinker out past the fish, let it go down towards the fish, and then you would jerk your hooks towards the fish, watching the hooks go into the fish, and then you'd fight the fish from there," he said.

Rackers said he loves fish and eats it all the time, but it's not a requirement for fishing. "I know a lot of people that love to go fishing but hate to eat fish," he said. His favorite fish to eat is the walleye, but his



favorite to target are white bass and hybrid stripers. "They're a little more abundant than the walleye and the sauger population is down here. The walleye/sau-

See **FISHING CHARTERS** on Page 3B

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Fishing charters • from page 2B

ger population has been going down last 10 years, that I have been noticing. And the white bass and the hybrid's a lot more aggressive fighter."

His favorite lure for catching white bass is a Binks Pro Series jiggling spoon, with a three eighths house and a blue back. "White Bass and hybrid stripers tend to love that color and love the action of that spoon. They just eat it up," he said.

"I had my first clients back last May (2023), and they wanted to get on the white bass and hybrid stripers. And each one of them caught their personal best hybrid striper. And one of them's biggest was eight pounds, and the other one was seven pounds. But they had, I think, 10 or 12 mixed bag of the white bass and the hybrids," Rackers continued.

Rackers is CPR certified, as is required for his Captain's license, and can swim. "That Missouri River has definitely got some undertow in it, and if you get out in the current or whatever, them undertows, which I call them little whirlpools, even with a lifejacket on, it could pull you under like a cork," Rackers explained. Being CPR certified means that, if someone falls out of the boat and is rescued, he would be able to give them CPR and navigate them safely back to the boat ramp.



Rackers' favorite person to fish with recreationally is his lovely fiancé, Jessica Nowland. "She's definitely my ride or die companion," he said.

Nowland is also the one who pushed him to get his Captain's license. "I kept

talking about it," Rackers said, "and she was like 'Do it.'"

"And then I had a best buddy of mine, God rest his soul. He passed away last year in a motorcycle accident. He was EMS and (a) firefighter and he's like,



"I can be your teacher. I can teach that class. Let's do it." I said, 'Okay, you give me my CPR training and EMS and then I'll go to my captain's license.'

See **FISHING CHARTERS** on Page 4B

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Fishing charters • from page 3B

I did, and it was a few months later, last February 13, I got my Captain's license," Rackers said. His friend, John "J.L." Lucas died only a few months later.

Rackers said the biggest fish he's ever caught was an 80 lb lake sturgeon, but the oddest was a large mouth bass with a rock shoved in its mouth. "I guess whenever I was reeling it in, its mouth was open and it ran into the bank, or I reeled it in to the bank, and a rock shoved up in it. But I helped it out," he laughed. "I took the rock out of its mouth."

He has also unintentionally caught a few mudpuppies. "I've only caught maybe six total, and that's all been in the Maries River. It (was) actually about this time of the year whenever I caught them, about March/April. That's because I'm pretty sure they are spawning right now, or getting ready to," Rackers explained.

Rackers said, based on his experience, there are probably more white bass and hybrid stripers than there were five years ago. The spoonbill population also seems to be doing very well, since the length limit was increased from 24 to 32 inches.

"Back then you'd have a really small, low quality unhealthy fish - real skinny fish. And right now, since they changed the length limit to 32 inches, you'd have a better-quality, healthier fish. Yes, you do still have some skinny fish in there. But, over time, (those) fish will have time, from between that 24 and 32 inch minimum, (to) get healthier over time and get a bigger belly on them and stuff," Rackers explained.

He believes the reason the spoonbills are skinnier and unhealthy is because they have to compete with invasive, non-native silver and big head carp. "They're both filter feeders and they're

fighting over the same food source," he explained. (Silver Carp are the type that leap out of the water when startled by boat motors.)

The world record Black Carp, he said, came out of the Osage River, at Bonnots Mill. "Them guys actually called me to identify it, and it was 112 pounds. Whenever I came down there, them guys were like, 'You know what this thing is? We know it's a carp of some sort. I was like, 'Holy cow guys, that's a black carp, 100%, You need to get a hold of Conservation and US Fish and Wildlife, like now, because that is invasive,'" he said.

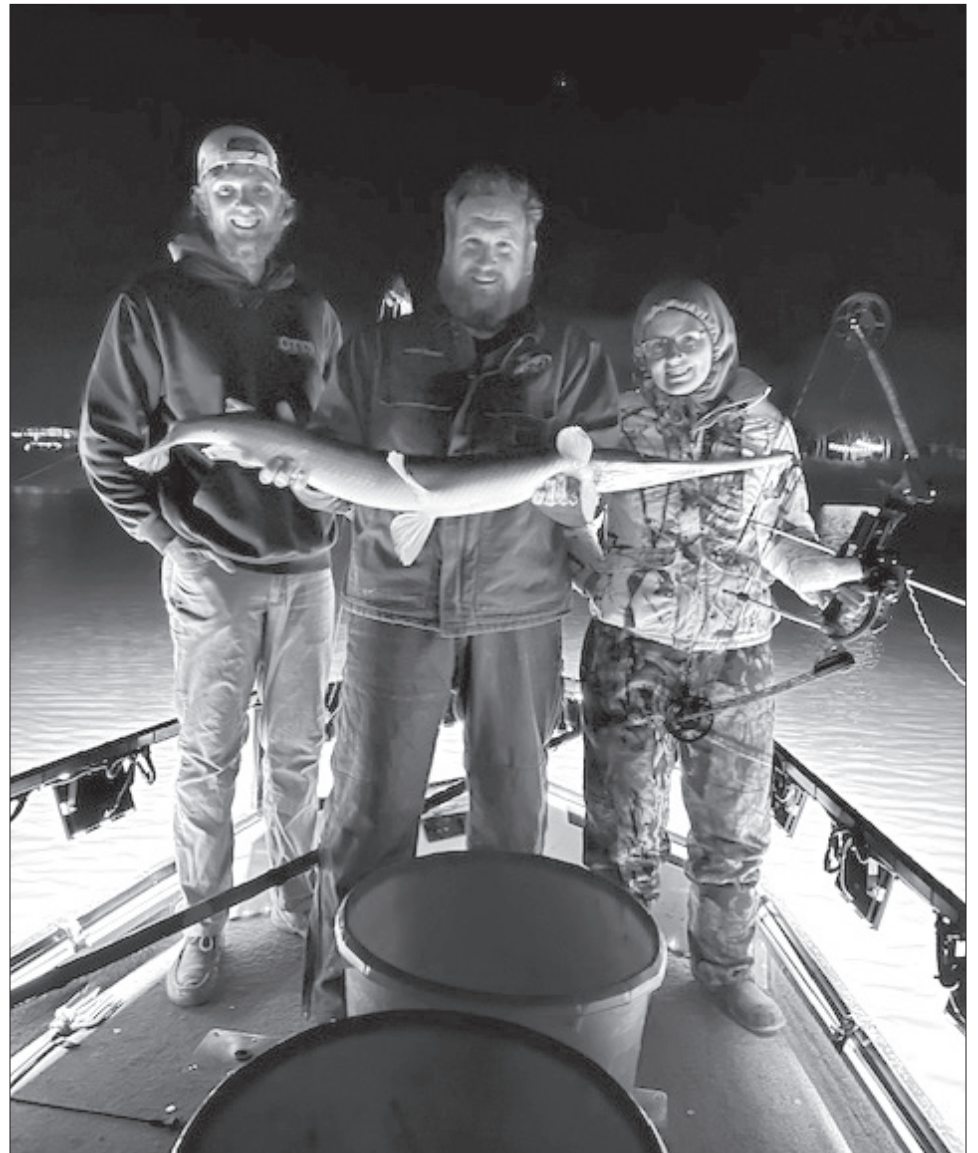
Rackers said that was the first black carp he'd ever seen in this area. "The guy that caught it was kind of disappointed, because he was like, 'Oh, I just got the world record on a darn carp.' I said, 'Dude, I would be pleased with myself.'"

Charters do occasionally have to be rescheduled due to weather. Rackers explained that when the wind gets over 20 miles per hour, the water can get rough. Rain is not an issue, however he will get off the water if there is thunder or lightening. Depending on the timing and number of fish caught, Rackers will discuss with the client whether they're satisfied with the trip or would like to reschedule.

The worst weather he's ever fished in, he said, was a tornado. "As bad as it sounds, it was actually the best," Rackers said. He was in Indiana, working with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and entered a bass fishing tournament with a buddy.

"Well, we knew there was going to be a storm coming, there was going to be a mean one," Rackers said. The two men

See **FISHING CHARTERS** on Page 5B



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were fishing in a cove along a bluff. “We were catching fish, catching some bass and stuff, and we can see it's getting dark,” he said. Then they saw a lot of other boats on the lake going back to the main ramp.

“We couldn't see the storm because it was on the backside of that bluff. Well, we got away from that bluff, and we look up and it was just solid black,” he said. Their phones started going off with tornado warnings, but Rackers said the tornado was in front of them

and heading away, so they decided to stay where they were. “Whenever all (those) dark clouds and that front moved in, my goodness, the bass started biting and we ended up winning that tournament,” he said, “over a big storm.” Rackers' favorite place to fish

is still on the Osage or Missouri Rivers, near Bonnots Mill. “When you're out on the rivers down here, you never know what you may catch,” he said. “I've got five fish state records of five different species. I mean, you never know.”



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Spring Conservation

WEDNESDAY, MAR. 27, 2024 ■ PAGE 6B

Missouri angler catches world record-sized bighead carp

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) confirms George Chance of Festus is the latest state record holder after catching a massive 97-pound bighead carp from the Mississippi River. Chance was bank fishing for catfish with a bottom-bouncing crankbait when he hooked into the fish March 19. The previous pole-and-line state record was an 80-pound fish caught from the Lake of the Ozarks in 2004.

“You kind of know what a fish is once you hook into it based on how it fights,” Chance said. “It was moving pretty slow and I originally thought it could be a flathead.”

Chance was fighting with the fish for around 20 minutes before he finally got it onto the shore.

“The more it fought, I saw its tail and knew it was some type of carp,”

he recalled. “I was able to hook him with a hay hook in order to get him out of the water. It looked to be 50 or 60 pounds at least.”

Chance took the monster fish to a nearby recycling center to use their scale, which prompted him to call his local conservation agent.

“They told me it was a state record, and I said, ‘You’ve got to be kidding me!’” he laughed. “Then later they said ‘It’s not just a state record, it’s a world record!’ and I said ‘You’ve got to be kidding me!’ I had no idea this would happen would I woke up that morning.”

Chance’s catch is the third state record fish recorded for 2024. The fish also beats the current bighead carp pole-and-line world record of

See **BIGHEAD CARP** on Page 7B

Spring Conservation

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Bighead carp • from page 6B

90-pounds.

“I chopped up the fish and put it in my garden,” Chance said. “I’m going to eat it in the form of tomatoes and cucumbers.”

Chance also noted the carp was full of eggs and likely would have spawned this spring. Bighead carp are an invasive fish from Asia. MDC encourages people to harvest carp to help remove them from Missouri waters.

Missouri state record fish are recognized in two categories: pole-and-line and alternative methods.

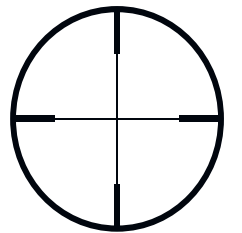
Alternative methods include trotline, throwline, limb line, bank line, jug line, gig, bow, crossbow, underwater spearfishing, snagging, snaring, grabbing, or atlatl. For more information on state record fish, visit <http://short.mdc.mo.gov/ZCp>.

GEORGE CHANCE of Festus was bank fishing from the Mississippi River March 19 when he reeled in a monster 97-pound bighead carp. The fish not only beats the previous state record of 80 pounds, but beats the current pole-and-line world record weight of 90-pounds.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE CHANCE

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Spring Conservation

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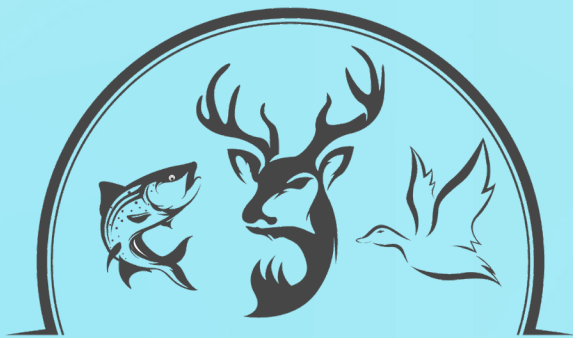
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Traveling to turkey hunt top Midwest Counties

Turkey hunters take to the road each spring to chase the gobbles. When trying to select the best places to go, hunters need to consider turkey population numbers, harvest data, license availability, the amount of public land, distance from home and so much more.

One thing is for certain, when it comes



by **BRANDON BUTLER**

to wrapping tags on turkeys, the Midwest stands above the rest of the country. Wisconsin and Missouri are always in contention for being the state with the most turkeys harvested. The rest of the Midwest puts up respectable numbers, too. Most

states offer over the counter licenses, or at least very likely draw odds. If you are looking for a leg up on where to try your hand in the turkey woods this spring, these five destinations can't miss.

**Kentucky –
Muhlenberg County**

Peabody Wildlife Management Area offers 34,560 acres. This wildlife gem in Muhlenberg County is reason enough to descend on the green River Region during turkey season. Muhlenberg County was number two in the state for spring harvest in 2022 with 524 turkeys tagged. Proximity to the Land Between the Lakes makes this county desirable, because if you do end up struggling to find turkeys, you know there is a giant swath of public land nearby. Kentucky offers over the counter licenses. The season runs April 13 – May 5.

**Missouri –
Shannon County**

Missouri has long been recognized as a top turkey hunting destination. The state offers over the counter licenses and hunters take advantage of them. In 2023, 41,970 turkeys were killed in the state. Hunters find success statewide, but the Ozarks are special. They region is steeped with turkey hunting tradition, especially

Shannon County. Old time box call makers have come from Shannon County for generations. Box calls cut across wide valleys and carry down the long hollers of this sparsely populated county. When you add up the state, federal, and private acres open to public hunting, Shannon County offers well over 100,000 acres of public hunting. Special areas to check out are the Pioneer Forest and the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

Indiana – Brown County

Aside from being arguably Indiana's most scenic county, this public land rich region of the Hoosier Hills is filled with turkey. The nearly 8,000-acre Yellowwood State Forest is great spring turkey hunting destination for three reasons. One, there are a lot of birds running around the forest. Patient hunters should do well if their willing to put in the work and escape any other hunters. Two, there is an excellent fishing lake in the State Forest. Once you tag out or give up, you can wet a line for nice largemouth, catfish, and bluegill. Three, there is a nice primitive campground in the forest next to the lake. Bring your grill and cook fresh wild turkey, fish filets, and morel mushrooms for a meal you'll never forget.

Wisconsin – Grant County

Wisconsin's spring turkey season has

six periods across seven Turkey Management Zones. So when and where has a lot to do with top turkey hunting destinations, but if one could choose one county to hunt, it would be hard to argue against Grant. Zone A boasts the top harvest and Grant is a leading county in the zone. It borders the Mississippi River and offers public land one can access from the water. There isn't much public land elsewhere in the county, so public hunters need to focus on the river bottoms.

Ohio – Athens County

Ohio boasts an estimated population of 150,000 turkeys. The spring season is split into two zones in Ohio. The Northeast Zone is open until May 28. Smaller wildlife areas are open to turkey hunting in the Northeast Zone. The South Zone closes earlier on May 21. The Wayne National Forest offers 240,000 acres of public land in the South Zone. The bag limit for the 2023 spring season is one bearded wild turkey. Hunters must possess a valid Ohio hunting license and spring turkey permit.

See you down the trail...

For more Driftwood Outdoors, check out the podcast on www.driftwoodoutdoors.com or anywhere podcasts are streamed.



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OUTDOORS IN THE OZARKS

Bit, stung and threatened



by **LARRY DABLEMONT**

I wrote about some things awhile back that some folks questioned. One column concerned skunks and someone hoo-rahed the idea that skunks carry rabies and therefore there is liable to be a rabies outbreak this year. We may not see a rabies outbreak on an increased scale, but the increase in skunk populations, which has doubled or tripled their numbers, makes it

likely.

Another questioned why I would kill black snakes on Lightnin' Ridge. That is because they climb high into the trees, and prey upon bird eggs and even baby birds. The other reason I kill them is to save baby rabbits and the eggs of quail, wild turkey and whippoorwills. All three of those birds are declining in number. Blacksnakes are at peak numbers always in the Ozarks. Always! Now if you have a barn where you store grain as food for cattle, as my grandmother did, you have a problem with mice and rats and you like having the snakes as rodent trapper.

But a barn, or a shed is not an ecosystem. An ecosystem is a 'natural-life' system which is unaffected by man's activities. You couldn't actually call my wilderness ridgetop a true ecosystem with my manipulation of things. But if you want to create a real natural life system today, you have to interfere to correct the bad parts of it which man has caused to happen.

There are few true ecosystems in the Ozarks now. I have seen some true ecosystems in Canada and northwestern U.S. I am trying to create one amongst the big timber where I live on this high point above the Pomme River. But today ecosystems around populations of men have to be worked on. Eliminating armadillos, which are non-native, controlling populations of invasive plants, and not leaving black snakes and copperheads on the property is part of making an ecosystem work for the benefit of desirable native species.

I had a conversation with a lady who said that if the state's department of conservation said no one had ever died of copperhead bite they surely knew, with their expertise, and she would not believe that dozens of people in the Ozarks of many decades ago had died from snake bites.

I hope to gosh most people do not think that way. The MDC's erroneous brochure, which contains many questionable statements

See **DABLEMONT** on Page 11B

Outdoor Fashion: Fur and Feathers

The outer wear of animals protects them from the elements and helps to display, attract, hide, warn, and travel. When indoors is a den or a nest during winter, fur and feathers have many functions. And have been known to inspire fashion designers in their collections.

FUR

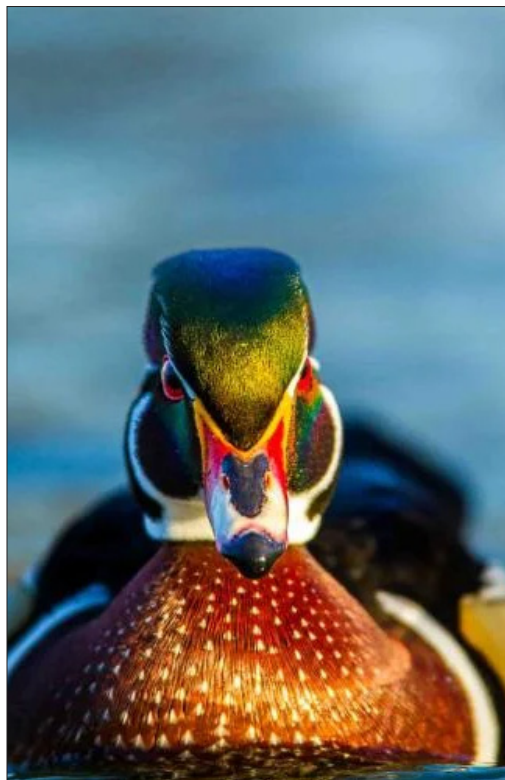
A mammal's fur along with thick layers of fat provide insulation that conserves body heat. Fur is made of two kinds of hair: guard hairs and underfur. Guard hairs are long and glossy and lay over the shorter, duller, downier underfur. Guard hairs waterproof the animal's coat by blocking moisture and keeping the underfur dry. They also protect the underfur from wear. Underfur traps air warmed by the animal's body heat and insulates from the frigid air outside.

In North America, the length and thickness of an animal's fur is greatest between November and March. This winter coat is referred to as "prime". When in prime, mammal skin turns blue or creamy white. This occurs because the blood supply to the hair decreases and production of hair pigments stops.

In spring, mammals begin to shed their fur. Some species shed twice a year, in spring and fall, while others shed continuously from early summer through fall.

FEATHERS

Only birds have feathers and every bird has them. They really are an engineering marvel. Feathers are used to display, provide insulation, These can be puffed up for warmth or sliced down for cooling. There are too many parts to each feather to count. They contain multiple microscopic parts. Repairs are made during preening. Contour feathers are outer feathers that cover the body and aid in flight. Wing feathers may be among nature's strongest for its weight. A feather's strength is related to its color. White is the most brittle, and black the strongest. That may explain why birds like snow geese have black wing tips. Down feathers are inner feathers that keep birds warm and insulated. You may have heard the saying, "like water off a duck's back" in your lifetime. This relates the oil glands that birds use to coat wings for wind and water resistance in flight.



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Dablemont • from page 10B

about snakes, convinced one person of that! He died after being bitten a couple of years back. You will survive snakebite IF you quickly get medical attention. You may survive it if you do not. But an even greater danger is losing a foot or hand if you ignore a copperhead bite. And if a bite is untreated, you may die!! I will say more about this as summer approaches, and I ask you to spread the word.

Only a few hundred people read this column, so there are huge numbers of people who read that brochure, printed by the thousands, who will believe it and possibly lose their life, as that poor man a couple of years back did. Albert Einstein said ... "Blind belief in authority is the greatest enemy of the truth." The MDC biologists, many of them in their twenties and often without a clue of what is happening in the outdoor world, and unaware of what a true ecosystem is, have made a whole lot of such statements that are not accurate. Once I ask one of them, a game bird biologist, who claimed to have the same wildlife and natural history degree I have, but grew up in a large city, "Are wild turkeys and grouse chicks both precocial?" The biologist had no idea what I was talking about.

Things won't change. I guess it doesn't matter. But in the case of copperheads, false information has cost lives and

limbs.

I was a naturalist at a park in Arkansas when a young boy got a scorpion on his bare leg. His daddy grabbed it and the scorpion stung him. The father came to me and wanted to know how long he had to get to a hospital, sure that he would die from a scorpion sting, because he had seen it on a movie. I told him to relax, the scorpions of southern Mexico and Central America were indeed poison, but Ozark scorpions were not. A timber rattlesnake nearly nailed me, but it missed! It comforted him some, but he went to the hospital anyway. The next day he apologized for not taking my word for it, me being a naturalist who was an expert and all. I told him that he did the right thing, as no naturalist in his twenties knows everything about scorpions or any other aspect of the outdoors. Sixty years after I began to study nature, I still learn each week.

I have, since that time been bitten by a copperhead, a big water snake that I thought would make me bleed to death (their saliva causes blood to flow freely and not coagulate) a brown recluse spider, and stung by hornets, yellow jackets, wood bees, honeybees, and yes, scorpions. More of this in next week's column. Don't miss that exciting installment from the life and times of the pool hall kid!



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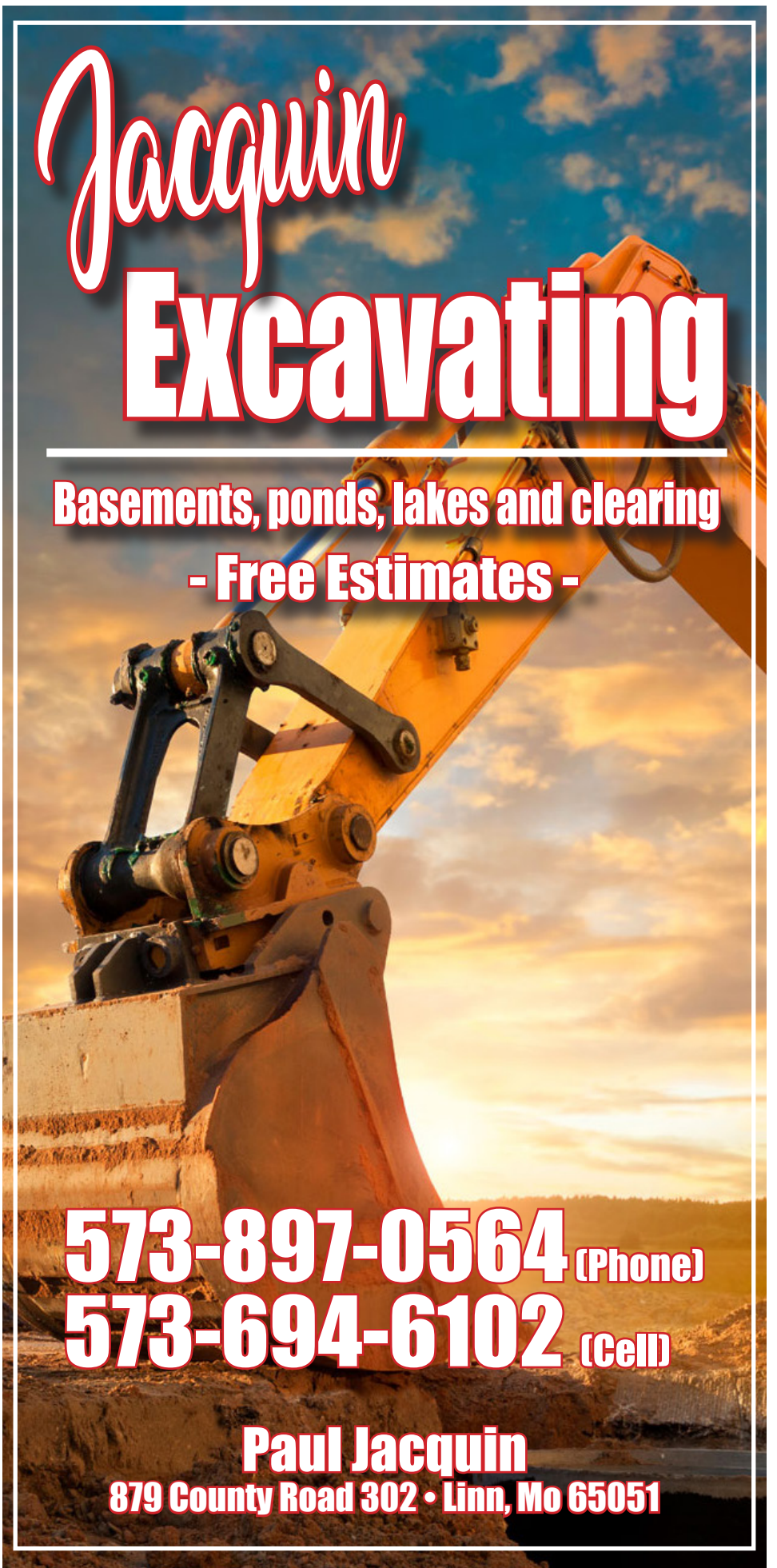
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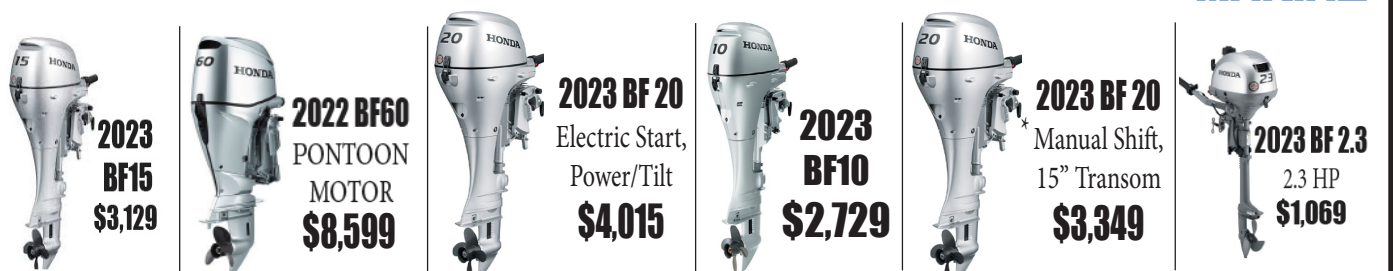
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