

Honor the Work

A Labor Day Special Feature



Respect the Workers

Fish culturist keeps streams well stocked

By Delia Guzman

Imagine caring for, feeding, healing and watching over 650,000 little ones. With humans, it would be a daycare nightmare. But with trout, it is what Leo Slogaski does at the Bellefonte Fish Culture Station, located on Spring Creek by Fisherman's Paradise off the Benner Pike near Bellefonte.

"It's a great job. You get to work in a nice environment, you're outside. Unless it's really hot or really cold, it's nice."

A fish culturist at the hatchery since 2000, Leo oversees every aspect of a fish's life, from roe to release. He'd always liked fishing, hunting and being outdoors, so he thought he would like the job.

"I took the Civil Service test back in 1992. I had studied so I could get a heads-up on the subject, fish anatomy, life cycle, you know. Then later, I saw they had five openings here, so I interviewed and got a job."

The hatchery is run by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. According to the commission's Web site, the stocking program's total yearly impact on Pennsylvania's economy is about \$67 million in tourism, licensing fees, salaries, and other monies. The Bellefonte fish hatchery produces over 650,000 stocking fish a year; they stock rainbow, brown, brook, and trophy golden trout in rivers and streams in 16 counties. The hatchery employs 11 full-time workers, including 7 fish culturists.

Leo explained the many tasks he has to complete in a typical day this time of year: feeding two or three times per day, checking on the water and fish, and cleaning the ponds and the facility.

"Right now, I'm measuring the oxygen concentration in the water. We have our own sources of water—a spring and two wells—for these ponds where the fish stay,"



Fish culturist Leo Slogaski oversees every aspect of a fish's life from roe to release. The stocking program's impact on the state's economy is an estimated \$67 million per year.

he says, pointing to the many long, narrow cement enclosures for the fish. "We recharge the ponds with oxygen once a day so the fish can breathe."

Big black nets cover most of the tanks. Leo explains why.

"Those are to keep the predators out, birds mainly. This morning when I got here, there were 11 blue heron, eating the fish."

See **Fish Culturist**, pg. 8

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Bartender gets education at work

By Earliisa Granger

Bartender Meridith McKnight has had a hot/cold relationship with higher education. After graduating from State College Area High School, she attended Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and majored in math. But she found herself living with her mother in Virginia after only two years because, as she puts it, she had "too good of a time."

After a year at home with mom she decided to try the college thing again at Lock Haven University, majoring in health science and pre-physical therapy. When she realized that graduate school was next on the horizon of her career path, she quit "so close to graduation."

"I said 'No. I'm not going to. I can't do any more school,'" she said, tapping a fist against the bar and remembering her

resolve.

With almost six years of education, but no degree, she moved back to her hometown, State College, to "finish growing up around friends," she said. She had friends here both from high school and from working as a bouncer at Player's Nightclub, a gig she started while attending Lock Haven.

She gained some baggage from her tepid relationship with higher education — loan repayment. Realizing she was going to have some bigger bills coming in, she decided to make the most of the State College bar scene. Chumley's, an LGBT-friendly bar adjacent to Player's on College Avenue, had an opening for a bartender. After a straightforward pitch to the owner about her knowledge of the gay crowd and her financial needs, she was hired. She said it was an



"Mer" McKnight tried higher education more than once, but prefers the atmosphere working as a bartender at Chumley's on College Avenue.

See **Bartender**, pg. 11