



Fisher's Marina on Ohio's Buckeye Lake has grown steadily throughout its 103 years. Fisher's (at right) became the first Harris FloteBote dealer in 1985 and still features the brand on its showroom floor. The second-generation Fisher, Ed, (lower right) starts a late-1930s Elto outboard built by a company founded by Ole Evinrude.



# Family-owned for a century

Lon Fisher founded a marina on an Ohio lake in 1912, and four generations of his descendants have been nurturing it since

By Ben Sherwood

**H**ow's this for longevity: a marina established in 1912 that is still going strong — even growing — 103 years later. And run by the great-grandson and great-great-grandson of the founder.

In my 50 years in the boating industry I've met hundreds and hundreds of dealers. But until I got acquainted with the Fishers of Fisher's Marina in Buckeye Lake, Ohio, if I'd ever met a five-generation dealership in business for more than a century I sure don't remember it.

In 1912 entrepreneur Alonzo ("Lon") Fisher opened Fisher's Beach on Buckeye Lake. It was a place where people could go to swim, fish or just cool off in the summertime. If you chose to swim, you could rent a locker and a swimsuit. Fisher's Beach also had a small marina where customers could rent a rowboat — or

later, a small boat powered by an outboard.

Residents and visitors alike would board a boat and cross the lake to enjoy the sand and cool waters.

Buckeye Lake was created 180 years ago when a dam was built on the Ohio-Erie Canal. Sometime after the opening of Fisher's Beach, there was a demand for rental boats and marine supplies, which created the need for a marina.

The second-generation Fisher, Ed, took over the marina business and grew it over the years, becoming an Evinrude dealer in 1945. At that point people could not only rent a boat with an Evinrude outboard for power, they also could buy a boat with the outboard. This was a big deal for the family business because people now could go farther on the lake than if they were in a rowboat. Eventually the name Fisher's Marina replaced the original name.

The third-generation Fisher to help grow the busi-

ness was Ed's son Pete, who signed up Fisher's Marina to become the first Harris FloteBote dealer in 1957. Today Fisher's Marina remains a Harris FloteBote dealer, as well as an Evinrude dealer. On Harris Kayot Marine's 50th anniversary in 2007, the company presented Fisher's with a loyalty award for pioneering the brand.

Initially the Fisher's Beach land was leased from the state of Ohio, but it was later purchased in 1985 by founder Lon's grandson (Pete). With the marina side of the business growing rapidly, the building that once housed a locker room for swimmers and a bunkhouse for lifeguards was transformed into a full-service marina.

In the early 1980s the marina was moved out of the original building and over to the main island, where it is today, just off Liebs Island. Fisher's Marine then became one of the first in the area to offer plastic heat shrink for winter storage. Pete Fisher built up the marina during the next 30 years and grew the Evinrude and Harris FloteBote brands on Buckeye Lake. Fisher's Marina became known to many locals as Pete's. There was even a shirt many boaters wore that said, "I dock at Pete's."

By 1990 the fourth-generation Fisher, another Ed, took over ownership and management of the marina from his father, Pete. This is when the marina started to grow more and become the full-service facility it is today. A large service department was added, the overall marina was updated and docks were changed to allow for larger boats.

Big changes took place over the years under Ed's management. A computer system was installed, the size of the marine store was doubled and the business

began stocking more boats and engines. As Buckeye Lake became more of a pontoon boat market, Ed focused on those — a specialization that put the business years ahead of the competition. Ed then started offering high-performance pontoons before anyone else, giving the company a product line that would cover any type of pontoon boat a customer could want.

Four generations later, the Fisher family carries on the tradition of friendly service and a neighborly atmosphere at the original location. Ed Fisher, great-grandson of the founder, and his wife, Debbie, continue to operate the marina on Liebs Island, along with the fifth generation, their son Josh.

On Aug. 1, 2006, the Greater Buckeye Lake Historical Society gave Fisher's Marina a plaque that read: "The Greater Buckeye Lake Historical Society is proud to award recognition to this historical landmark that is preserved as part of our community."

In 2009 and 2010 Ed Fisher added a larger five-bay service shop. Then, in 2011, the marina began offering inside storage. The Fishers bought land offsite and built three brand-new storage buildings. In 2013 Fisher's Marina opened a new showroom for better display of new boats and motors.

According to fourth-generation Ed Fisher, the Buckeye Lake dam was built 180 years ago. Ed says, "It was built back in the time when they built the Ohio-Erie canal. It was built about 10 feet high to provide locks for the canal. Then when the canal era ended they changed the dam from a reservoir for the locks for canal boats to

providing a recreational lake. A lot of the lakes in Ohio were canals that were converted to recreational lakes."

"No one has ever done too much with the dams," says Ed. "The dam is about 4 or 5 miles long. The Buckeye Lake earthen dam is about 180 years old. The structure has been reinforced over the years, some of it with stone and concrete. Buckeye Lake is 7¼ miles in length and a quarter-mile wide at its widest point with about 30 miles of shoreline. Now the government is saying the dam does not hold up to national dam safety. People have built a lot of houses behind the dam. The government said, 'No houses should have been built there.' But I think the houses have provided an anchor for the dam. Without the houses the dam would have been gone a long time ago."

"Now the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Corps of Engineers have lowered the lake and started rebuilding the dam, claiming it could be up to five years to get it done. No one boated last year. The water around our marina is down about five feet. But Gov. [John] Kasich has gotten involved and has given the order for them to get the dam done so we can have water back in the lake for [the 2016 season]."

Work is progressing, Josh Fisher said in mid-February, and the expectation is that boating will return by June on a limited basis and the lake will be completely filled for the 2017 season. ■

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The fourth and fifth Fisher generations — Ed and his wife, Debbie, daughter Julie and son Josh relax on a Harris FloteBote.