



St. Joe Beach

FISHING OUR COAST

Anglers young and old, novice or seasoned flock to Gulf County to fish our great waters. Whether seeking to catch dinner for the evening or simply to release, fishing in Gulf County is a year-round activity.

More and more families are enjoying this long-standing pastime...especially women! Captain Charlene Burke, owner of About Fun Charters, shares her thoughts about Saltwater Fishing...From a Female Perspective!

As a female U.S. Coast Guard Captain, I often am asked why I chose to be a charter captain. Of course, I already know the answer, but usually I act as though I am in deep thought. First, I get paid to do my most favorite thing in the world since early childhood... fish. Second, I get to put my Master's degree in Marine

Biology to its ultimate potential taking folks on eco-tours through St. Joseph Bay's beautiful ecosystem and aquatic preserve. From bald eagles and osprey to sea turtles and dolphins playing in the beautiful clear waters, each day and each trip is different. But I think my favorite reason for being a sea captain is that with every charter I take, I get to watch how fishing and spending time on the water transforms people.

When folks first walk down the dock to depart on their trip, many are quiet and anxious, especially moms

and grandmas that have rarely been on boats or never fished. Many say, "I really don't want to fish" or "I'm just along for the boat ride". I just tell them I am glad they came along. Many think some old salty captain is going to fuss at them for not doing it right or make them feel uncomfortable because they haven't fished before. For me, it's perfectly fine...I help them with every step of the way! And, usually within an hour into the trip, I have them casting and catching their first fish, confident that they tried something new and succeeded!

Children of all ages are fun and I love to teach them to fish. Usually the first fishing pole I rig is handed to the youngest member of the group. With a little help casting, a child can be the first to reel one in. To hear the



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contagious laughter and glee of a kid that has caught a fish is pure joy and pleasure! One of the youngest fishermen I have had the pleasure of meeting is Jake... he is two years old, has come back to fish with me a few times this past year and has an unusual way of measuring fish. Even at his young age, Jake knows that state fishing regulations require some fish to be put back in the water to grow. So, like all good fishermen Jake measures his fish, too...but in his own way. He calls them Jake size, Mama size, Daddy size and GRANDPA size! Jake caught a 6-pound Sheepshead (with a little help from his Mom) that he decided was grandpa size and I agreed with him! At the end of the trip, Jake was the hero of the day!

An exciting, enjoyable boating day out on the water is wholesome family fun and makes beautiful, lasting memories for families. Vacation relaxation helps reclaim what is important in life. Even if only for a long weekend, time spent enjoying our beautiful bay relieves stresses from their work regimented life. Water heals and I get to witness it happen almost every day!