

made my way back to the ramp," said Cowan. "We both weighed our fish together, so it was an awesome experience and a great week fishing the elements. TPWD staff arrived less than an hour after I caught the fish to collect it. They were great to work with and it's exciting to be able to participate in the ShareLunker program."

The following morning, Mabry headed to the lake with a lot of confidence that it would be a good day to fish due to the cold front arriving earlier in the week. His hunch was correct. Mabry landed several fish that morning and then came his catch of a lifetime, ShareLunker 638.

"I found some new spots that I had never fished before and knew exactly where I wanted to go," said Mabry. "Before I caught the Lunker, I was having an incredible morning and one of the better days I've ever had fishing. I moved 300-400 feet away from where I was fishing and stopped getting bites, so I went back to my original location — that's when I caught it."

Once Mabry boated the fish, he immediately thought of the ShareLunker program and keeping the fish healthy to submit it. He had entered a 10.01-pound Elite Class fish on Jan. 19 from O.H. Ivie and knew exactly what to do.

"From the time I started bass fishing, I really wanted to provide an entry into the ShareLunker program," said Mabry. "My son and I went to the Bassmaster Classic and visited the ShareLunker booth. We were intrigued by the program and the genetics behind it, but the outreach and the resources that TPWD invests into the fishing community is really what caught our attention. It gives us something as a family, along with my best friend Cade Wilson, to chase."

Mabry said there had been a lot of discussion about what it would take to catch a ShareLunker.

"I'm very excited to bring my family to the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center in a couple of weeks to see the fish there," he said.

Moua and his friend began planning their trip to O.H. Ivie a few months ago, hoping for a catch of a lifetime. Moua ended up shattering his previous personal best record of 7.5 pounds with his catch on Sunday.

"We were seeing a lot of big fish suspended, roaming through a tree line," said Moua. "I saw one sitting out there about 40-feet out and threw an A-rig over the top of her. It was the right cast and the right fish, and she turned and ate on it right away. I set the hook ... everything seemed to happen so fast. The first thing I said when we got the fish in the boat was, 'We got it done.'"

Moua and his friend made the trip to Texas because O.H. Ivie provided an opportunity for them to achieve personal bests.

"We wanted to give ourselves a shot to up our personal bests because we knew the potential here," said Moua. "I went in with no expectations and just fished hard. I was blown away by the ShareLunker program and wish we had something like this in Washington. I appreciate the fact that the ShareLunker program takes really good care of the fish and was very impressed with how thorough TPWD staff is with every detail. Overall, this was a great experience."

O.H. Ivie's incredible run continues after producing two dozen combined ShareLunkers in the past two seasons, including a new waterbody record of 17.06 pounds in 2022. It was the biggest catch in 30 years and the seventh-largest largemouth bass ever verified in Texas in public or private waters.

During the first three months of the season (January through March), anglers who reel in a 13-plus pound bass can loan it to TPWD for the ShareLunker selective breeding and stocking program. These anglers call the ShareLunker hotline at (903) 681-0550 to report their catch

24/7 through March 31.

Anglers who catch and donate one of these 13-plus pound Lunkers earn Legacy Class status, a catch kit filled with merchandise, a 13-plus pound Legacy decal for their vehicle or boat, VIP access to the Toyota ShareLunker Annual Awards event and a high-quality replica mount of their Lunker fish from Lake Fork Taxidermy. These anglers will also receive entries into two separate contests — a Legacy Class drawing and the year-end Grand Prize drawing. First place in either wins a \$5,000 Bass Pro Shops shopping spree and a resident (or non-resident) annual fishing license.

The year-round Toyota ShareLunker program offers four levels of participation for catching bass over eight pounds or 24 inches in Texas. In addition to Legacy Class (13-plus pounds between January and March), ShareLunker entry classes include the Lunker Class (8-plus pounds), Elite Class (10-plus pounds), and Legend Class (13-plus pounds from April to December).

Anglers who enter data for any Lunker they catch (greater than eight pounds or 24 inches) during the calendar year 2023 also receive a catch kit, a decal for their vehicle or boat and an entry into the year-end Grand Prize drawing to win a \$5,000 Bass Pro Shops shopping spree and annual fishing license.

Once a Lunker is reeled in, anglers need to enter the catch data on the Toyota ShareLunker mobile app — available for free from the Apple App Store and Google Play — or on the Toyota ShareLunker online app at TexasSharelunker.com. In addition to basic catch information, anglers can also provide a DNA scale sample from their Lunker bass to TPWD researchers for genetic analysis.

A new procedure is in effect for the 2023 season. Legend Class ShareLunkers no longer need to be weighed on a

certified scale for entry. Anglers must include a photo of their Lunker on a digital scale to qualify for Legend Class.

For updates on the Toyota ShareLunker program, visit facebook.com/sharelunkerprogram/, [@texassharelunker](https://twitter.com/texassharelunker) on Instagram and online at TexasSharelunker.com.

Breaking Up

By Eileen Mattei

David Gross stands among about 5,000 men and women who served on the USS Kitty Hawk between 1961 and 2009 as the towering supercarrier is towed through Brazos Santiago Pass.

They're crowded onto South Padre Island's south shore to pay their respects and reminisce about the extraordinary aircraft carrier that had been their home away from home.

That home moved around: Vietnam and Afghanistan, in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea, but mostly in the western Pacific, until it was retired 14 years ago as the last conventionally powered American carrier. But today, after 48 years of active service, the decommissioned ship arrived at the Port of Brownsville, never to sail again.

Watching the Kitty Hawk head to the recycling yard is "kind of like having the house you grew up in torn down," says Gross, who came from San Diego to see the carrier one last time. He served as a roof rat—part of the flight deck crew—40 years ago.

Veterans—from the Silent Generation, baby boomers, Gen Xers and millennials—roar in pride and appreciation as Gross raps out a long, proud tribute: "We are the Kitty, and we ride the back of a Hawk. We were young. We were strong, working day and night long—12 on and 12 off, jet exhaust we did cough. Yeah, we're the crew of the

Kitty, and we walk the walk."

Oceanfront Home

The Kitty Hawk, a small floating city (population 5,280) with a major airport, housed the ship's company, deployed air wing and the admiral's staff. Essential duties of those onboard ranged from air traffic controller, jet mechanic, roof rat and parachute rigger to pilot, electrician and cook working in 12-hour shifts. Many sailors were teenagers when they first came aboard and formed enduring bonds with their ship and shipmates.

"The Kitty was by far my favorite ship. Everyone had a can-do attitude," says Gordon Wilcox, a 21-year veteran who served two tours on the carrier. The Alvarado resident and United Cooperative Services member initially photographed shipboard events for news releases. Later he worked with reconnaissance cameras used by pilots.

Aviation electrician A.J. Reynolds served two tours on the carrier. "I was 18 or 19 when I first went on the Kitty Hawk," says the Bandera Electric Cooperative member.

"It was special. I'll never forget it."

His sentiment was echoed by Joseph Houck of Somerset, who was aboard 1989-93. He came to South Padre to see the first ship on which he had served and recalled watching dolphins racing alongside as the carrier reached 30 knots.

"For fun, we had roller chair derbies during sea trials," he says.

Jet engines once roared as catapults launched Phantoms, A-6s and Hawkeyes from the carrier's short deck. Coupled with the shrill whines of fighters and reconnaissance planes landing and coming to abrupt stops as their tail hooks caught a cable on the deck, sailors' attempts at sleeping could get complicated.

(Continued on page 6)

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