

# Comments

## Two local guys and their weeds

Ice covers our lake, although it probably won't last. This happened a few weeks ago and it all melted. But the fact is unavoidable - serious ice is just around the corner.

Actually, I don't want to avoid that fact. Ice means ice fishing. That's how this story begins.

Ice fishing kind of runs in our family. All the kids used to enjoy it when they were little, but only the two boys, Chuck and John, have turned it into a kind of passion. That's how it goes. Boys usually develop a fondness for their fathers' hobbies. That's true of Vince and Mike LaQua as well. Vince, who now lives in Hankinson, was the long-term States Attorney from Fessenden and Mike was a classmate and close buddy of our son John. They graduated from Fessenden in 1983.

As fate would have it, first Mike and later John moved to Wausau, Wisconsin. For a hunter/fisherman, Wausau is as close as it gets to heaven, so Mike and John are in their element. One of the things they did a lot of together is ice fish.

Now, every fisherman knows about the importance of "structure" in fishing. Structure is stuff in the water. Docks, sudden changes in depth, logs, weeds - es-

### One Perspective



Charles Eldredge

The problem is that in the winter all the docks are gone and almost all the weeds have died and sunk to the bottom. Fish still cruise around, looking for food and shelter, but there's precious little of it under the ice. But there's some, and every ice fisherman knows he's on a good spot if he happens to drill his hole above "green weeds" - that is, living, upright weeds.

I don't know the details of the dramatic moment, but somewhere along the line John and/or Mike speculated on whether artificial weeds would work. They tried it with some plastics and, bingo, they caught

pecially weeds - fish. That was something like five years ago. They tried different "weeds," different ways to "plant" them near their fishing holes. They were on to something.

They incorporated as LaDredge Outdoors, filed for a patent and gathered supplies. Most plastic weeds were no good because they couldn't endure cold, but they found what they needed in China.

The next year they made many dozens and passed them out to outdoor writers, guides and professional fishermen. Their response was unanimous. The darned things really worked.

Last year they went commercial, selling two forms of the weeds on the Internet. One, called Camera Cable Structure (CCS), is for wrapping around an underwater camera, then a couple feet up the camera cable. The other, called Structure on a String (SOS), is for use by itself, usually in groups to simulate a little bed of weeds.

They sold enough to keep their production capacity stretched to the limit. They also got some of the most amazing underwater movies you've even seen of fish being caught, and just being fish, while hanging around their "Reel Weeds." That's the product name.

Since it takes months to get delivery of supplies from China, they started early this year, got some sales help, and lined up a distributor and more retailers. Some of the retailers are showing Reel Weeds at their fishing shows this fall. Orders are flowing in as the seasons (ice fishing and Christmas) approach. Mike, John and about a dozen workers are burning the midnight oil filling orders and building some inventory. Last year they were too busy making Reel Weeds to have much time to use them. This year could be worse - or I guess that's better.

Neither has quit his day job, and probably never will, but I think they're on to something. As a board member and president of Harvey Area Economic Development, Inc. I saw a lot of good new product ideas fail because the inventors didn't understand how critical marketing and merchandising is. Mike and John are doing it right.

Now bring on that ice, I'm good to go.

For more information about Reel Weeds, as well as some great filmstrips (One shows a northern doing what you never thought a northern would do.), check out [www.reelweeds.com](http://www.reelweeds.com).