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Legendary outdoors writer inducted into Freshwater Fish Hall of Fame

By Jim Kleinhans, Staff Writer

Surrounded by friends from Menomonie and across the state Friday, Don L. Johnson was inducted into the Freshwater Fish Hall of Fame during ceremonies at the Dunn County Fish and Game clubhouse in Wakanda Park.

Making the presentation was Bill Gautsche, a director of the Freshwater Hall of Fame and Museum in Hayward.

In making the presentation, Gautsche called Johnson, a former outdoors writer from the Milwaukee Sentinel and a noted author now living in Menomonie with his wife, Lorraine, a "true artist of the pen, where the picture was never completed until it was perfect."



Don L. Johnson was inducted into the Freshwater Fish Hall of Fame Friday. Jim Kleinhans/Dunn County News

"One of the things Don imparted was that when he wanted to make his point, he could disagree without being disagreeable," Gautsche stressed.

He noted that Johnson's name is now on a list of legendary outdoor writers in the Freshwater Fish Hall of Fame, including Homer Circle, Gordon McQuarie and Ernest Hemingway, among others.

"Don L. Johnson is the ultimate humble professional," Gautsche concluded.

John Welter of Eau Claire, a member of the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board, the governing body of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), said that Johnson, through his outdoor articles, has "given us the opportunity to live vicariously in places where we would want to be," indicating that he has been to Africa, Mexico, South America and Canada's Yukon to gain information for his stories.

But, Welter said, much of Johnson's work was done in investigative reporting on mercury and pesticide pollution, the impacts of PCBs on the environment and lead shotgun pellets on wildlife.

"Don understands and appreciates the need to do investigative work," Welter said. "He has done great service to the people of Wisconsin with his slogging detective work, asking questions and writing some groundbreaking articles that spurred the State Legislature into action."

"The answers he found helped us all and we're grateful," Welter told the crowd.

Tim Eisele of Madison, president of the Wisconsin Outdoors Communicators Association, said, "If God could have created a better outdoor writer than Don Johnson, he would have."

Jim Mense of Menomonie said that there isn't anyone in the world who has had more influence on his life.

"If not for Don L. Johnson, I wouldn't have written the outdoor column in The Dunn County News for 40-some years," Mense said.

Al May of Menomonie said his cabin in the Northwoods is filled with signatures from people all over the world, "but the one I treasure the most is Don L. Johnson's."

Dave Carlson, a TV outdoor journalist from Eau Claire who served as master of ceremonies, said that Johnson, in his professional career and private life, has "made us feel good."

"Don did the things he wanted, when he wanted, with professionalism and zeal," Carlson said.

For himself, Johnson said that he considered his work a true calling.

"I didn't just entertain, I informed and educated whenever I could," he said, thanking those in attendance for the honor.

Johnson worked at the old Milwaukee Sentinel from 1962 to 1984. He began writing a regular outdoors column for the Eau Claire Leader-Telegram in 1951 before joining the Sentinel.

Since retirement, Johnson has written several books on hunting and written articles for several outdoors publications, and is a member of the Dunn County Fish and Game Club.

Recently, Johnson was honored for his contributions to the natural resources of Wisconsin by the Natural Resources Board.

"He was an inquiring, thoughtful and hardworking reporter," said Welter.

Welter, a former reporter who is an attorney in Eau Claire, said that Johnson played an important role in conservation issues in Wisconsin.

He noted in particular Johnson's reporting about pollution in the Fox River, even before the DNR was pushing paper companies to limit their discharges.

The Natural Resources Board will consider a formal citation honoring Johnson at its May 25 meeting in Black River Falls.

Johnson was also inducted into the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Sports Show Hall of Fame in 2001.

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Complaint filed against committee member... Ethanol opponent alleges conflict of interest

Jody Slocum, a member of Dunn County Concerned Citizens (DCCC), has filed a complaint regarding a potential conflict of interest on the part of one of the members of the Dunn County Planning, Resources and Development (PR&D) Committee.