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ANGLING BLIND

Fishing tournament caters to VIPs
— *visually impaired people*

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Macular degeneration keeps Neil McCauley from seeing anything with clarity. Bob Magiera lost a good chunk of his eyesight to optic neuropathy. For Don Rego, it was Leber's Disease. Doug Aldrich had Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. For 14 years now, Fredericka Athanas' eyesight has faded away. James Legare's world is not completely dark, he says, but it's miles away from crystal clear. They all enjoy fishing. It's different than it would have been years ago, different than it would be for those with 20/20 vision. They could say the same about everything in their lives. The tug of a fish on the line, though, is not so different. "It's a lot

tougher," Legare says, "but the feel is all the same."

It's the moment when something catches, when you think you've got a bite, when you think maybe this is a big one. There is nothing to see, not for a while. It's the tug that matters. At the Rhode Island Lions Sight Foundation VIP Fishing Tournament, it's everything.

Now in its ninth year, the event welcomes about three dozen people with visual impairments to Galilee each June. With guides by their side, they board the *Lady Frances* and set off. For some, it is their first time on a boat, or their first time with a fishing rod in hand. For others, it is a return trip. For all of them, it is a chance to leave daily challenges firmly on shore. "It has been a very uplifting thing," says Ken Barthelemy, tournament director.

The program began in 2008, when the Lions Sight Foundation ran with an idea that a counterpart had presented. Connecticut had started a fishing tournament for VIPs — visually impaired people — and was sending its winners to a quickly growing national tournament in North Carolina. It was a unique opportunity for the participants and a chance for the foundation to expand its assistance. Rhode Island was on board.



