

## **J & J Sports: Patchogue's Pot of Gold**

by Tony Salerno



Back in the hey days of flounder fishing, I was on the hunt for just the right rod and reel combo that would be perfectly suited for fishing aboard the rental skiffs from any of the many fishing stations that once lined the pristine shorelines of Moriches Bay. In those days, flounder were not only plentiful, but many boarded the snowshoe caliber as each spring giant sea flounder would make their way from the mud banks of the deep blue, into the skinny little bays of Shinnecock and Moriches for their early spring spawn. Indeed many of those flounder did have shoulders and I needed a combo for the task at hand that would be smooth, comfortable and dependable and wouldn't drain the wallet.

Contemplating, after visiting several tackle shops over the right combo, I stopped in at J & J Bait and Tackle in Patchogue, New York and glanced at an array of selections that sort of left me baffled at the time. That's when Paul Graniello offered his help. Less than an hour later, I walked out with a 6 foot Fenwick Crankshaft rod matched with an Abu Garcia Ambassadeur 5500 filled with 15-pound Ande pink monofilament.

It's been better than 25 years when I first walked through the doors of J & J Sports, and still today, with the exception of the fishing line, that original combo is still part of my arsenal as it continues to pluck flounder from the bay of Moriches. In addition, it is serving me well slamming fluke and sea bass. The old girl has her battle scars, but I wouldn't give her up for anything in the world.

The fact is, TLC has kept that combo going; however the truth is, Paul Graniello took his time to find me just what I was looking for in spite of a crowded store. He could have easily pushed me aside for an easier and quicker sale elsewhere, but instead; his genuine compassion for people and his social skills helped me in my decision on that combo. More than 28 years later, Paul Graniello and John Mantione are still compassionate about what they do, which is why they are Nor' East Saltwater Magazine pick for the 2010 Tackle Shop Special Feature.



## HOW IT ALL STARTED

Back in the late 70's into the early 80's, John and Paul were shop regulars at J & J and made their acquaintance frequenting the shop. Paul, a Vietnam Veteran, had spent most of his free time suds surfing the beaches from Sandy Hook to Montauk, along with his father and grandfather. The trio would spend many days and evenings drilling cow stripers and bluefish as well as weakfish and fluke from the surf. When not pounding the waves, Paul would also spend time on the sweet waterside of the sport, particularly at West Lake located close to where he grew up. Over the years Paul culled his share of 8 to 10-pound largemouth bass from the local lakes along with countless trout, pickerel and pan fish. Because of his reputation, I have gone many times to see Paul for some tutelage concerning tails from the sweet side and believe me, Paul is the man when it comes to freshwater fishing. His passion and knowledge is the real deal.

John grew up on the east end of the Island and did most of his fishing in the Peconic Bay estuary. John recalls how back in the 70's he would catch weakfish upon weakfish by employing a simple half-ounce diamond tipped with a strip of squid bounced along the bottom. John vividly recalls one day in particular when he starting fishing at sunrise and didn't quit until sunset and caught weakfish non-stop the entire time. "Boy how my arms hurt that night," stated John. Aside from weakfish, John also loves to bottom fish, especially for porgies. As with weakfish, porgies were abundant in the Peconics during the 70's and John would slam them at slack tide by just letting his diamond jig tipped with squid sit on the bottom, and the scup would suck the bait down. John also enjoys fishing for fluke and flounder and wrestling with big blackfish. Just as Paul, fishing was John's passion.

Then in 1982, Jimmy the original owner of J & J wanted to sell the business in order to spend more time fishing. That is when John and Paul stepped in, and became partners and the new proud owners of J & J Sports.

## USING THEIR NOGGIN

Twenty-eight years later, J & J Sports continues to move forward. Oh sure they felt the crunch of the recession

during the 80's, and the roller coaster rides through the years leading right into the latest recession, but rather than lay down their swords, John and Paul have tightened the belt and made changes for the better, which cannot be said for many of the businesses in the fishing industry today. "You have to think outside the box", states John, meaning you need to change with the times, which are beneficial to the customers and the business alike. Such changes may seem subtle, but they are huge impacts that keep anglers happy and the business afloat.

Some changes include seminars, consumer shows, free booklets and flyers on current size and season regulations, free tide charts and promotional gift cards. On the latter, if you come into the shop and sign up on the e-mail list, you will be notified of all sorts of sales, events and promotions including a \$5 gift card which you will receive on your birthday.

Speaking of e-mail, the Internet is probably one of J & J's greatest assets. Aside from being able to purchase anything that is carried in the store online, there is a wealth of information that is available by logging on to their website. You will find helpful videos you can download that include how to tie all types of rigs and all types of helpful and secret tips that will help you catch more fish. In addition there are helpful links that will make your time on the water not only more enjoyable, but more knowledgeable as well. Of course you can also sign up for news and promotions on the website as well. As John says, "If you can't come to us, we come to you". You can check it out on your own by logging on to the site at [www.jjsportfishing.com](http://www.jjsportfishing.com).

### **CLOTHING TO CLOSEOUTS**

While purchasing tackle online may be a sign of the times, nothing can compare to wandering up and down the glittering isles of a well-fortified tackle shop, and J & J is no exception. Upon arrival into the store you will be greeted by Jasper, Paul's pet Golden Retriever, or if you pay a visit in the P.M., odds are Sammy, John's pet Rottweiler, will greet you. However, don't let the size of these two canines intimidate you, both pups are gentle giants. Once past the dogs, Emerald City of tackle surrounds you, as anywhere you turn you will find anything from BB splits to Penn Internationals. Aside from fishing tackle, perhaps you need a set of foul weather gear; warm gloves and a jacket, no need to go elsewhere, top brands are at the store. Need a hunting, fresh or saltwater license? Yeah they have them too. Basically, whether it's bait, tackle, licenses or clothing to keep comfortable, the shop has it from soup to nuts.

### **IF YOU DON'T SEE IT, JUST ASK**

In years gone by, bait was bait and tackle was tackle. Today most educated anglers are always looking for an edge. Fishing tackle has become high tech with artificial lures looking as real as they come, scents and juices more convincing than the real McCoy, and rods and reels that are ever so light and sensitive. These days trying to keep up with the Joneses, combined with the myriad of tackle manufacturers in the field looking to edge out the competition can become quite a challenge even to the broadest tackle centers. Carrying every product ever made would be impossible. And while you can't always please everyone, Paul and John will do their best trying to find what you may be pursuing. Paul explained that he would first try to steer a customer to a tackle shop that he is sure carries a particular item; however, if that is not possible he is more than happy to order what you may need, even bait, in fact, J & J carries live golden shiners from Arkansas which are a bass and trout killer in the local lakes. If you are looking for something that deviates from the norm, just ask.

### **ROD AND REEL REPAIR SPECIALIST**

Need a rod or reel repaired? Or perhaps you want that custom stick to look as new as the first day you got it. Or that reel is squeaking and quite frankly, it can use a good cleaning and lube. Well fret not as J & J specializes in repairs on most rod and reels. In fact, the shop has a long and fine reputation of being one of the top repair centers on Long Island. Please note; however, that the shop is not a warranty center of any manufacturer, it is strictly COD.

More than likely when you bring a rod or reel in for repair, either Paul himself, or Frank The Reel Deal will attend to it. Both these men are master mechanics when it comes to fishing tackle, and you can be rest assured that all repairs are done using genuine manufacturer's parts.

In case you decide to fix a rod or reel on your own, the shop carries most of the components needed for rod repairs, and just about all Penn parts for the reels. Aside from Penn, the shop carries a large assortment of functional parts for many other top brand reels. Should you decide to have the repair done professionally at the shop, allow a day or two turn around on reels and a bit longer on rods depending on the condition.

### **JOHN AND NYFTTA VERSUS THE FEDS**

For John and Paul, the business goes beyond opening and closing the door each day. When not attending the shop the men are involved in fighting fishery management for getting a fair share of the pie. "There's something seriously wrong when the surrounding states can keep six fluke at 18 inches, while we struggle with 2 at 21 inches", states John. "People want to be able to go fishing and bring fish home," added Paul. Both men agree we need management to ensure future fisheries, however within reason. Both men were quick to emphasize that many

families come to the shop purchasing bait and tackle and spend a day of quality time together by way of fishing. However, once these folks realize how stringent the regulations are, and go home disappointed with an empty cooler, they rarely return as they seek out other ways to create family values which in turn effects the industry as a whole. As for fishing licenses, John feels that we can live with the \$10 a year saltwater fee; however the increase of \$10 to \$29 for a freshwater license is, well, as John puts it; "A bit too harsh". In actuality both men would not mind if both licenses were repealed.

Understand that, John Mantione is not afraid to speak out. He is the Chief Administrator for the New York Fishing Tackle Trade Association (NYFTTA), which is the voice of the recreation fishing industry. The organization through the effort of its members has earned the attention and respect of the legislators and advisory bodies governing our recreational fisheries. One of NYFTTA's main goals at this time is a fair share of the fishery, which will make a profound economic impact. The battle is brutal.

## **JJ AND THE GANG**

Both John and Paul strongly agree that if it weren't for their loyal and courteous staff, it would be hard to pull away from the shop and have much, if any free time. John explained that most bait shop owners don't find the time to fish or do the things they like to do from time to time.

However, with a proficient staff, "Paul and I can go fishing if we want, or spend time with our families. Aside from Paul and John, the J & J staff includes Frank, Brian, John, Anthony, Daschel and Chuck. And of course let us not forget Jasper and Sammy.

There's a pot of gold in Patchogue, and from the entire staff here at

Nor' east to the entire staff at J & J Sports, congratulations on 28 years of dedicated service. May the coming seasons bring health, happiness and good fortune.