

## Teaching sponsor development is priority for club

**SANTA ROSA, Calif.** — Sponsorship development is challenging at every level of bass fishing, but one California B.A.S.S. Federation Nation club uses its annual raffle to teach members how to approach potential sponsors.

“It started off with the goal to get sponsors for the club,” said Rich Caro, founder of the Sonoma County Belly Boat Bass Club. “We’re now using this raffle as another learning avenue to allow our members to move to the next level.”

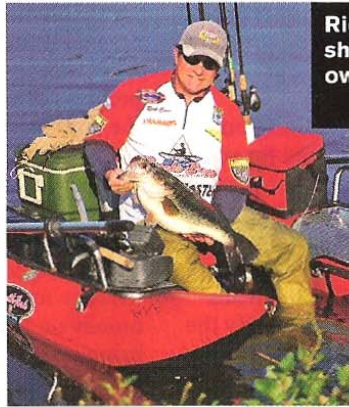
Caro first saw the potential while working with the club’s raffle committee six years ago. “I wrote down a bunch of phone numbers and began making calls,” he said. “I started with 30-plus numbers.”

Several companies shipped product to Caro for the raffle, part of the club’s annual championship event on Clear Lake.

“I sent each of them a thank-you note,” Caro said. “I sent them Christmas cards. I sent them anything that was published about our club.”

That made contact easier the following year, and eventually led to his first personal sponsorship. Caro began wearing a shirt bearing logos of his sponsors.

“I put on my first pro shirt to



**Rich Caro wears logos on his shirt and helps others get their own sponsors.**

Photo courtesy of Mike Ayers

make our pictures look good,” he said.

That caught the eye of other members. “I think them seeing me with my shirt made them

see that the door’s wide open for them to do the same thing,” said Caro, who now has six personal sponsors.

Today, six of the club’s 47 mem-

bers actively pursue sponsorships. The trick is to build upon a company’s willingness to help with a single club event.

“They’re only asking for donations for that one big tournament, for now,” Caro said. “That allows them to build a relationship.”

Members compare lists of potential sponsors to ensure they aren’t double-dipping.

“Once they sign a sponsor up, no one else calls them,” Caro said. “That way they develop relationships.”

Nick Gaetano contacted 15 potential sponsors last year and signed up Rat-L-Trap to support the club.

“I e-mailed them to see if they

could do anything, and they sent a 28-pound box full of Rat-L-Traps and catalogs,” he said.

Gaetano, 17, said he’s received many rejections, but he doesn’t get discouraged. “You have to accept that some you can deal with and some you can’t,” he said. “I hope to build on that and keep getting better at the sport and building better sponsors.”

Caro said the experience has given him confidence enough to progress past belly boats.

“I know how I’ll approach the sponsor side of things,” he said. “I’ve already created a reputation, and the transition for me into a boater will be easier.”

**ANDY CRAWFORD**