

Twenty-two Flies Mean More Than One Thousand

My heartfelt thanks goes out to the group of 33 tyers who came to the shop today to tie and donate flies to Reeling and Healing Midwest and Reel Recovery that they may be used in fly fishing retreats for those with or recovering from life-threatening cancer.

Another group of tyers came by with flies they tied at home and still another group of non-tyers donated cash for me to buy flies to donate. We had tyers from all the Illinois TU chapters, the Northern Illinois Fly Tyers, Chicago Fly Fishers, the Du Page Rivers Fly Tyers, members of the Wisconsin Fly Fishing message board and the Illinois Smallmouth Alliance.

As well as local tyers, we had some kind folks come down from Wisconsin for the event and a dozen flies traveled a very long way. I was met at the door of the shop one morning by a soldier in uniform who had arrived by cab which was kept waiting while he ran in. He told me that 72 hours ago, he was in Iraq and a fly tying buddy of his stationed there had read my request for flies on the Internet. When his fellow soldier in Iraq found out that he was headed home through O'Hare, he asked this soldier to drop off the flies at my shop, *a 40-minute cab ride from O'Hare.*

We cast a few rods, shared tying skills, beer, laughter and stories of why each tyer had come.

I'm here for my Mother who died of breast cancer, my sister who succumbed to pancreatic cancer, my wife who was lost to brain cancer.

Thanks to the listeners of [Outdoor Notebook](#) and the readers of this paper, we received several dozen more flies and cash donations in the mail. We also would like to thank Upper MidwestFlyFishing.com for the donation of pizza.

We made many new friends and had several with skills that we very much needed come forward and say:

I'm a paramedic here to help with equipment and training so your participants can remain safe in the outdoors. I'm an oncology nurse, how can I volunteer? I'm a counselor for those with cancer can I help? I'm a guide; I can give you a day or two on the river.

They all wanted to help, we are deeply grateful to all, and yes, we will use your help.

I have not yet done the math but we have enough donations to equal over 1,000 flies but 22 of them are most special.

One of our tyers, sitting alone and quietly crafting his flies was pretty silent during an otherwise hectic day and when he came up to the desk to hand in his flies he quietly said, "Here. Here are 22 flies".

Thanks so much but why 22, I only asked for a dozen. His reply reduced me to tears when he related that after a 22-month battle with ovarian cancer and a 22-day stay in hospice care he and his wife had to bury their 22-year-old daughter. As he tied each fly today he was thanking God for each of the 22 years of joy their daughter brought them and he left the shop, smiling.

We'll use them to enrich the lives of 22 new fly fishers. They can spend a day on the stream with others who share their struggles with cancer and perhaps take their minds off the toll this disease and caused.

It's not often that a bunch of crusty fly fishers can enrich the lives of others by tying a few simple trout flies, but I remain eternally grateful to those who came forward to help.