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Alexandria's Dresch makes "the ice angler's landing net"

By [Eric Morken](#) on Jan 17, 2018 at 5:47 a.m.

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A nice sunfish is held up with the ice hole trap. The plate on the trap closes the hole by stepping on a foot lever after the fish has come up through the bottom of the ice. (Eric Morken / Echo Press)

Alexandria's Jim Dresch was ice fishing with his good friend, Roger Van Surksun, a couple years ago when Van Surksun latched into a nice crappie.

He worked the fish up to the hole before his chair went flying. Crappies are known for their paper-thin mouths, and this one did not quite make it out of the hole. Van Surksun, 70, shot to his knees in an attempt to grab it in the water before it could get away. No luck.

"I looked at Roger and said, 'That one sounded like it hurt,' " Dresch said.

It was not long after that when the two were fishing together again, this time with another one of Van Surksun's friends also along.

"We had five, six, seven in the pail, but he's over here in this corner and hasn't gotten one yet," Dresch said. "Pretty soon, he had a real nice one. I was so happy for him until it got right to the top of the hole, and it was gone. I was just looking at that hole thinking it sure would be nice if that hole would just shut when the fish is in."

Over the years, Dresch had seen too many fish get to the top of the hole in his house only to swim free. Crappies, walleyes, northerns - any aggressive fighting fish has a tendency to do that every once in a while before an angler can get it in their grasp.

Dresch eventually acted on a plan to fix that. It led to what he refers to as the ice fisherman's landing net.

Grandpa Jimmy's Ice Hole Trap, as he named it, has a shaft that is adjustable to fit the depth of the ice with heavy-duty parachute cord that attaches to a bottom plate and a foot lever. The trap is easily mounted to the bottom of a fish house. Once the fish is through the bottom of the hole, stepping on the lever closes the plate and keeps the fish from getting free should it spit the lure.

Dresch made his first one at the end of February 2016. He and Van Surksun tested it together the rest of that winter fishing season and discovered that it saved them quite a few fish.

"It's everybody's dream to make some money fishing and hunting, but very few people do it," Dresch said. "I had no intention of starting a business, but I thought, 'this is really neat.' I talked to a couple people and they wanted one, and another wanted one."

Dresch quickly had a lawyer run a patent search.

"Nothing came up," Dresch said. "I've been fishing my whole life. I had never seen it, so I said let's go ahead and patent it."

Dresch has a provisional patent on the product that protects him for one year as he seeks a non-provisional patent that lasts longer.

What is that?

The units are made out of galvanized steel. The parts are cut by a manufacturer before Dresch and his girlfriend, Deb Anderson, assemble and package them out of their home.

The ice hole traps come in two sizes to fit an 8-inch hole or a 10-inch hole and sell for \$39.95 and \$44.95, respectively, on his website, grandpajimmy.com. Each order also comes with Dresch's tartar sauce recipe.

To market the product, Dresch has been to sports shows in Fargo, Blaine and St. Paul. Nobody has seemed to know what the ice hole trap is upon first glance. Dresch gets a kick out of explaining it to them and watching the expression on their faces.

"We're just having a blast with it," he said. "Every time I put one together, I just kind of wonder who's going to use it? Is it going to be a crappie or a walleye caught by some kid or a senior citizen who can't get down on his hands and knees quick to grab a fish? It's a fun thing."

Dresch said he has produced somewhere between 700-800 of the traps so far. In addition to ordering them online, anglers can also find some in about 25 shops around Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Where to go from here?

Dresch says he does not know right now how far he expects the business to go. He is 61 and semi-retired after serving in the Air Force and selling insurance for almost 30 years. That job gave him some experience in sales and marketing. Right now, he is still figuring out the best path forward with the product.

"Should I be in the garage assembling parts or should I be in Michigan and Wisconsin and Red Lake or up at Lake of the Woods doing marketing?" Dresch said. "We're just getting started. It's just a little bit early to know which way I want to go with it."

Dresch said that as his buddy, Van Surksum, was busy reeling in another nice sunfish in his fish house on Jan. 11. Roger looked back at Jim and smiled. He hopes Dresch sets his sights high on a product that he believes every ice angler could use to save a few fish.

"There's lots of people making tackle," Van Surksum said. "There's lots of people making rods and reels, but here you have almost a dip net for ice fishing. I said to Jim, 'it's about the most unique thing because you don't see something like this on the market.' I've had fun with it, and I go to others and I have yet to have somebody tell me what it is. It's pretty cool."

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