

# Johnson Family Lures

## This fish story is a keeper

STORY BY ROBERT FRAASS • PHOTOS BY BILL SITZMANN

Doug Johnson had two hobbies: fishing and woodworking. When he put the two together, he created a successful home-based business.

Johnson began creating his homemade bass lures in the garage workshop of his Bellevue home in 1994, making lure bodies with his woodworking tools then painting and assembling them.

"As I would paint lures, some would be flawed," he says. "So I'd give them to my sons to play with."

Soon, his sons Blaine and Andrew, now ages 9 and 15, would want to do more than play with the fishing lures; they wanted to help build them.

Johnson realized he had a potential business, not just a hobby, on his hands. He began calling local fishing tackle shops, casting about for interest in selling his lures. Omaha's Angler Supply Co. was the first to bite in 1999.

"When it started out, I was doing it all, but it became a family project real quickly," Johnson says. "It's been great to get the whole family involved. The thing I like about it is that I am teaching the kids about business."

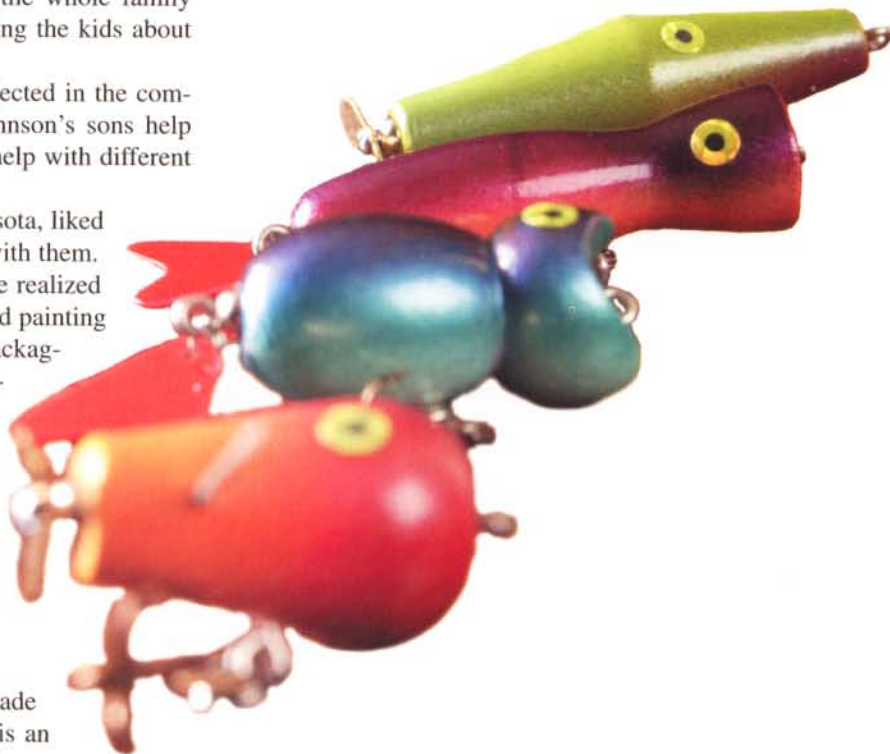
The family involvement meant it needed to be reflected in the company name: Johnson Family Lures. Not only do Johnson's sons help out, his wife Jennifer and his parents and stepfather help with different aspects of the business.

Other tackle shops, mostly in Nebraska and Minnesota, liked Johnson Family Lures enough to stock their shelves with them.

But Johnson's business didn't truly take off until he realized that he could make more money by not assembling and painting the lures. Johnson started putting together lure kits: packages of wood lure bodies, metal parts, paints and assembly instructions. He also launched a website ([www.johnsonfamilylures.com](http://www.johnsonfamilylures.com)) to sell his completed lures and lure kits.

There are dozens of manufacturers of handmade wooden lures on the Internet, Johnson says, but lure kits aren't nearly as common. Johnson also can make dozens of lure kits a week, while he can manufacture just 18-20 completed lures a week. Profits were much easier to come by with the kits.

"The appeal of the lure kits is that they are handmade and fun and easy to assemble," Johnson says. "This is an easy project that kids can do, and we take all the tools away





Doug Johnson with wife Jennifer and sons Andrew, 15, and Blaine, 9.

in making the lures, so that's an incentive to parents."

When Johnson started making the kits, those in the fishing business took notice. Omaha's Canfields Sporting Goods began carrying Johnson Family Lures, and Johnson started marketing the lures to individual Boy Scouts of America offices as a fun, educational den project for Scouts.

"The biggest challenge with the Boy Scouts was to get their leaders to say, 'This is something I want our pack or den to do,'" Johnson says.

When area Boy Scout troops took notice, so did the national organization. In 2004, Johnson Family Lures became the national provider of lure kits for the Boy Scouts of America. Assembling a lure can fill one of the requirements for the Boy Scouts' Fishing Merit Badge.

The national office orders several hundred kits each year then sells them to individual offices that request them, Johnson says.

The lure of lure kits for younger fisherman also sold a University of Florida-Gainesville professor on Johnson Family Lures. Dan Canfield, a university research professor, runs "Fishing for Success," a private program designed to introduce at-risk kids and their families to the joys of fishing.

Canfield's program sponsors family fishing days, where kids and

their families fish stocked ponds. At the end of the day, the families can get a free lure kit. Canfield says "Fishing for Success" distributed 1,800 kits in 2005.

"Parents say it's great because it's something that's not complicated to work on with the kids," Canfield says. "It's easily understood by the kids, and, for some, the painting brings out their artistic and creative side."

There are four levels of lure kits, each one increasing in difficulty. The Level 1 and 2 lures are top-water models that are the easiest to assemble. Each kit contains the lure bodies made of imported soft marupa wood, assembled treble hooks and pre-drilled holes.

"The kids like the top-water kits because they can see the lure on the water and its action. It keeps them interested," Johnson says.

Level 3 kits contain crank-bait lures (A lure with a diving bill that dives downward when retrieved or "cranked") that come without the holes and preassembled hooks. A Level 4 kit contains one of the Level 1 to 3 lures kits without any predrilled holes or anything assembled.

Johnson says he will continue seeking new markets while continuing to sell his finished lures and lure kits through the Johnson Family Lures website.

"This is the perfect way to introduce kids to fishing," he says. ■