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Here's an urban fish tale for you: You can catch a rainbow trout in a downtown Toronto pool this week for just \$3.

Someone will gut it, rinse it and put it in a plastic bag so you can take it home and eat it.

Or, if you have another \$4, someone will cook it for you and serve it with rice and salad or coleslaw.

The Gone Fishin' project has been a wildly popular event at the [Scadding Court Community Centre](#) for nine years. Fifteen school groups landed coveted slots to come during the day this week. The public can come in the late afternoon and evening until Friday, and all day Saturday. Fishing rods and bait are provided.

It will be the first time many of these people — the ones without cottages or cars — have fished.

I grew up fishing, but Scadding Court executive director Kevin Lee can't help but coach me Monday during the project launch.

"Set the hook," he stresses as my fish keep spitting out the black plastic grub. "Hold the line tight."

All around me pint-sized school kids seem to be effortlessly landing their fish.

"You know why you're not catching one," Lee suddenly admits. "You're using my rod and I took the barb off the hook."

It takes a little longer, but I finally land a trout.

Police chief Bill Blair has no trouble catching his, but throws it back practicing what's known in angling circles as catch-and-release.

"It's not the way the police normally do it," he jokes, "but I thought I'd try."

I watch three kids from Charles G. Fraser Junior Public School fish. They stand uncertainly at the edge of the pool behind yellow police tape so they don't fall in. Volunteer Abraham Abdullahi provides advice and hands-on guidance.

The fish aren't biting, so Lee throws in fish food to start a frenzy.

Grade 2 student Joy Chua, 7, is the first to catch her trout. "Hard" and "tiring" is how she describes the experience.

"Scary," is 7-year-old Crystal Chen's word of choice after her fish is safely stowed in a bucket.

Grade 3 student Larry Li, 9, is the only one who has fished before. He knows enough to ask to change spots (which doesn't happen) and change rods (which does happen). Once he lands his fish, he can't wipe the grin off his face.

"There's nothing like the experience of seeing food, in this case, from pool to table," says Lauren Baker, coordinator of the Toronto Food Policy Council.

"Look at these kids. They've got a chance to put a line in the water and see how thrilling it is to catch and cook a fish. Not everybody has the opportunity to do that and there are innovative ways to do that in the city.

A trio of politicians — Trinity-Spadina MPP Rosario Marchese and city councillors Adam Vaughan and Mike Layton — echo Baker's sentiments in brief speeches about access to food and recreation.



This is the first fish that 7-year-old Crystal Chen 7 has ever caught.

RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

Lee created the Gone Fishin' project for three high-minded reasons — to educate people about the environment, to boost recreational access for inner-city dwellers, and to show people where food comes from while improving food access and food security.

On Tuesday, the trout pond will be turned over to wheelchair-using students. On Friday night, Scadding Court (at Dundas St. W and Bathurst Ave.) will barbecue people's freshly caught trout at its first Live Local Marketplace of the summer.

"The whole issue of food is so important in the community we live in," says Lee, who would love to see the city convert its under-utilized outdoor pools to fish farms from September to May.

For now, he will make do with his six-day event featuring 2,000 trout from Silver Creek Aquaculture in Erin and a chemical that's added to the pool to "unbind" the hard chlorine. Area fishing pro Doug Hodge is on hand to get the 49 rods ready with tackle.

The fun doesn't end with the fishing. For an extra 75 cents, volunteers like Dave Kim will gut and wash the fish. There's a free sheet with recipes for poached trout with brown butter sauce, lemon dill trout, grilled rainbow trout and whole grilled trout with lemon parsley butter.

The Scadding Greenhouse Café will even cook your fish.

Kimberly "Slice" Belle, a 24-year-old youth program and community engagement worker, cooks mine. She douses it with chili powder, pepper, thyme, seasoning salt and hot sauce. She stuffs it with green peppers, tomatoes and green onions and cooks it on a flat-top grill, adding garlic powder, more seasoning salt and lemon juice at the end.

She plates it with a fresh green salad and white rice sprinkled with paprika.

"It's affordable and you might as well enjoy it while you eat," reasons Belle. "Everybody wants to feel like their food is quality food."

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