

A group of eight women, dressed in fly fishing gear including waders, hats, and vests, are posing in a shallow river. They are smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a lush green landscape with trees and a building in the distance.

# HEALING THROUGH FLY FISHING RENEW YOUR SPIRIT AND FISH ON!

“It’s a trout! I caught my very first trout!” shouted Susan Fields, a novice fly fisher and cancer survivor from Chicago, Illinois. She jumped up and down with delight, fly rod in one hand and a trout dangling from a dry fly in the other. The volunteer guide knelt down in the river, focusing the camera on the fish.

“C’mon - give me a smile and say the magic words,” coaxed the guide. With that Suzanne bellowed Reeling & Healing Midwest’s motto for all on the river to hear, “FISH ON!”

In the fishing world you often hear, “Fish On!” when a fish is hooked. It marks the beginning of a battle with something wild and unknown. To the women participating in Reeling & Healing Midwest retreats, it means so much more. To them, “Fish On!” is a statement of action. “Fish On!” means I will embrace life and thrive in my survivorship”. It also means, “I will continue fighting, continue healing, continue living”.



Based in Michigan and entering their twelfth retreat season, Reeling & Healing Midwest, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, champions fly fishing wellness retreats for women in any phase of cancer survivorship, from new diagnosis to remission. Their mission is to introduce these women to the healing powers of the sport of fly fishing and provide a one-of-a-kind experience, on and off the water. This is accomplished through the elements of fly fishing, positive camaraderie, peer coaching, the enjoyment of nature and a support network, which in turn renews the spirit and hope of each participant.

Participants do not need fly fishing experience to attend retreats. Women receive expert instruction allowing them to discover a sport they can enjoy throughout recovery and a lifetime. Retreats accommodate participants with a variety of medical, dietary and mobility needs. Reeling & Healing Midwest covers all meals, lodging and equipment costs for all the participants and

volunteers. Most importantly, the retreats provide a safe, reflective venue where participants share disease and recovery experiences with other women who have cancer.

Susan was attending her first retreat while undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. "My oncology nurse suggested I attend. I'm so happy I did. I met women who survived the journey I'm currently on. Their courage and positive attitude motivates me to fight my battle with more strength, less doubt. This experience has been so joyful and fear-conquering for me."

Ruthanne Tietsort attended her initial retreat after recovering from breast cancer and a double mastectomy. She was hooked on fly fishing after her first cast into the river. "I had finished treatment and thought I wouldn't fit in. Boy was

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[LEFT PAGE] Participants celebrate fly fishing and friendship at a Reunion Retreat.

[TOP TO BOTTOM] Fly fishing retreats provide women an opportunity to renew spirit, peace and hope. Brook trout on bead headed nymph. New to the sport, participants are geared up and ready to fly fish the river. Catching her first trout is a healing and joyful experience. Laughing, fly fishing and enjoying the river. Choosing flies for their fly fishing experience.







I wrong.” she said. “The retreat was reaffirming and a step toward true healing for me. The women who attended opened up, shared their stories, encouraged each other and accepted me.” After that retreat, she began fly fishing on a regular basis and giving back by volunteering. “I receive more healing each time I step into the river and teach another survivor to fly fish. It is pure joy for me to share this amazing sport.”

Because 90% of the women who attend their first retreat, request to return, learn more, and strengthen the bonds they create, Reeling & Healing Midwest offers something unique - Reunion Retreats. Some Reunion Retreats offer an in-depth fishing experience with day long float trips provided by seasoned guides who donate their time. Along with the fishing time and instruction, the guides provide an invaluable education of the river’s ecosystem and watershed, along with conservation efforts. Other Reunion Retreats span up to three days at river lodges. While fly fishing is non-stop, it is also a time where participants from multiple retreats gather to enhance established bonds and create new ones.



“We share a common goal to step into the healing waters of the river together and enjoy the camaraderie of healing friendships,” said Brooke Madden a five year survivor who attended her first retreat in 2007. “I attended a reunion retreat to hone my fly fishing skills, but it was so much more. I reconnected with women who share a special bond with me beyond the sisterhood of battling and living with cancer. These bonds add a dimension to my life that empowers me, rejuvenates me and brings me joy. We laugh, hug and celebrate all that we share together – even catching a fish,” her face beaming with a smile as she reflected.

“Though I hate my cancer with a passion, I’m blessed to be fighting it,” shared Susan as she cast to a rising trout. “I never would have taken the time to learn to fly fish. Cancer made me stop, think and change my life. I’m thankful to Reeling & Healing Midwest because they offer something different from the typical support groups for women like me.” Suddenly Susan’s rod bent down and fly line pulled tight into the river’s current. She squealed with delight and shouted, “It’s another trout! I cannot believe I’m wading in this beautiful river, fly casting and catching fish – all in one day! I can’t wait to go again! I’m definitely going to continue to Fish On!”



**LEARN MORE ABOUT FLY FISHING WELLNESS RETREATS AND REELING & HEALING MIDWEST AT [WWW.FISHON.ORG](http://WWW.FISHON.ORG).**

*[CLOCKWISE] The camaraderie shared on the stream contributes to their healing bonds. New hair returning after chemo, they're proud to be fly fishing. Peace and renewal may be found among the river rocks and flowing water. Wading gear awaits participants and the river. Retreat participants receive expert fly fishing instruction.*