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## The Catfish Man

By Rafael Hernandez

**PROSPER RESIDENT** and *Catfish Gold Magazine* publisher, Richard Chrisman, is a giant of a man. Towering over me at roughly 6' 5," Richard shakes my hand as he sits down with his sandwich, his lanky legs sticking out from all sides of our table. Interestingly, as intimidating as his height seems, Richard exudes an appealing, almost avuncular charm that immediately eases you in his presence. On the other hand, my 'giant' wisecrack wasn't solely directed at his height. If you

had to measure a man's stature based on his ability to balance ambition with humility, a knack for thinking outside the box, meeting challenges foursquare and keeping a healthy sense of humor while you're at it, Richard is an actual giant.

Dressed in a mauve Henley, layered underneath an open plaid shirt, worn jeans and a *Catfish Gold* trucker hat covering his shaggy, ivory hair, Richard describes his lifelong passion for catfish fishing with delight. "Fishing is like magic.

You've got to believe your gonna catch a fish and when it happens, you've got to be ready. You've gotta want it."

There's a childish mischievousness about Richard Chrisman's smile. "Today I saw the coolest net light out there," referring to an item Richard is considering as an addition to the company's line of products. As he explains the practicality of a flashlight designed to latch onto a fishing net with the same glee a 10-year-old would describe a BB gun. I find it hard to believe this man grew the company, Danny King's Fish Bait, into a nationally distributed fishing bait brand in three short years and has developed the largest catfish fishing themed publication in the



*Richard Chrisman*  
photo by Chris Fritchie

All joking aside, Richard's true driving force is his fervor for life and defying conventions. At the tender age of 19, Richard suffered a devastating motorcycle accident that shattered almost everything below his waist. After regaining use of his legs, he went to work for Southwestern Bell, where he would spend the next 23 years working as a telecom technician and union official. One of the requirements of the job: climbing poles. "I refused to accept that I couldn't do it. I was raised to believe that if you want something, you gotta go get it."

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It was the lingering effects of this same accident that ultimately forced Richard into early retirement after years of physical ailments. But Richard refused to stay mired in the idleness that comes without a regular day job. That's when he headed out to a fishing shop in Oklahoma in search of something to do and shortly after met Danny King. Three years later, armed with a plethora of forthcoming new products ranging from fishing rods, sunglasses and hand cleaners to hunting odor attractants, the company is on the brink of becoming a sizeable presence in the fishing industry.

In spite of the accomplishments his assertiveness and ambition have gained him, Richard doesn't like the spotlight. "I find this whole interview embarrassing. I like to be the man behind the curtain; the large curtain that is," Richard says with boyish charm. Many believe that a true man doesn't draw attention to his actions. We believe the same of Richard, although we enjoy thinking of him in his own words. "I'm the biggest little boy you'll know!"

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U.S. in a mere two. It's this unbridled passion for the sport that has helped him find his niche.

With Danny King products found in major retailers such as Wal-Mart, Academy and Cabela's, the company is currently projected to become a \$1 million dollar business by the end of fiscal 2007. But Richard's affinity for catfish fishing doesn't stop there. Richard had an idea to create a magazine simply as a marketing tool for Danny King's Bait. "I've never done a magazine. I had no idea what it was like. But it's important to me that people see a different side to catfish fishing." It turned out to be a little more than a marketing tool.

With a print circulation of approximately 17,000, combined with three major websites and two weekly radio shows, Richard is helping a growing base of fishing enthusiasts understand that catfish fishing can be a mainstream and respectable sport. And you've got to give it to him; he picked a very promising target market. According to the US Department of Agriculture, catfish fishing accounts for more than half of U.S. aquaculture production and the catfish industry is estimated to be worth more than \$7 billion (USDA-ARS, 2007). "You also gotta remember, a healthy alcohol dependency is key to good catfish fishing," Richard jokes.