

Nelson immediately got on the phone with Ranger Boats, one of the Federation chapter's sponsors, and began selling the idea.

The company didn't take much convincing.

Ranger agreed to provide the boat at dealer cost, and Mercury jumped onboard to provide an outboard. Rounding out the deal was Minn Kota - which chipped in a trolling motor - and Lowrance, which threw in two fishfinders. A local sporting goods store provided a deep discount on a pile of fishing tackle.

Instead of an aluminum boat, Carton was getting a 15 1/2-foot Ranger 155 rigged out with a 75-horsepower Mercury motor and all the equipment he'd need to find and stay on the bass.

"I was pretty surprised," Carton said.

The boat was presented to Carton on Jan. 17 during the Illinois BASS Federation President's Meeting. He also was presented with a lifetime membership in the state and national BASS Federations.

Carton, who is a young man of few words, could only grin.

"He's a soft-spoken kid. You could see the excitement on his face," Nelson said. "His parents and grandparents were in the back crying, and he was just grinning."

Kinzer said that, although it's been too cold for Carton to make a trip in his new boat, the gift has brightened his life.

"Right now, I've got it sitting in my garage so he can fill it with tackle and show it to all of his friends," she said.

Carton said he doesn't mind that he has to wait to use it.

"I just sit in it right now," he said.

Nelson said he and the rest of the Federation members, who had already helped with a couple of other fishing-related wishes, were proud to be a part of making Carton's wish come true.

"We stand behind Make-A-Wish because of what it does for the kids," Nelson said. "It gives the kids hope during a troubled time in their lives."