Shannon J. Owens SPORTS COMMENTARY

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Patric McDaniel has quite a fish story to tell. You would, too, if you had caught more than 200,000 fish.

That's the milestone he says he reached late last month, when he reeled in a black crappie at Lake Fairview Marina near Orange Blossom Trail.

"I just love to fish. I would do it a lot more than I do, but I think I'm getting carpal tunnel in my hands from the reels, setting the hook and casting," said McDaniel, 67. "I fish. I don't set there and put my pole in a prop or holder and let the boat catch the fish, or the minnow catch the fish, or the worm catch the fish. I use artificial bait, and I have to fish it.

It's one thing to love to fish, but what sets McDaniel apart is his love for all types of fish and his commitment to keeping meticulous statistics on his catches.

Since he caught his first fish at age 13, he has kept track of everything he caught regardless of size: bass, black crappie, bluegill, tilapia, catfish and so many other varieties. Many came from Dwarf Lake, a 5-acre retention pond in his Pine Hills neighborhood.

During one stretch in the 1990s, he calculated that he averaged 4.47 minutes per catch.
There's no way to verify McDaniel's personal record-keeping for the amount of fish he's caught, but he is undoubtedly a world-class fisherman. More than 23 plaques containing world and state fishing records line his office walls.

Some of his records still stand, including a 9-pound, 7-ounce Florida gar he caught on a 4-pound line in 2001.

Then there was the time he set a world record with a 12-inch oscar fish in Dwarf Lake years ago. It wasn't supposed to be there, but someone dumped it from an aquarium, and McDaniel caught it.

"Not only is catching 200,000 fish impressive, but recording that information is just as amazing," said Jason Schratwieser, conservation director for the International Game Fish Association.

McDaniel says he fell in love with fishing at age 13 when a family friend helped him hook his first catch. McDaniel set the goal of catching 100,000 fish in his lifetime. He achieved that feat in 1999 and kept fishing.

McDaniel uses the same meticulous detail documenting his fishing expeditions on a computer as he does creating his own artificial bait and jigs. In 1993, he expanded his record keeping to include the amount of time he fishes, the lakes he fished, weather conditions, water temperatures and the species of the fish he caught.

So far, he's spent more than 558,640 minutes fishing. And that number doesn't include the period when he first started fishing as a teen in Ohio.

It's uncommon to find fishermen who keep records of almost every fish they've ever caught. Then again, it's uncommon to find people who save buckets of rain and lake water to avoid using "city" water to preserve their plants as McDaniel does.

McDaniel is a fishing zealot. It took someone special — his wife, Carole — to lure him away from the water.

Carole suffered a stroke four years ago. It scared him so much that now he won't drive farther than 13 miles from his house to fish, and he doesn't stay out past noon.

No personal fishing record — even the quarter-million he wants — is as valuable as she.

"I really wanted a woman I could spend 24 hours a day with," McDaniel said. "We worked together, and we played together. I'm the happiest man in the world because of that."

They met at a Coca-Cola bottling plant in Florida where they both worked as lab technicians. Almost everyone at the office knew about McDaniel's fanatical fishing hobby.

Their first dates, of course, were fishing trips.

He discovered the strength of her affection for him during one of those trips, a bluegill expedition on a cold winter morning. They waded into the frigid water even though Carole is barely 5 feet tall.

"Her legs were so cold, they changed colors," McDaniel said. "You could see the waterline, and I'm thinking, 'My gosh, she must really like me or like to fish.'"

Lucky for him, she liked both.

Carole is his best fishing buddy, earning a certificate from the National Fresh Fishing Hall of Fame for one of her catches in October 2010.

That was around the time she suffered a mini-stroke that weakened her knees. That, combined with a spine disorder she was born with, limits how much time she can sit in a fishing boat.

"I just feel like I'm taking time away from his fishing because I can't sit in the boat for a long time," she said.
She appreciates her husband's discipline to fashion himself into a prolific fisherman. He doesn't need to see the fish to know what's on the other side of his 4-pound line. A catfish gives a thump. A bass runs 5 to 10 feet, pauses and makes another short run. A crappie shakes its head. Bluegills vibrate because they're smaller and faster. A walleye, a Northern fish he's caught in Ohio, feels like a 10-foot rope on the line.

Since Jan. 1, he's already gone on seven fishing trips and caught almost 200 fish — mostly small bluegills.

He and his wife toasted to the new year with their traditional glass of champagne and talked about their hopes for the future.

McDaniel used to dream about catching a fish in every state in America. Now he dreams about keeping his wife healthy.

"[My hope is] that she doesn't get any worse because I know she's not going to get any better," he said. "That things stay the same because that allows me the freedom to do the running around."

He'd like to get his fishing buddy back on the boat more regularly. A few years ago, she told him to buy any boat he wanted because it would be the last boat purchase for the retired couple.

McDaniel bought a red, deep-V-hull boat so Carole could have a place to sit comfortably instead of being stuck on a platform.

It's the first new boat McDaniel has ever owned. All his previous boats were used.

He keeps the boat hitched to the truck no matter where he's going — even during his golf trips.

"The truck doesn't let go of it," McDaniel said.

And he doesn't let go of Carole.

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( Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda, Orlando Sentinel / January 13, 2014 )

Pat McDaniel and wife Carole McDaniel in his workshop at their Orlando home, on Tuesday, January 14, 2014. Pat McDaniel is a prolific Orlando fisherman who set a record by catching his 200,000th fish.