



## **Aloysius "Al" Kostielny**

**Kostielny Bait Company**

**Bronson, Michigan**

**By Bob Honstra**

The Kostielny Bait Company was started by Ladislaw "Chris" Kostielny around 1917. Although Kostielny's wife and children were involved in the production of the company's fishing lures in varying degrees, it was Kostielny's son Al who was the most heavily involved of the family members in the production, testing and marketing of the regionally known "Chris Floater" lures.

As a youth Al worked in his father's basement workshop after school assembling lures while his father painted them. During this period Al often accompanied his father to nearby lakes where they carefully tested the lures for proper action and balance. Since the lures were "floaters" it was important that they ride properly on the water's surface. Some of the best results were achieved when Al and his father harvested some "Michigan Whitewood" trees from their property. This type of wood proved to be very buoyant and after careful experimentation by Al and his father was used in the manufacture of some of the earlier lures.

Al remembers getting up often at 3:00 AM to go fishing with his dad. They fished for the love of it, but also to test Kostielny baits as well as reels for the local Bronson Reel Company. Two of each new Bronson reel model was given to Kostielny and son for testing purposes. Through this association with Bronson Reels Kostielny was able to purchase propellers for his lures from the South Bend Bait Co.

Around 1937 this company decided they didn't want the competition and wouldn't sell Kostielny any more hardware. According to Al, his father then purchased props from the Shakespeare Company of Kalamazoo. Again, this was possible due to Kostielny's association with Bronson Reels. The importance of this is that some of those propellers were marked Shakespeare, which has caused a great deal of confusion for collectors who naturally assume any lures with Shakespeare props must be Shakespeare products. According to Al Kostielny, however, at the time neither his father nor the Shakespeare Company was particularly concerned about a conflict.

The most productive commercial period of the Kostielny Bait Company coincided with Al's return from active service in World War II. Employment was scarce for returning servicemen and Al's availability and employment status resulted in a decision to expand the business and use Al, along with Al's uncle, Anthony Bohacz, as full time employees of the Kostielny Bait Company. Al located a man in Indiana who had a production lathe and was able to produce large numbers of lure bodies which Al and his father painted and assembled. The painting process used to produce the attractive and durable finish on the lures was a closely guarded family secret which Al refuses to divulge to this day.

In addition to assisting with lure production, Al did the bookkeeping and also served as a traveling sales representative for the family business. Armed with advertising posters and lure samples, Al traveled throughout southern Michigan, Ohio and northern Indiana towns where he solicited new accounts among hardware stores and sporting goods dealers. In this manner Al helped turn his father's part time hobby into a regionally known family business.

In towns surrounding Bronson the lures "sold like hotcakes" according to Al, who attributes their popularity to their fish catching ability. Sales at this time were sometimes as high as 500 lures per week. This means, as Al pointed out, that there should be a lot of Kostielny plugs still out there.

Despite the popularity of the Kostielny lures with fishermen and the overall success of the "shoestring operation" it was difficult to make a

living manufacturing fishing lures. Eventually Al's uncle left the operation, and since the venture was only a part time occupation for Al's father, Al was left as the only full time employee of the company.

Around 1952 Al married and moved north to Traverse City, Michigan where he found employment with the Traverse City Fire Department. In his spare time Al opened a fishing guide service in the Traverse City area. He registered with the local Chamber of Commerce and was quite successful in this part time venture. He guided high ranking executives for U.S. Steel and the Bloomington Hills Woolen Mills along with Ohio tourists. His motto was "No fish, No pay". Not surprisingly, Al used Kostielny baits exclusively. Al said that the baits were so effective, "I would go up against anybody even today ...using any Kostielny plug ... to catch fish." Al still uses Kostielny plugs with great success to catch a variety of species in both fresh and salt water.

Shortly after Al moved away from Bronson an incident occurred which could have greatly affected the future of the Kostielny Bait Company. The Sears Roebuck Company approached Al's father Ladislav and offered to buy 10,000 baits. After discussion with his wife Ladislav decided not to attempt production of this rather large order. Al was unaware of the Sears proposal at the time, but believes strongly that if he had known about it he would have influenced his father to accept the offer and the "shoestring" operation would have become a "going concern".

Al later left Traverse City and accepted employment as a fireman with the Lockheed Corporation of Sunnyvale, California. After three years with that outfit he became the chief of a fire department in Northern California. He retired in 1974 but found other jobs to keep him busy. He now distributes a twice monthly fishing newspaper and at age 72 still fishes regularly.

When asked to comment on the fact that Kostielny baits are now very much desired and appreciated by tackle collectors, Al said he regrets that his father is not alive to reap the benefits of his work. Additionally, Al and his family are honored that Kostielny baits have found a place in fishing tackle history.

Editor's note: Aloysuis Kostielny was the 2<sup>nd</sup> honorary member for 1997. For more information on the Kostielny Bait Company, see the article "*Lures of Distinction - Kostielny Bait Company*" by Bob Hornstra, West Paterson, New Jersey in the September, 1993 issue of the N.F.L.C.C. Gazette.

Honorary Member - 1997