

Partnerships help fulfill sick children's dreams

As I arrived in North Carolina in February to attend the North Carolina Wildlife Extravaganza, I was impressed with the natural beauty and diversity of its terrain. From heavily forested hills to fertile farmland, North Carolina is certainly blessed with abundant natural resources. Public awareness and resolve is essential to preserve any state's resources for future generations, and North Carolina has done a fine job of that.

At United Special Sportsman Alliance (USSA), our mission is to see that all Americans, regardless of their challenges in life, have an opportunity to experience and enjoy the fruits of dedicated conservation efforts and to promote outdoor activities for future generations.

USSA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit "dream-wish" granting charity that specializes in sending children and veterans with life-threatening illnesses and disabilities on the outdoor adventure of their dreams. The USSA's staff is composed en-



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tirely of volunteers from all walks of life. The charity has a deep respect for our fellow man and, like the North Carolina Wildlife Habitat Foundation, has a passion for natural resources conservation. By working cooperatively with merchandise donors, landowners, fishermen and financial sponsors, we are able to coordinate adventures for everyone in need.

Since its inception in 2000, USSA has granted more than 6,600 outdoor dream adventures in 38 states, and the number keeps growing rapidly each year. North Carolina has hosted deer, bear and turkey hunts, and fishing events. A partnership with the North Carolina Taxidermists Association provides a visual reminder of the recipient's adventure, so that the memory of the trip remains with

them for life.



Children like Brittany Zebrasky, who has brain cancer, can benefit from USSA and its partners.

them for life. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission also gave its support by waiving hunting and fishing licenses for nonprofit charities beginning last fall, making it more affordable to follow through with our mission. USSA is now trying to spread the movement to all states to benefit children and families enduring illnesses and disabilities. John Boy and Billy, hosts of The Big Show radio program in Charlotte, have been instrumental in helping to find deserving kids nationwide who would have otherwise never known about the available opportunities.

Indeed, there has been a long, productive and mutually beneficial history between the USSA and the residents of North Car-

olina. The Extravaganza I attended in February was a great experience. I was heartened to see so many dedicated professional people from all walks of life united under one roof for a mutual cause. By bringing them all together in one place, we create a deep pool of concepts and solutions that can lead to effective implementation of programs to further NCWHF's critical mission. The future quality of life within the state depends on it.

For USSA, it all comes back to children like Brittany Zebrasky, 15, of Wisconsin (pictured). Brittany has been a part of the USSA for six years and has had brain cancer for most of her life. Despite the many critical and even life-threatening moments she's endured, her spirit has not suffered. She remains a vital inspiration to me and to everyone she meets, as she has taught us the virtue of finding peace in the great outdoors. She loves hunting and being involved outdoors, and her greatest wish is to one

day become head of USSA. She and so many like her who are part of this organization are the brightest parts of our lives.

I look to a future in which the NCWHF works together with USSA to help medically challenged children and disabled veterans in North Carolina and across the county enjoy the results of caring and visionary people like those I met at the Extravaganza.

If you would like to support USSA and its mission, or would like to donate a dream wish or other goods or services, please feel free to contact us by calling or visiting our website. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend and speak at the North Carolina Wildlife Extravaganza. May God bless you all.

Brigid O'Donoghue is founder and CEO of United Special Sportsman Alliance, based in Pittsville, Wis. For more information about USSA, call (800) 518-8019 or visit www.childswish.org.