

Volunteers getting set to go fishing for disabled children

By AMY FRIEDENBERGER

For the Mirror

Professional bass fisherman Rex Johnsonbaugh of Altoona and a military veteran were fishing out on a lake last month, and the veteran was chatting about his experiences while deployed in the Middle East.

They were part of the fifth annual Warriors on the Water Military Appreciation Fishing tournament at Fort Bragg, N.C., which brought together military veterans recently returned from deployment who enjoyed fishing.

"We had a mutual respect for one another," Johnsonbaugh said. "I for what he has done for this country and for him it was that I took the time out of my schedule to go fishing with him."

Johnsonbaugh, 44, has been a fisherman for as long as he can remember, and he started professionally in the last four years. It was in the last six years that he combined his passion for fishing with his desire to give back to the community.

"It's good when I can use my fishing to reach out to people," he said.

Johnsonbaugh will be attending the fourth annual Child's Wish family event at Raystown Lake May 20-22. He and about 40 other volunteer fishermen will spend the day fishing with about 20 families that have a disabled child.

"A lot of what I do is based on helping the kids," he said. "Not a lot of kids get outdoors these days, especially the children who are in critical condition. And for one weekend, we want to make these

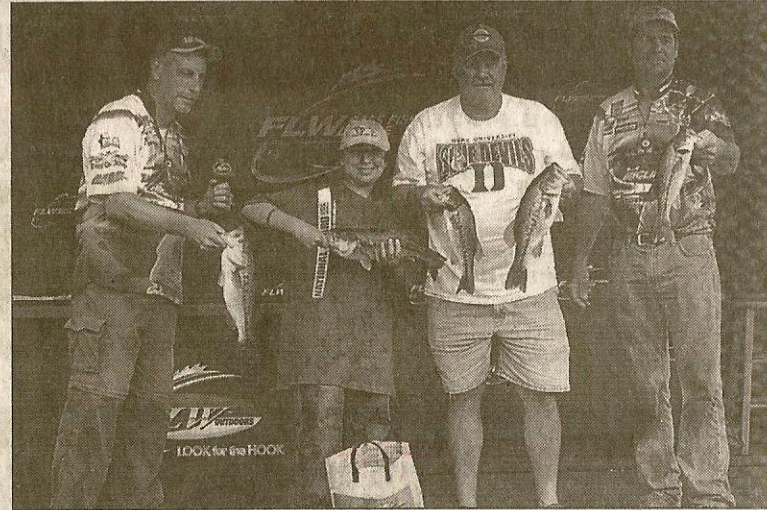
kids forget about everything going on with their medical situation."

The Child's Wish events, which began in 2000, are organized through United Special Sportsman Alliance, a non-profit organization based in Wisconsin that works to send critically ill and disabled youth and disabled veterans on outdoor trips.

Brigid O'Donoghue, CEO and founder of USSA, said that the outdoor event is made possible entirely through donations and volunteers, such as Johnsonbaugh.

"Rex puts his whole heart into this, and that's what really makes these events work," she said.

O'Donoghue said that USSA is always looking for donations to help create more events. Those interested in donating can go to www.childswish.com for details.



Courtesy photo

(From left) Rex Johnsonbaugh, DJ Honneffer (Child's Wish representative), Randy Creswell and Randy Yarnall participated in last year's event at Lake Raystown Resort.