Eric Badolsky of Skokie had sent me the e-mail a week ago. Like so many other e-mails, I glanced at it quickly and saved it in my inbox to read another day.

We all have so much to do, and so it seems, very little time to do it. But time was of no importance to me after finally reading Eric’s e-mail this week. You see, Eric’s e-mail touched my heart like no other.

In his e-mail Eric stated he’s a volunteer director for a non-profit organization called United Special Sportsmen Alliance.

“United Special Sportsmen Alliance (USSA) was created to help fulfill the dreams of disabled and terminally-ill children who dream about an outdoor activity, hunting or fishing experience,” wrote Eric, “and I would like to prove Chicago is a city with a big heart.”

Eric’s son Ben is an International Game Fishing Association record holder, having winged doves and turkeys in Mexico and shed for giant muskies in Canada. He’s a healthy kid who comes from a good family.

“I came to realize how blessed and fortunate I am to be able to provide these wonderful experiences to my son,” Eric wrote, “but it occurred to me there are thousands of children across the country who can’t escape, who can’t enjoy even one of the things my son has experienced. Many of these physically challenged or terminally-ill kids are coming from one parent homes with no role model. I wanted an opportunity to give these kids something they can treasure the rest of their lives.”

Eric’s desire to help physically challenged children was fueled during a chance business meeting attended by Brigid O’Donoghue. At 39, Brigid resides at the helm of Bio-Tec Research, Inc., a Pittsfield, Wis.-based company which manufactures deer and elk foods. She is president of the company. Few thought she would ever achieve such status given her history of childhood seizures.

When Brigid was 10 months old, her parents discovered she had seizures. She suffered through a coma, paralyzed on the right side and had epilepsy. When she reached 20 she had undergone surgery and lost her ability to speak. She endured six years of speech therapy. Now, says Brigid, her ability to speak is her greatest asset.

Brigid met Danny Schumann just over three years ago. Schumann owns a farm and shooting preserve in central Wisconsin. “Find me someone who is dying,” said Danny. “I’d like to offer him a place for free.”

Brigid called the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the American Cancer Society. For various reasons they would not accommodate her request.

Then she hit pay dirt with the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

They arranged transportation for a 42-year-old Texas man who’s terminally ill to hunt deer at Danny’s preserve. Brigid came along on the hunt.

“He was the most wonderful man,” she said. “We were in the blind and he was telling me about his two kids. Because of his condition he was weak and fell asleep and his head fell into my lap. I held him like a child and I realized the good lord was telling me I needed to do something for disabled and terminally-ill kids.”

Brigid talked to vendors and lodges at hunting trade shows and all offered hunts or equipment. But all she needed was the kids.

Her big break came on a nationally syndicated radio hunting show.

“We had responses from the parents of 42 terminally-ill children in less than two days,” said Brigid, “and we filled their needs for hunting trips within three days.”

Through USSA, 300 disabled or terminally-ill children went fishing and hunting in 2003 alone. But the donations far exceed the number of known children in need.

“What I’m seeing is disabled and terminally-ill children treated so cruelly by other children in the classrooms, we need to make them feel they are no different,” Brigid said. “And we need to reach out to the families and let them know what we have to offer. So many of them have lost everything trying to keep up with medical expenses.”

In several cases children had been abandoned by their parents and were missing a male role model. The mothers didn’t know much about fishing and hunting. When Brigid finds a child who doesn’t have a father, she connects them with one of her volunteers to guide them as a big brother.

Both Brigid’s and Eric’s goal is to bring Illinois on board each year.

“We need the families of disabled and terminally-ill children to come forward so we can help fulfill their dreams,” said Eric. “And we need to find a printer willing to donate a run of brochures so we can spread our message across the state.”

USSA also seeks guides, outfitters, charter captains, lodge and preserve owners willing to donate their time and facilities to the cause, as well as individual memberships to help with funding children’s trips and operational expenses.

One of Brigid’s special children, Michael, died of cancer two weeks ago. But before he left this earth he was able to harvest a deer last fall.

“You could see it in his eyes. He wasn’t long for this earth,” said Brigid. “But when I went to harvest that deer I insisted on walking 150 yards in his walker to see his prize. Everyone there was crying. I know he went to heaven a happy kid.”

If any of you know of any deserving disabled or terminally-ill child that would like to go on a free hunting, fishing, camping or canoeing trip, contact

USSA at 1-800-518-8019 or fill out the request form at the USSA link on Bio-Tecs website at www.deerfood.com. USSA’s goal is to turn no child away, regardless of illness or disability. They will try to match each child to the adventure most appropriate to his or her desires and abilities.

Outdoors notes

- The 35th annual Indoor Fishing Show takes place Saturday from 3 a.m. to 10 p.m. at Rolling Meadows High School. The show has over 100 vendors selling collectible and used fishing tackle, overstocks and closeouts, and other boat and marine merchandise.
- More info call (347) 870-7685.
- LaSalle Lake opens to boat and bank fishing March 17 on a Wednesday through Sunday schedule from 6 a.m. to sunset. A seven day a week schedule is planned to begin April 1, depending on staffing levels at the time.
- Brunswick Corp has signed an agreement to buy the Crestliner, Lowe and Lund aluminum boat brands from Genmar Holdings Inc. for about $191 million in cash, plus an additional $30 million potential earn-out.

“Outdoors with Mike Norris” is heard every Thursday from 3-4 p.m. on WBIG (AM-1280). Mike Norris can be reached at wallymk@aol.com.