Providing outdoor joy to disabled and terminally-ill children

Eric Badofsky 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 fishing or hunting 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, has hunted for wing doves and turkeys in Mexico and fished 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 provide these wonderful experiences to my son," Eric wrote, "but it occurred to me there are thousand of children across the country who can't escape, who cannot enjoy even one 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 diseases.

When Brigid was 10 months old, she contracted encephalitis. She suffered through a coma, was paralyzed on the right side and had epilepsy. When she reached 20 she had brain surgery and lost her ability to speak. She endured six years of speech therapy. Now, says Brigid, her ability to speak may be 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 hunt 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 paydirt with the Paralyzed Veterans of America.