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Staff Writer

ENGLEWOOD – The United Special
Sportsmen Alliance recently granted the wishes
of two local brothers that included a fishing trip
in Alabama, a hunting expedition in Texas and
even an appearance on the “Rick and Bubba
Show” in Birmingham.

Christopher, nicknamed “Red,” and Christian
Aders are the 9-year-old twin
grandsons of
Chris Nichols of
Englewood, who
has raised the
boys since birth.

Christian
walks with braces
and that makes
going long
distances difficult,
and Red has
ADHD, giving
him bundles of
energy that must
be spent.

But medical
problems didn’t
keep the boys from enjoying their USSA eight-
day out-of-state trip with Bio-Tec Research
President and USSA President Bridgid
O’Donoghue, who picked up the boys at their
home in March to begin their adventure near
Huntsville, Ala.

“These two darlings touched my heart in a
way I can’t express in words. I felt so lucky that a
grandma would give me the opportunity to take
her grandkids alone hunting and fishing out of
state,” O’Donoghue said.

“I had spoken to them earlier on the phone, so
they expected me. When I pulled into the drive-
way the twins came flying out the front door.

Red was running and
Christian
was wearing
braces, both
hurrying
along to give
me huge
hugs before
we started
d out,” she
said.

In
Alabama, the
boys went
fishing with
Buzzy
Barham and
were filmed
for his television program called “Tennessee
Valley Outdoors.”

Afterwards, they headed off to Texas where
See BOYS, Page 5
Boys

Continued from Page 1

they stayed with Stanley and Deanna Mayfield, owners of Mayfield Ranch in Christoval, where they experienced hunting in the wild.

“Christian harvested an Axis (a type of deer) and we also got a possum and a rattlesnake. It was pretty exciting,” O’Donoghue said.

“Christian took off his braces and never used them again during the trip. He told his brother it felt good to be like the other kids. His grandma said he couldn’t walk without his braces, so it was shocking to us all,” she said.

On the way home the boys visited the Texas Deer Association, where they shared hunting and fishing stories and the video made during their Alabama fishing trip.

The trip wound down only after the boys appeared live on the Rick and Bubba television and radio show in Birmingham, but they took a copy of the video home to watch over and over.

“Both boys and I shed some tears when we parted for we had bonded in a very special way,” O’Donoghue said.

“This was the first time they’d been away from me, but I’m sure it was harder for me to be separated from them for eight days than it was for them,” said their grandmother, Chris Nichols.

“Before the boys left Athens, Legends Outdoors outfitted Christian for the hunt and I’d like to thank them. They provided him boots, coveralls, shirts and a Legends T-shirt,” Nichols said.

“Red likes fishing and playing games, for that keeps his mind and hands occupied, but Christian can sit in a deerstand all day long and was able to bring down a deer,” Nichols said.

“It’s not many people you’ll send your children off with, but this wish-granting program and Ms. O’Donoghue were wonderful. The boys were able to enjoy doing things they would never have experienced and I’m truly thankful they got to go,” she said.

Nichols works at Subway in Athens and her sister helps care for the boys when they’re not attending Englewood Elementary School, where they are in the fourth grade. They do well, make “A’s” and are on the honor roll despite ongoing medical problems that still require frequent hospital visits.

“The boys were born 10 weeks premature. Red has ADHD. He is hyper and sleep walks and takes medication every day. He also has closed spina-bifida,” Nichols said.

“Christian has open spina-bifida and was born hydrocephalic, which required a shunt to be installed surgically, and he has to take 21 medications a day.

“In his life he’s had 19 surgeries, including surgical reconstruction of bowels and kidneys, the first when he was six hours old and again at two weeks old,” Nichols said.

“God has blessed us because one out of 10 children who have had a shunt put in has to have it replaced. Some fail within two days, but Christian has not had to have his replaced,” she added.

The family attends Zion Hill Baptist Church Sunday mornings, nights and Wednesday nights.

“Zion Hill is the most children-oriented church with a unique set of people. Mark Hensley, our pastor, deacon Scott Cass and Scott Allen, a member and bus driver, have all made such an impact on my boys. They ride the church bus. They don’t ride with me, but are always ready when the church bus comes,” Nichols said.

USSA was started by O’Donoghue in 2000 after finding this was a way to give to others who are experiencing some of the hardships she has known that included poverty and illness.

“I had viral encephalitis at the age of 10 months. I lost my speech and had brain surgery and had speech impairment for a long time. But the Lord blessed me and gave me a second chance,” O’Donoghue said.

As owner of Bio-Tec, she was able to grant the wish of a dying man in Texas. The experience touched her and resulted in her establishing USSA, which picks up children’s wishes for outdoor events the more familiar “Make-A-Wish Foundation” doesn’t grant because of difficulties from animal activists.

“Five years ago this started out as an outdoor wish granting charity for disabled and terminally ill or with life-threatening illnesses,” O’Donoghue said.

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