Volunteers make childrens’ wishes come true

Did you know that every year there are almost 1.5 million new cases of cancer in the United States, and there were 797 children injured every day in motor vehicle crashes during 2000? Just one drop of blood ... just one moment in time ... A child becomes hounded by serious illness and haunted by the threat of mortality that can’t be unplugged from the memory. Everything they have ever known is no longer.

For many, hours that might have been spent hiking through the woods, canoeing down a stream or even fishing in a lake were instead replaced by a sentence of hospital beds or physical therapy facilities. Endless hours of pain are spent indoors in a sterile man-made world, when their fondest wish is to spend hours of pleasure in the serene outdoors living normal again. I want to tell you about a free gift for these children and their families... A secret that needs to be told. U.S.A. It is the concern for those kids that inspired me to found the United Special Sportsmen Alliance, a grassroots, all-volunteer organization dedicated to sending those special children on the outdoor adventures of their dreams.

While our organization is little more than five years old, our tireless team of volunteers and generous donors has already placed more than 2,600 deserving children on dream trips. Whether it's fishing a trout stream in Wyoming, hiking through the Shawnee National forest in Illinois or harvesting a whitetail deer in Texas hill country, the children have been matched to the fulfillment of their particular dreams and families have found peaceful quality time together.

Today, the recollections of my own challenging illnesses are the chief reason I'm so thankful when I see my own children enjoying the outdoors in such good health. It is the reason I am so mindful of the countless children — suffering from life-threatening illnesses or other disabilities — who have been deprived of so many blessings.

Unfortunately, there are still thousands of families who share my love of the outdoors, but who have yet to experience it because of their child’s illness. They are families with a child suffering from a life threatening illness or a heart-wrenching disability that, tragically, will rob them of their lives before they reach adulthood.

This coming year, we have set the lofty goal of sending another thousand of these very special children out to enjoy the beauty and majesty of nature, but we’re sorely in need of help.

We want to find the kids, if you know of a seriously ill or disabled child who dreams of an outdoor adventure of a lifetime, contact me directly now, and I will work diligently to fulfill their child's wish.

We want you to be a part of our mission, if you own a fishing, hunting or other outdoor activity lodge, and we need you to donate a trip to one of the children on our national waiting list, please contact us. We will match you up with one of these beautiful children and their families with a guarantee that it will change your life forever.

And if you don’t have the time or resources to donate, a child still needs you, and you can help us make our children's dreams come true, by making a small financial contribution. Annual USSA membership starts at just $25, and you can enroll online at www.childswish.com. Contributions are tax-deductible, and because no one on the USSA staff accepts financial compensation of any kind, 100 percent of your gift goes directly toward helping children most in need.

There is, of course, a special sense of urgency here. You see, for these children, there is little time left to defer their dreams... dreams that can come true with the help of those of us who count their blessings every day.

The United Special Sportsmen Alliance is an all-volunteer, 501(C)(3) charity headquartered at 7864 Shotwell Road, Mountville, WI 54466. For more information, call (800) 518-8019, or log onto www.ChildsWish.com.

Brigid O'Donoghue is the president and founder of the United Special Sportsmen Alliance.