

Literally over night, the peaceful 1200 acre cranberry farm where the USSA headquarters stand goes from placid to pandemonium. Children and their families roll in to set up camp and to shoot, fish, swim, ski and enjoy a myriad of fun activities that fill the serene settings with the sound of fun and laughter. This July marked the 5th annual summer outdoor water sports event for the United Special Sportsman's Alliance. The charity grows steadily each year, granting hunting, fishing and outdoor wishes to children enduring critical and debilitating illnesses. The USSA summer water sports event is sort of a revival where people relax, see old friends, make new friends, reconnect and just have fun.

I was joined by other professional anglers / guides from several states, including Perry Powell from Texas, Denny Helgren from Illinois, Brent Long from North Carolina and Carl Roberts from St Louis. Taking these kids and their families fishing is what fishing is all about for us. The smiles say it all, and there is just no better way to spend time on the water.

Robbie Pruitt from Muzzy bow hunting equipment set up the archery range and did a superb job of keeping up with all of the youngsters who wanted to try their hand at shooting targets with a bow.

Adam Bernarde headed up the rifle range and provided a full hunter safety course for many kids as well. Both the archery and rifle ranges are favorites each year at the retreat.

Swimming and water skiing keep kids and their families busy all day long, as the water provides some cooling moments from the warm, sand beach. And the most favored ride in the park is the excavator rope swing, run by Pete Normington, who heads up the Saddle Mountain cranberry farm. Pete is also the Chairman of the board of directors for the USSA. "I can't imagine not doing this each year. It's a part of our lives and everyone that comes here is like family to us," said Normington.

Along with my usual pickin' and grinnin' for the gang, we had several other music talents for the kids and their families this year. Carl Roberts goes from pro-catfish guide to percussionist when he is not fishing. He played an old plastic barrel better than many percussionists I know play the drums. The band "Witches Brew," made up mainly of the Pflugradt family, played live country/gospel on the beach. Karaoke was provided each night by the family of Austin Schuler, who was one of the kids who took part in a bear hunt this past fall. The kids loved performing for the crowd, and even a few parents joined in the mix. Young recording artist and USSA hunter Austin Degroot, gave his extraordinary performance for the group as well.

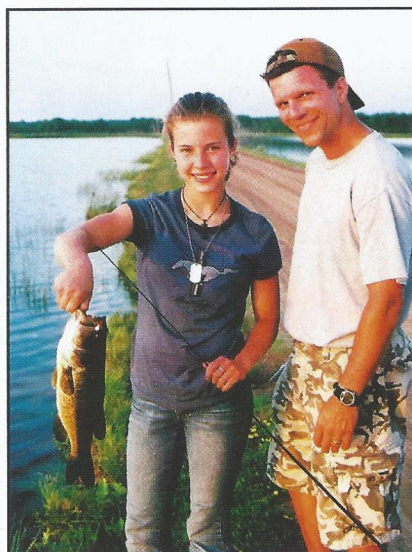
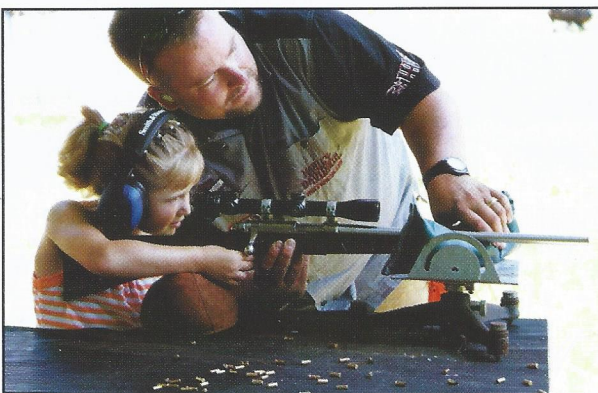
With food provided by Ron and Annette Johnson, John and Karen Krier and crew, and the Pittsville Lions Club, there was no shortage of fine vittles around. Being from the South, I can relate to fine vittles, and we all eat too good every year.

James Lakeman, former president of the Georgia Chapter of Safari Club International, and past COB of USSA came all the way up from the south to help out this year.

There are numerous others who volunteer their time and donate their hearts and souls each year to support and help directly with this event. It is a huge undertaking, but it's worth every effort put forth to make a great weekend retreat for such wonderful families. So many of us become connected in eternal ways.

I would be remiss if I did not pass on a special thanks to the many friends who help me each year with these trips. Without them, being able to spend time with these kids would not be possible. My many friends from the Bass Fishing Home Page have been involved every year in supporting these efforts. And an extra special thanks to TLC charities.

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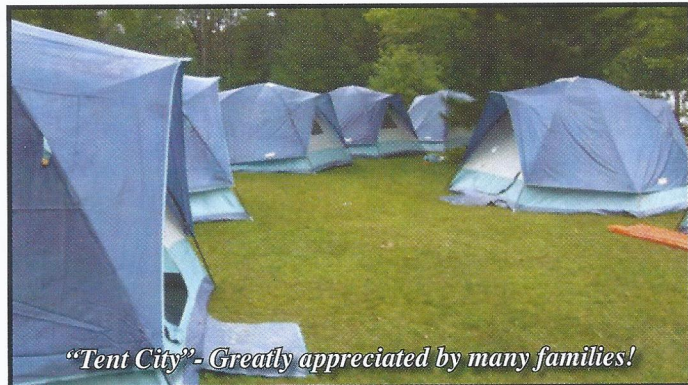
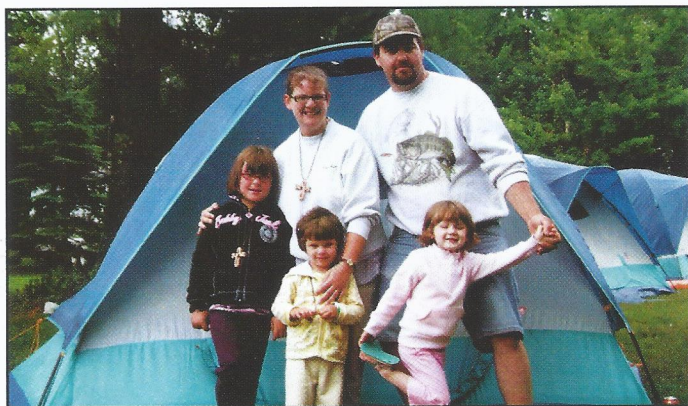


"The Leper Colony" is a group of really crazy anglers from around the country that really helped make my trip possible the past two years.

Brigid O'Donoghue, the founder and CEO of the USSA charity works non-stop and literally does an amazing job of keeping up with the many tasks and the people that it takes

forgotten... will again remind me of how much I truly have to be thankful for.

-Troy Jens
USSA Board Director



to make the USSA operate. We are all grateful for her life-long dedication to this mission.

The greatest thanks I'll give to Jesus Christ, my living Lord and Savior who has made all things possible for me.

When it's over, I get to stay behind and help with the clean up, write some articles and go through thousands of priceless photos. A dime for every smile would make me rich, but you couldn't buy away just one. There is simply no other weekend like this one anywhere. As I stand on the grounds overlooking the again quiet cranberry marsh, I hear the ghosts of children's laughter echoing over the still waters of the ponds. The foot prints left on the empty beach bring back to life the unforgettable memories and the moments of fellowship that will remain forever etched into my heart. And like so many others, I already long for next July, where we can share the past memories of the coming year that will bring us again to this place. Familiar faces, new faces, and faces now gone to a better place but never

Editor's note:

In speaking with Brigid, she has huge words of praise to some amazing Texas ranchers/producers. After speaking at the Exotic Whitetail Association banquet in the spring, she chose an empty seat at a table next to a friendly couple. This couple asked if she was ever in need of other types of donations for "her kids." Always grateful for anything to better the lives of the special needs and terminally ill children the USSA helps fill wishes for every year, she was given a contact number written on the ripped-off corner of a placemat. A few weeks later she called the number, not even sure what she was calling about. The lady proceeded to tell her about 360 tents, stored in a warehouse and owned by the state of Oklahoma, left over from emergency flooding conditions. As a charity, she was told she should qualify, but the state of Wisconsin denied her paperwork for this huge answer to prayer. Although, they expressed compassion for what she was attempting to do for "her kids," they explained that her charity just simply didn't qualify being she wasn't registered as a government agency. So never one to back down in the face of adversity, she asked, "Well, who does qualify?" She found her local fire department qualified. One quick call to the fire department, who said they absolutely would accept those tents for her, and the paperwork with the state finally went through. After 3 months, Brigid was finally able to get the tents delivered. The tents themselves were free, but the delivery was going to cost in the thousands. This is where 3 Texas ranchers stepped in to anonymously "foot the bill" for the delivery costs of these tents! So through the generosity of a few producers, many miracles and a lot of prayer, the USSA summer sports event received their "tent city!"

The USSA is currently only 50 kids away from having fulfilled 5000 wishes! Brigid is thankful to all the deer farmers & ranchers that continue to donate animals and hunts to "her kids." Any hunt donated can be filled, Brigid has assured me. Let's remember to support The United Special Sportsman Alliance- a continuing bright spot in the industry.

- contact Brigid @ USSA

www.childwish.com 800-518-8019 or (715) 884-2256

