

# PORTfolio



## Wishes for fishes

By Alexandria Sands  
Staff writer

When 12-year-old Emmanuel and 10-year-old Santiago Ribera set out to sea with Capt. Scott Blevins last Friday from Southport Marina, they had only one thought on their mind: to catch a shark.

When Blevins heard their wish, being the experienced fisherman he is, he took the brothers and their family out on his skiff down the Cape Fear River to his “secret spot,” and that day, the boys not only reeled in one five-foot shark (the size of Santiago’s whole body), but two, along with more than 20 fish.

The boys had imagined themselves accomplishing this feat for the past month since they found out they were coming to Southport for an United Special Sportsman Alliance (USSA) Child’s Wish trip. The charity provides all expenses paid outdoor adventures for critically ill and disabled youths and their families.

With each fish they reeled in, the boys were taking pictures and saving the moment. Their mother, Eva, was thankful to see her sons making some new memories. For the past year, Emmanuel and Santiago have been grieving the loss of their older brother, Jorge.

“It’s been very hard for them,” Eva said. “They both loved him a lot. They miss him a lot ... this trip is very helpful for them because it’s something different. They have it for their memories.”

Jorge suffered from multiple health issues. He had hydrocephalus, which causes fluid to build up in the brain, and that caused cerebral palsy. He had problems with his breathing and seizures and had to use a feeding tube.



“He wasn’t able to see, he wasn’t able to walk, he wasn’t able to speak,” said his father. Last September, Jorge passed away at age 20.

Blevins didn’t know why the boys were there that day — and he didn’t ask — he just knew what he wanted to accomplish for them as their captain.

“They don’t have to think about anything,” he explained. “There’s no medical issues, there’s no bills and all that crap. They just come out and have an awesome time.”

USSA is like a Make-A-Wish Foundation for kids who love the outdoors: the organization provide all types of fishing trips—from bass to salmon—as well as camping, horseback riding and hunting for deer, bear, turkey and pheasants. The non-profit has granted more than 15,000 wishes since its inception in 2000.

Blevins has been a volunteer for the Child’s Wish event since it started taking place in Southport four years ago. He used to work at the marina, and now he helps coordinate the annual trip. He and the other 33 captains on hand provided their own boats, gas, fishing poles, bait and equipment.

There were just 18 boats the first year and since then, the amount of volunteers has doubled, solely from word-of-mouth among the captains.

The Ribera family heard about the Southport trip through Transitions LifeCare, a non-profit that provides support to those living with illness and helps grieving families and kids. Their parents knew the boys love fishing on ponds at their home in Red Springs. But they, like every child there Friday, had never fished in the deep sea.

Their father was thrilled to see the boys’ reaction to big fishes tugging on their rods, a feeling unlike the pull of little ones in a pond.

Blevins helped them catch some live bait, but both boys were eager to net their own fish and take their catches off the hook. Besides their two sharks, the boys also caught redfish and toadfish, one after another.

“We caught a lot of fish,” Emmanuel said, “more than we expected to. I didn’t think we were gonna get like big fish, and especially not a lot of them.”

“I would be happy at least with a shark.”

Blevins and the other captains with their new fishing mates Friday, made certain that some wishes came true.



Photos by Morgan Harper