

2 great ideas take kids beyond the backyard

THIS PAST MONTH I spent two days at the Quality Deer Management Association annual convention, in Chattanooga, Tenn., on my way for medical tests at the Huntsville (Ala.) Heart Center.

While I toured the displays with Bill Jordan, of Realtree, and Lee and Tiffany Lakosky, of "Getting Close" television, this handsome young man approached me with a smile and handshake.

His name was Dean Castillo, and I noticed the monogram "Sportsmen's Legacy Foundation" on his shirt.

"What is the SLF?" I asked. He explained that he created SLF with a mission to "provide lasting, quality outdoor mentorship to children who have lost a parent or who have a parent that has become physically challenged as a result of public service" — military, fire fighting, law enforcement.

What a great concept.

He added that SLF has a new nationwide program aimed at getting sons and daughters of our military (and firefighters and police), children 8 to 18, into the outdoors to participate in fishing, hunting, horseback riding, archery, shooting sports, boating, camping, hiking, etc.

Who is Dean Castillo to start such an organization?

He is someone pretty special, and not



DR. DAVE SAMUEL

just because he hunts.

Dean is a pilot in the Navy, and has flown more than 400 missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia. He is a lieutenant commander and now serves as Operations Officer for the Red Rippers of the Strike Fighter Squadron ELEVEN. Dean graduated from the Naval Academy in 1995 and played on the football team as well.

He told me he has seen many close friends die or become disabled, and their children then lose the male role-model needed to help get them in the woods. And there are thousands of youngsters waiting for help.

Thus, SLF was born.

In order for Dean's program to work, the mentors are extremely important. Note that this program is not a one-shot deal. Mentors will work with their assigned children as long as is needed.

I love this concept — helping our fighting men and women, firefighters and

police get their children into the woods. I was honored when Dean asked me to be on the Advisory Board. For information on how you can help this great program, go to www.sportsmenslegacyfoundation.org.

When I was a wildlife professor, a pre-law student took several of my wildlife classes. Just like Dean Castillo, Bobby Warner is bright, personable and well spoken. In the past eight months, I've been in touch with Bobby several times, asking him about some legal issues related to my health situation. It was during one of those conversations that Bobby told me about a new charitable youth foundation he created.

Through the years, I've learned that Bobby is someone pretty special, and not just because he hunts. As a parent and hunter, he understands just how important it is to get kids "beyond the backyard." The mission of Beyond the Backyard is to increase the number of children who participate in West Virginia's great outdoors.

What a great concept.

Membership is open to all children, and it's free. Members get a newsletter and access to an interactive Web site that should be up and running in a week. Members will also be invited to attend organized youth hunting and fishing



A BOBBY WARNER CHARITABLE YOUTH FOUNDATION

events, and the chance to participate in writing and art competitions.

Winners will be invited to go on all-expenses-paid hunting, fishing and camping adventures.

"We want to involve all of the children of West Virginia and become a place that kids are able to learn and grow as outdoorsmen and outdoorswomen," Bobby said. "Our Web site will include a photo gallery, games and information on how to get involved in Beyond the Backyard."

Bobby Warner is no stranger to innovative ideas. If you've seen his television commercials, Web site, logo and letterhead for his Warner Law Offices in Charleston, then you know he is passionate about getting kids into the outdoors. Yes, his TV ads for his law firm promote

hunting and youth participation in all outdoor activities.

Get your kids to join Beyond the Backyard. There will be newsletters, seminars and outdoors trips of all kinds. As Bobby points out, the parents are the key to Beyond the Backyard.

"We want the parents to be as involved as the kids," he said.

One last thing: Check out their essay contest, with the winner getting a free hunting trip with shotgun or muzzle-loader to Ohio. The hunt will take place Nov. 22-23 and be filmed for possible use on television. Children need to write an essay about their most memorable West Virginia outdoor experience. The deadline is Oct. 30, and you must be a member of Beyond the Backyard to be eligible.

Readers know I feel strongly about getting our youth into the outdoors for camping, hiking, hunting, whatever. That's why I was happy to accept Bobby's invitation to serve on the Board of Directors.

For more information on how to get a free membership, and also how to participate in the writing contest: www.beyondthebackyard.org, or (866) WV-WOODS, or e-mail Cwalls@beyondthebackyard.org.

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