

## Woodward students 'eagle parents'

What began as a scholarly interest in Georgia's endangered wildlife has become conservation reality for the fifth-graders of Woodward Academy.

The 90 students have been designated the surrogate parents of a golden eagle.

In a ceremony at the elementary school Friday, the students presented a check for \$1,600 to representatives of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Non-game Wildlife Fund.

"This is one of the most profound examples of conservation I can think of," said the DNR's Lonice Barrett, spokesman for the agency's Adopt-An-Eagle program. The restoration project, begun in 1979, is under the auspices of the state's "Give Wildlife a Chance" wide-ranging conservation efforts.

Under the guidelines of the eagle restoration program, citizens can become "eagle parents" by donating \$1,500. The money will be used to underwrite the cost of raising and releasing the endangered majestic birds into the wild at the Crockford-Pigeon

Mountain Wildlife Management Area in the state's northwestern corner and on a marsh island on Georgia's coast.

Thirty-three golden eagles have been released and are nesting in the state.

"Our students decided it was time to stop talking about the need to do something to protect our endangered wildlife," said Woodward Academy science teacher Mike Murphy. "They decided to undertake a project themselves."

The fifth-graders raised \$1,600 through a year-long effort in which they designed and sold T-shirts to students and teachers. The shirts, 500 of which were sold, bore conservation slogans such as "Save the eagle before the opportunity flies away" and "Help whales be free like you and me."

Friday, the proceeds were turned over to Cason J. Callaway III, chairman of the state non-game executive committee, and Rankin Smith Jr., chairman of the Atlanta committee for the Non-game Wildlife Fund.

— J. Edwin Smith



Give Wildlife  
a Chance

# Seeking peace on untroubled waters

## Methodist minister uses Lanier's fishing as tool to help 'troubled youth'

By J. Edwin Smith  
Staff Writer

CUMMING, Ga. — On Sundays, Mike Gunter dons a traditional black robe and preaches from a pulpit.

On Saturdays, his garments of choice are jeans and an ornate fishing jacket as he reaches out to souls from the deck of a high-tech bass boat. A fishing rod in hand as he casts artificial lures and baits on the untroubled waters of Lake Lanier, the ordained Methodist minister works with troubled youth.

His ultimate goal in each setting is similar.

"In my business," said Gunter, pastor of the Bethelview United Methodist Church in Cumming, "you spend a lot of your time listening to crying human needs, trying to give sense and order to nothingness."

"On one hand, I have my congregation. On the other is the children, ages 10-18 — battered children, underprivileged children, children from all walks of life who have been neglected in one way or another."

Gunter and a handful of dedicated fishermen and women spend their Saturday leisure time on Lanier with the youngsters as part of Highland Ministries, a non-profit organization that uses charity fishing tournaments to finance summer camps.

For the most part, Gunter and other adult anglers are there not to preach, but to listen.

"We're in the business of defusing them," said Gunter. "Most of these kids come to us with mentally loaded guns. In a sense, we take that gun out of their hands. We're there to offer a positive experience."

"All their lives these kids have been told they are losers. We're out there on the water fishing with them, listening to them, getting them to open up and trust us. You would be surprised how much it means to them."

The June 11 bass tournament sponsored Highland Ministries, Gunter explained, is more than a cast-for-cash event. For a \$50 entry fee, he said local anglers will not only compete for a variety of awards and prizes



J. EDWIN SMITH/Staff

Mike Gunter's fishing not only gives him hours of enjoyment on Lanier, but also is a tool to defuse troubled children.

but will help support the camps.

In a sense, they become fishers of young men and women.

"We have those who fish the tournament and then volunteer a weekend to spend with a troubled child," said Gunter, 33, who has been involved with youth ministries for 14 years. "And we have those who just want to help us during our camp sessions."

The program consists of four week-long summer camps and numerous weekend outings throughout the year. A maximum of 20 youngsters, referred to Gunter through various children's homes and state agencies, will be offered the opportunity to attend the camps held at Gunter's church.

Gunter's fishing predates his work with youth. A native of Paris, Tenn., the mild-mannered minister spent some of his most enjoyable moments fishing with his father,

J.D., on the Tennessee River.

"I never knew how much I would come to depend on what my dad taught me," he said. "Over the years I came to realize how much peace there is to be found on a river or lake. You know, I'd get out there and what was boiling under my skin would come to the surface. Then I could deal with it."

"It works that way with troubled youth. For the most part, they don't want to fish. But they get out there with you, they start trusting you and seeing that you're sincere. Then, all of a sudden, they're talking. And out of that comes healing."

Gunter cited one youth who recently spent a day on the lake. Son of an alcoholic, the boy was overweight, withdrawn and self-conscious and "always went around with a tough-guy image."

"The father would always talk to me

late at night when he was drunk," said Gunter, "but the kid... well, he was lock-jawed. He built a wall up around himself and wouldn't let anyone in. He had a lot of personal problems."

A few hours on the lake was all it took, said Gunter. The barriers came down and the boy talked incessantly. "All he was looking for was a friend, someone to listen to him."

"I think all of us are alike to a certain degree," he added with a magnanimous smile as he lofted a cast toward two exposed trees rising above the water near the banks of Lake Lanier. "When I fish, I don't want to go alone. I want to share it, so I take a kid with me. When you get down to it, that isn't asking much. It's all a part of growing."

■ For more information about Highland Ministries, Inc., call (404)-887-4790.

Age proves to be no obstacle