

Fishing Outing on Lake Lanier a Big Day for Neglected Children

By J. Edwin Smith
Staff Writer

CUMMING, Ga. — Despite the steady rain and high winds that had turned Lake Lanier into a frothing nightmare for most folks, the laughter from a small group of hardy anglers was unmistakable.



"Another perfect day, that's the only way I can describe this one," said the Rev. Mike Gunter over the shouts of both young and old anglers alike.

Rev. Gunter had more than ample reason to feel as he did. It had been less than seven hours since he and 11 other adults had accompanied 11 children from the Calvary Children's Home onto Lanier for a

"day of sharing."

And in that short period, a Christian mission of sorts had been accomplished.

"In my business," said Rev. Gunter, an ordained Methodist minister who works with troubled youth, "you spend a lot of your time listening to crying human needs, trying to give sense and order to nothingness."

And that's what the pastor of the Bethelview United Methodist Church in Cumming was doing last Saturday on Lanier — despite inclement weather.

Rev. Gunter and nine members of the Bolling-bridge Bass Masters fishing club each accompanied youth from the Smyrna children's home for "a day of fishing, healing and companionship."

The excursion was just a part of Rev. Gunter's ongoing efforts with Highland Ministries, a non-profit organization created this past summer to help children ages 10-18.

Using volunteers, the program consists of four weeklong summer camps and numerous weekend outings throughout the year. A maximum of 20 youngsters, referred to Rev. Gunter through various children's homes and state agencies, are offered the opportunity to attend the camps held at the Bethelview United Methodist Church.

"We're talking about battered children, underprivileged children, children from all walks of life who have been neglected in one way or another," said Rev. Gunter, 33.

The storm, which blanketed Lanier for the better part of an hour, did nothing to dampen the spirits of the children and the adults.

"As always, the kids had a great time," said Rev. Gunter, pointing out that Diawa representative Scott Rodgers provided the children with rods and reels and that lures and live bait were donated by Lanier Bait & Tackle, Pinelake Sporting Goods and Bass Pro of Gwinnett.

"The kids really connected with our adult anglers. It was a real joy. The smiles when the kids caught fish — well, that was the real joy."

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

Positive outdoor experiences can help troubled youth

The young man of 12, with bushy hair and a gold earring, shuffled his almost worn-out tennis shoes as he traversed the length of the dock to the boat. The look on his face as he viewed the situation was one of complete indifference. Life experiences guaranteed him that nothing was done for free. He was sure that this "do-gooder" who was waiting for him with bass patches all over his jacket wanted something for his efforts.

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Even the expensive

bass boat with its complicated electronics didn't ignite noticeable interest from the youth, but the older gentleman who was driving the boat noticed a spark of life appear on the face of the boy as the boat sped away toward a secret fishing hole with a spray of water and burst of power from a 150 horsepower outboard motor.

Though almost imperceptible, the transformation had begun. The combination of nature's beauty, the genuine concern of the older fisherman, and the eternal competition between man and fish finally opened up as a new world to the hardened young man. The final wall fell when he actually landed his first fish, and he returned to the dock a changed person. Instead of a cynical youth, there was a wide-eyed boy with a new friend.

There was happiness on his face and a look of anticipation for his next outdoor adventure in his eyes.

I have seen this scenario many times, and each was heartwarming. The only problem is that for most of these kids, the experience was a one-time thing. Without a followup, they soon return to being cynical. I've often asked, "How can we do more?"

Someone has found a way to do more. After having taken my bass boat out of the water following an all-day fishing trip a couple of years ago, I was approached by a young man who introduced himself as Mike Gunter, a Methodist minister from Cumming. He explained an idea that would aid underprivileged, handicapped or problem children through fishing.

At first I thought, "Here's another of those one-time deals." Nevertheless, I told him to send me something in writing, and if I thought it was a good plan, I'd be glad to help.

Even though I didn't hear from the young minister for some time, he never lost sight of his goal to help children. Highland Ministries Inc. is now a reality and will soon kick off its first fishing event.

Highland Ministries Inc. offers a Christian experience through fishing and fellowship. It is open to children of any faith or nationality. Young people will be accepted through recommendations from churches, hospitals, schools or social agencies.

The program consists of six one-week camps during the summer, and weekend mini-camps throughout the year. The sum-

mer camps begin at noon on Tuesday and end on Thursday morning. The experience will include seminars about fishing, actual fishing and lots of one-on-one time with experienced volunteers.

Proceeds from two "buddy-type" bass tournaments at Lake Lanier — April 30 and June 11 — will help support the ministry. Prizes for these events have been donated by the Boat Center in Gainesville, Lowrance Electronics, the Sports Stop in Cumming, and Buck Knives. Tournament director will be "Skeeter" Williams, owner of the Georgia Fish-Finder magazine.

This is a worthwhile endeavor that still needs volunteers to help with the camps and entries for tournaments. For more information call (404) 887-4790.