



# Catch-A-Dream

BY MARTIN W. BRUNSON

It's been an amazing year for Catch-A-Dream. The program has grown to true national status, with recognition on national television and several nationwide magazines. The success of the program, and the overwhelming support from the outdoors industry and from private and corporate entities, have surpassed all our initial expectations. As we near the completion of our third full year of making outdoor dreams come true, it might serve us well to take a brief look back at Catch-A-Dreams conception and establishment.

Bruce Brady, like many who love the outdoors, was disappointed in the late 1990s that the Make-a-Wish Foundation had been forced to abandon youth who suffered from life-threatening illness, and sought to establish a mechanism whereby all children who suffered from life-threatening illness could still be granted these types of wishes if they desired.

Bruce lost his battle with cancer in February 2000, as initial plans were being laid to establish a program that he had already dubbed Catch-A-Dream. But his family and friends were dedicated to creating Catch-A-Dream as a memorial to Bruce that would eternally provide a message of hope at a time when children with life-threatening illnesses need to know that hope does, indeed, exist. In mid-2000, the Bruce Brady Memorial Catch-A-Dream Program was founded as a unique and unprecedented partnership among the Brady family, the Mississippi State University-Extension Service, the Mississippi Wildlife Federation and the Mississippi 4-H Clubs Foundation. The Catch-A-Dream mission is to provide not only the opportunity to catch an outdoor dream, but also, spiritual encouragement that is often so badly needed by these children and youth.

It is this very message of hope, as promised in Isaiah 40:31, that we seek to instill in these children and their families. We use hunting and fishing as opportune tools to expose these children to the "...wonders of God..." that await them in "The High Country," as they spend time in the outdoors, away from the bleak and sterile world of medical facilities, treatments and hospital gowns, but in the presence of The Creator who is the Author of real hope.

On each trip, these children and their families, are surrounded by outdoors-minded people who understand that these children are often sick and tired of being sick and tired! A volunteer Catch-A-Dream host accompanies each family. Together with outfitters and local volunteers, hosts facilitate the dream experience; love and nurture the children; establish the strong personal relationships that inevitably are forged in the lodge, on the stream or in the woods; often become their best friends; and remain a part of their families long after the dream trip has concluded. As one volunteer has eloquently stated, We can't change the whole world; but we can change someone's whole world for

at least a short period! Many parents have confirmed that the mission is consistently accomplished! Here is a sample of testimonies from the parents of some of our Catch-A-Dream children:

■ "Thanks again for everything that you did for Taylor. It was truly a trip to remember. When a child would rather return to Alaska over Disney World, that's an accomplishment!"

-Mother of a nine-year-old

■ "Last June when he was so sick and in the hospital, he had a depressed feeling and he was asking about dying. Today he is talking about his future. He is even looking into colleges. What a difference!"

-Mother of a 14-year-old

■ "Thank you, for giving Matt such an experience! I don't think he has come down off his high yet! I can't explain the joy that our family has experienced from seeing Matt so happy." -- Mother of a 14-year-old

■ "Andy had a Disney World grant from another organization. But Catch-A-Dream is different, and not just because this is hunting and fishing. At Disney World we had a good time, then went home; over and done. No one met us at the airport, no one hugged Andy and the rest of us and told Andy that they loved him. No one went out of their way like you folks in Catch-A-Dream have done. You have treated us like family, and that is exactly what you have now become to our little boy, and to us. True family." -- Parents of a 12-year-old

■ "There will be certain things in your life that you'll never forget that you'll always remember. This will be one of those things that we will all draw on; everybody that's here (not just me, not just Richard, but all of us) really believe that." -- Father of a 13-year-old

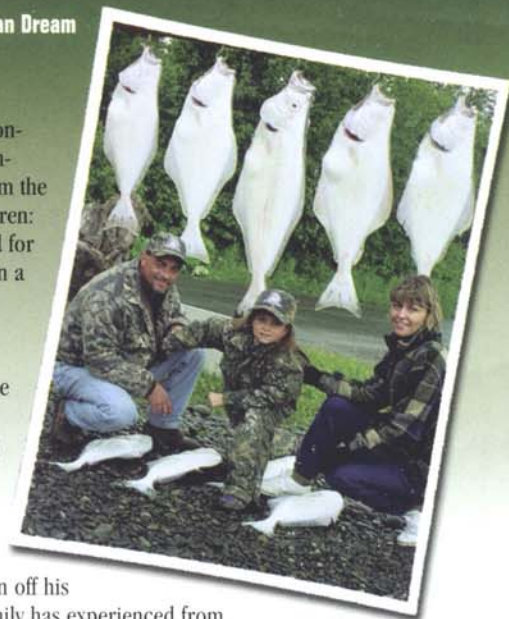
■ "This really helped his self-esteem. This isn't the same boy that's at home—he's perked right up—he's ready to go. He's taking the hunting seriously, but he's also having a great time." -- Father of a 10-year-old

Catch-A-Dream becomes aware of a child's wish through referrals, which are accepted from parents and guardians or medical and social work professionals. Eligibility requirements are simple: the child must be a U.S. resident, age 18 or under, and suffer from a physician-certified life-threatening illness. As a nonprofit program, Catch-A-Dream is dependent upon charitable contributions and fund-raising events. Basic funding comes from the generosity of donors who have caught the vision. A significant portion of the cost of each dream trip is covered by in-kind contributions from the many partner outfitters and outdoor enthusiasts who donate the hunting and fishing opportunities and become an integral part of each child's wish experience.

Catch-A-Dream has touched dozens of families to date. We have granted outdoor adventures for children from 23 different states, ranging in age from four to 18 years. Trips have encompassed destinations from deep in the Gulf of Mexico to the interior of Alaska and have included whitetails, mule deer, elk, caribou, bear, wolf, bison and turkey hunts as well as snapper, mackerel, shark, halibut, salmon, trout, and bluegill fishing.

For additional information, to make a contribution or to refer a child, contact Catch-A-Dream at 662/325-3174, write us at Box 9690, Mississippi State MS 39762, or visit our website at [www.catchadream.org](http://www.catchadream.org). Catch The Vision!

Alaskan Dream



**"There's a high country  
that awaits your coming;  
There's awesome beauty  
to fill you with bliss;  
There's a golden chance in  
the offering.  
Go, or these wonders of  
God you will miss."**

*Excerpted from "The High Country,"  
a poem by Bruce Holmes Brady*