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June2010 AnglingTrade.com

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Features

16 The AT 25 New Product Guide A sneak peek at some new product... the best bets to make an impact in the months ahead. **By the AT Editors**



22 Softgoods Seminar What's the key to selling shirts, hats, and the like with profitable effect? Knowing what kind of a shop you run, what your market is, and how big a role (if any at all) softgoods should play in your retail mix. **By Geoff Mueller**



27 Fly Fishing in Schools... The Key to Cultivating Generation Next?

Archery showed us that taking the outdoors inside schools is a win-win. Now, the National Fly Fishing in Schools Program is hoping to do the same. But who's going to step up and support them? **By David A. Rose**

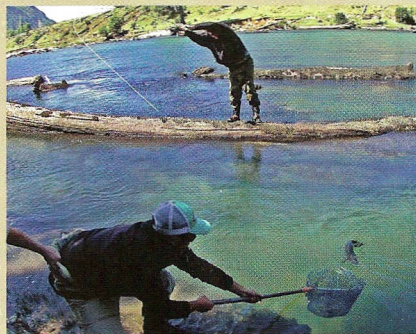
32 Gear Up for Sales Managing your inventory properly is critical to bottom line success. Here are some case examples of things that work in different fly shops around the country. **By Mike Conner**

Departments

6 Editor's Column What Utah told us about the state of the fly fishing industry, and why we need to find a fix quickly. **By Kirk Deeter**

8 Currents The latest people, product and issues News from the North American fly fishing industry.

14 Travel Seminar: So you want to have a travel program? Here are some concise insider tips from one of the best travel providers in the fly business. **By Mike Mercer of The Fly Shop**



30 Recommended Reading The Little Red Book of Fly Fishing is specifically written to make fly fishing more accessible, with smart tips in bright, clear language. It should be a sales magnet. **Reviewed by Monte Burke**

36 Backcast Tom Bie of The Drake takes over the "final word" slot in *Angling Trade*... check out what he has to say.



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Angling Trade is published four times a year by *Angling Trade, LLC*. Author and photographic submissions should be sent electronically to editor@anglingtrade.com. *Angling Trade* is not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts and/or photo submissions. We ask that contributors send formal queries in advance of submissions. For editorial guidelines and calendar, please contact the editor via E-mail.

Printed in the U.S.A.

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Fly Fishing in Schools...

If This Industry Wants to Cultivate a New Generation and Emulate the Success of Archery, Supporting a School-Based Program is the Place to Start.

Written by David A. Rose

The skills learned early in life are the ones that bond to us the longest.

Take, for example, the lessons taught in middle school: math, English, science, and the like. I'm certain, no matter your age now, you could still complete the fundamental problems taught to you as a youngster without much contemplation.

I'm also confident some of your most fond memories are from those same formative years. Perhaps they are of learning how to cast a fly to a lake or

continued on next page...

river while a mentor stood by your side; the tutor not only teaching you the essentials of fishing, but of the environment around you. These lessons, too, never seep free from our memories.

It's with the aforesaid in mind that the "National Fly Fishing in Schools Program" (NFFSP) program was developed. The NFFSP is a non-profit in-school course, with origins in Lincoln, Nebraska. It's an offshoot of the "Fly Fishing Education Foundation" (FFEF), a non-profit 501c3, organized in 2009, which supports the means for grants that schools can acquire the NFFSP curriculum for their middle school and high school students. The FFEF also has a sister program for older scholars, "Learn How to Fly Fish," with a program of study designed for colleges and universities.

The NFFSP is a course geared toward public schools that not only teaches students in grades 6 through 12 how to fly fish, but its curriculum, "Cast a Fly... Catch a Student," meets four National Academic Standards, which include language arts, physical education, science and technology. In other words, besides going through the motions of fishing, instructors educate students on ichthyology and entomology, and about the environment, conservation, and aquatic resources. The course teaches conservation and stewardship while it promotes an awareness of the out-of-doors. The NFFSP is working with a network of groups in cooperation, including state education and fish and wildlife agencies.

The founders of the program are Dena Cole—who's been in the fly fishing industry over six decades, and is the founder and director of the "School of Fly Fishing," which was started in 1998, as well an author

on the subject of fly fishing—and his daughter, program manager of the NFFSP, Katie Cole—whose knowledge of fly fishing is over two decades strong. She's been a staff member of the University of Nebraska "Outdoor Adventures" program and companion program in Arizona.

A Growing Demand

School participation has grown for the NFFSP in a big way in just one year, to the point of demand overtaking supply. From its start with eleven pilot schools in Nebraska, others have accepted the program, their locations spiraling out from Lincoln in concentric circles with several now established South Dakota, Colorado and eastward into Minnesota. And in the past six months, 150 schools have enlisted to participate in the program; this translates to nearly 20,000 students who will be learning how to fly fish in public schools in the next year alone. Schools are asked to participate for at least three years, which will help refine the curriculum to near faultlessness. That's 60,000 individual students going through the program from the last six months of recruitment.

"The timing of the creation of this program is really perfect," says Dena. "The whole country is coming to the realization that our kids are not spending enough time outside... They have a 'get off the couch and play out doors' attitude, if you will. We're very fortunate in this respect."

Effectiveness by Association

The program was actually brought to the forefront by a young girl, in 2008; the daughter of a friend of Katie's who happened to be in the National Archery in the School Program (NASP). At the time, the Coles had been contemplating how to get a fly fishing course accepted in schools. The link to the NASP was just what was needed.

"We figured if the archery program could be successful while using weapons

in public schools, then getting fly fishing gear into them should be a no brainer," adds Dena. A school gymnasium, free from inclement weather, after all, would be the perfect place to learn to fly cast. The father and daughter team realized the NASP's program was, indeed, similar to what they wanted to accomplish with a fly fishing program. "And the more we thought about it, the more we realized a similar path as the NASP was what was needed."

The NASP was started in Kentucky in 2002, and its curriculum has now been taught to nearly five million students throughout the United States. Its curriculum is taught through the Physical Education department (following National Physical Education Standards) to fourth through 12th grade students, who are instructed in International Style Target Archery. "Since they have been so successful, we've designed the fly fishing program after the NASP's. And they have been very supportive, and have graciously helped us along every step of the way," says Katie.

The Basic and Beyond

NFFAP Instructors use the K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple Stupid) theory when instructing casting techniques to these kids by teaching the "11 steps to the basic fly cast" (mimicking the archery course's 11-step program), which consist of learning to cast old-school style, with a book under the elbow (a sponge replacing the book), and basics of casting with pick up, back cast, forward cast, let down. "And we educate students to relinquish the notion that fly fishing is too hard, too expensive, and for mountain streams and trout species only. It's a real eye opener for students and instructors alike," says Dena.

The cost for a school to gear up and start teaching is \$3000. This includes one eight-hour instructor training and certification, the curriculum's outline,


text book, DVD, and casting training aid, as well equipment including 10 Ross rods and reels, numerous targets, yarn flies, leaders, and rod cases.

To help schools faced with budget crunches, the FFEF has established the "Adopt A School" program, through which a \$3000 tax-deductible donation allows the National FlyFishing in Schools Program to be provided to a school in the name of the donor - named by the benefactor, if desired.

And what does the fly fishing industry think of teaching kids to fish in public schools? "Everyone talks about getting kids involved in fishing, but few follow through like this," says Michael Smith, CFO of fishpond Inc, in Dillon, Colorado. "This is the most spiritual thing going on in the fly fishing world." John LeCoq, co-founder of fishpond

agreed, and added: "The Coles are just so passionate about their program - and it's just what sport fishing in general needs."

What lies ahead for the program may someday be collaboration with other groups. "After all, our goal is the same," adds Katie. "We hope to someday partner the NFFSP with other programs that are being offered in school. We've chatted with Trout Unlimited about marrying their 'Trout in the Classroom' project with ours, as well the programming of other organizations. But that's a ways out. For now, there's still a lot of work for my father and I to do on our own."

For more information on the National FlyFishing in Schools Program, you can check out their website at www.flyfishinginschools.org. 

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