

The Education of Conservation

The legacy of America's "original green organization"

PHOTOS BY: CAROLYN HILPERT

THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION OF DUCKS UNLIMITED IS "THAT IT IS A HUNTING CLUB or that its sportsman strictly focused on taking more animals. It happens [that] a vast majority of the members are sportsman. We hunt, we fish, and we enjoy the great outdoors. But DU's mission and vision is not about hunting, it is about conserving wetlands and enabling more waterfowl," Scott Hilpert, chairman of the Barrington Area Chapter of DU said.

Hilpert clarifies that when the committee meets, they are strategizing and planning events to raise funds for wetland conservation. "Of course stories from the field are shared" Hilpert adds.

DU was founded back in 1937. Headquarters resided in Long Grove before moving to Memphis. The Barrington Area Chapter has been in existence for 28 years. Hilpert said the local chapter's goal is to "raise money, while educating the public about conservation".

In their 73 years of existence, DU has conserved close to 13 million acres in North America. In Illinois there has been 50,000 acres preserved. "Over 700 additional species in addition to waterfowl benefit from DU's efforts on wetland conservation" Hilpert stated

The Barrington Area Chapter raises money for the national organization. Headquarters decides where to allocate the money that will provide the largest impact given the mission, and 86 percent of the money raised goes directly to conservation initiatives. As noted, the Barrington Area Chapter is composed of volunteers however, headquarters has paid staff.

"We see a huge disconnect in our youth of today," Hilpert said. "Kids are not outdoors as much as they should be. We want to encourage them to spend time outdoors and to have a heightened level of awareness for the resource." This is why the Barrington Area Chapter has become more than just raising money for DU. "In addition to raising money, we have embraced the youth which are referred to as Greenwings by DU. A Greenwing



Scott Hilpert, (front left) Greg VanHollen (back) and Mike Deering, (front right) walk back from the conservation and nature hike at Max McGraw Wildlife in Dundee, Ill.

member is a child 17 and under. They receive a monthly magazine called "The Puddler" which is created specifically for kids," adds Hilpert

On April 24, 2010, the Barrington Area Chapter held a community event at Max McGraw Wildlife. More than 20 children attended. The event was underwritten by the local chapter. The kids



10-year-old Sarah Elizabeth Hayward shows off her prized catch during the educational seminar at Max McGraw wildlife.

went on a nature hike, fishing and even saw a live great horned owl presentation. "As a committee, we are committed to educating the youth about conservation and recreation in the outdoors," Hilpert said.

Cole Fisher, age 10, has attended the Antioch, Ill. Greenwing Day, the Barrington Area DU Dinners, and the Greenwing Day at Max McGraw. "I have learned about keeping the water clean and that getting outdoors is good for me," said Fisher. His favorite part was the pond skim.

The Barrington Area Chapter is family oriented. "My father introduced me to Ducks Unlimited years ago when I lived in Minnesota and I've been involved ever since," Hilpert said. When I moved down here, I joined a local chapter as a member and eventually was asked to chair the committee in 2005. Hilpert has passed this commitment down to his two children as well.


DU continues to foster the same idea that Hilpert grew up with. It is first and foremost a wildlife conservation advocate group rather than a



Ducks Unlimited brings adults and children together to raise money for wildlife preservation and educate about the importance of wildlife conservation.

hunting group. “I think the public perception of hunting is grossly misunderstood. You would be hard pressed to find a group of individual that are more committed to the resource as DU members. We have the highest level of respect for wildlife and support it with our time and financial contributions. Yes, we pursue and recreate in the resource, but we also give back. To me, that is being a respectable steward,” explained Hilpert.

In summer 2010, DU started three projects. One was at Rollins Savanna forest preserve near Grayslake. Rollins Savanna is one of the largest forest preserves in Lake County with 1,216 uninterrupted acres. DU plans to maximize the land.

“I like to think that we were the original green organization,” said Hilpert proudly. “We are here, we’re in the community. We are always looking for committee volunteers to help plan and participate in events.” He is proud of the 780,000 national members that donate to help conserve wetlands. Any questions about the chapter, committee or events may be directed to Hilpert at 847-382-6604, shilpert@sbcglobal.net or online at the committee’s website, www.dubarringtonil.org. 



Andrew S. Hilpert feels the softness of an owl’s wing feathers during the educational seminar on wildlife at Max Mc Graw Wildlife.