

# Pocket Water

## NEWS BITS AND BYTES



### TU's Veterans Service Partnership is Mentorship in Action

*Editor's note: There are approximately 140 TU chapters that participate annually in VSP programs of various names, types and frequency. The Spring Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited in Pennsylvania operates a year-round VSP program that serves veterans, active duty military and their family members. This VSP was initially funded through a fundraiser "Bid for the Cause" at SCCTU's annual dinner and continues to function well with chapter, business and community donations of equipment, materials and funding. SCCTU's costs are less than \$1,000 a year thanks to these donations. As of today, 210 people participate in or provide support to this VSP program. We asked program director Jim Lanning to share his perspectives so that other chapters throughout the country could follow his highly successful example.*

One of the newest programs that highlights the TU ideal of mentoring anglers is its Veterans Service Partnership. VSP programs involve TU members who reach out to our veterans and active duty, Reserve and

National Guard members and their families to help with the transition to civilian life.

We provide a great place to meet and enjoy the benefits of the outdoors, and as our veterans enjoy the healing

aspects of our sport, they also learn about TU's watershed conservation projects. Everyone wins... the veterans, the volunteer mentors... and trout.

The frequency and reach of a program is dependent on a chapter's human and equipment resources and geographic area. If you are lucky enough to have a year-round program you must build a mentor cadre to meet the needs of your veterans.

The program is designed to be a one-on-one fishing experience, and a group or family experience for other activities. You will surely have a good number of fly-fishing bums on hand, but don't forget that other activities might require different skill sets. Think equipment and supplies, maintenance, set-up, fly tying, etc.



With a strong outreach effort, you will be able to pass the word to vets, and those who are interested will respond to you. Young vets are transitioning back into civilian life. As a mentor you have to build understanding, communication and trust with them, so you can be helpful when asked (or when things go sideways). Young vets are looking for the school connection the job connection, and maybe a little career counseling. They come for the no-cost recreational opportunity, sometimes just to check it out or to learn about a specific fishing hole.

Older vets like to get together, make fun of the younger vets (and their streamside mentors) and listen to the waters flow by. They will eat the hot dogs and sausages, and they will come *early*. The BBQ operators are mentors too, as they keep their eyes and ears

open and provide program support and feedback, while your other mentors are taking care of the fishing.

You can offer a range of fishing and life skill expertise by involving chapter members with a program. Folks who are not yet part of your chapter will want to help also. Printers, media pros and other technical specialists will be more than happy to not only provide the support requested, but also teach one of your VSP team how to do the function. We started out with two Penn State marketing specialists who designed our outreach program and flyers, and then taught our folks to

do the job. Other mentors can be fly shop owners and staff, as well as guides, but don't forget folks like Trader Joe's, Sheetz and Walmart. Every industry and business has folks who will provide mentoring for your vets. You just have to ask.

One of my guys is a long time engineer who loves all aspects of fishing and is a gear expert who can fix anything.



His name is Dan Kerstetter. Our program is the success it is because of him and many like him who are teachers, professors, retired business and industry leaders and more.

We also are lucky to have an 87-year-old Navy vet helping us. Years ago, he helped found the TU Spring Creek Chapter, and aside from his professional career as a teacher, coach and fly-fishing professor, he worked all his adult life in preserving, protecting and restoring waters throughout our nation. To this day he steps up and provides our VSP with one of the best fly-fishing courses of instruction, donates handmade fly logs and does personal appearances for fundraising. He teaches folks casting, nymphing, streamer fishing and “Romancing the Trout.” Here you have a veteran and mentor who helps our programs grow and become more successful. This is the true meaning of mentoring. His name is Joe Humphries.

—Jim Lanning

*Jim Lanning is a retired law enforcement officer from a large California agency who has settled in central Pennsylvania and is the VSP Chair and a Board Member for Spring Creek Chapter Trout Unlimited. He was recently asked to join the TU Veterans Service Partnership Advisory Board. He may be contacted at [jlanningusp@springcreektu.org](mailto:jlanningusp@springcreektu.org); also please visit the Spring Creek TU Facebook site.*



## Opportunity Knocks: An Unlikely Mentor Story

*Editor's note: We felt like sharing this story that was actually an email note we got from Andy Batcho, a TU volunteer leader from Washington, and a Field & Stream “Hero of Conservation.” Just because it's cool.*

I've been giving one-on-one casting/fly-fishing lessons—mainly to youngsters, but also some adults when asked—for years. I decided to write up a little outline for myself to help me remember topics as I went through a class.

Then I realized that I'd “fire-hosed” my students with so much information that they'd never be able to remember it all, so I decided to write it all down and send them a copy after the class. Students appreciated being able to read the information after the class.

The “Yellowstone Gang” was fishing in Fernie, B.C., last year. Mike was fishing the river and noticed a young man (Will was about 15-years-old) with a fly rod on the opposite side of the river watching him cast. Mike is an excellent caster, like you see in the fly movies. Will slid off the rock and began casting, then yelled over to Mike, “Is this how you do it?” Mike grimaced and said, “Let me find a way across the river and I'll give you some casting tips.”

Mike couldn't find a place to safely cross the river, so he told Will to go up to the condo nearby (where I was staying) knock on the door and ask for Andy. Amazingly, he did it. When J.R. answered the door, Will asked, “Is Andy here?” When J.R. said, “Andy you have a guest,” I couldn't imagine what he was talking about. I went to the door and Will said, “Mike said you could teach me how to cast my new fly rod.” I was speechless for a moment but answered, “Sure I can.”

I took one look at Will's rod rig with heavy leader and a huge fly and said, “First, I'll show you how to set up your fly rod.” Using my gear, we replaced the leader, tied on a practice fly without a hook and picked out a few good flies.

Will and his family were from coastal B.C. and were visiting the Fernie area.

Within a half hour of practicing on the lawn, Will was casting pretty well, so I sent him down to the river. First he practiced casting in a “fishless” area of the river to get his technique down; then I had him fish next to a log where I suspected there might be a fish. He made several great drifts when suddenly, a giant bull trout swam right under his dry fly and swirled the water. I thought the kid was going to jump out of his skin! Of course the bull trout didn't take the dry fly, but Will was hooked for life saying, “I had no idea there were fish that big in this river!”

Will and I traded email addresses and I told him of a nearby river where I knew he could catch some huge cutthroats. He said he had a buddy that could go with him and his dad would drive them. I gave him a selection of flies and said, “Write me an email and let me know how you did.”

Several weeks later I got an email from Will. He was three feet off the ground. He'd caught a bunch of big cutthroat and released them. When he got back home, he went down to the local river and caught his first salmon on a fly I gave him saying this fly is a “sure thing.” Will has written back a couple times and I'm sure he'll be a devoted fly fisherman for the rest of his life!

What fun to participate in opening the world of fly fishing to a kid...

—By Andy Batcho