

# Valley Angler

## Looking to the Future

### The Bartlett Elementary School Fly Fishing Program

by Bill Thompson

Getting kids to play outdoors these days is not as easy as it was in my day. My generation was the first to grow up with television and a great many predicted that no good would come of it and perhaps the world as we knew it would come to an end. Despite the dire warnings we survived and somehow we managed to log in a few hours outside in the fresh air each day. I can remember my parents discussing the danger of too much television and they did indeed make an effort to limit my time spent in front of the box.

One of the first big things to come from TV was the Davy Crockett fad. Millions of American kids purchased coonskin hats and spent countless hours building forts and reliving the Alamo. The interesting thing about this was that instead of the TV keeping us inside it inspired us to go out and play in the woods. I guess that today's kids have even more compelling reasons to stay inside the house. Computers and game boxes seem to have a lot more pull with kids than the old TV. So much so that some observers of cultural events think that many kids are "nature deprived".

It does seem that many of today's kids do spend too much time in front of some kind of screen and when they are outdoors they are engaged in some kind of organized activity supervised by adults. Gone are the days when kids organized their own games or simply went fishing with their friends. There are groups that have come forth to combat this. Tin Mountain is one local organization that does a great deal to get kids back into the woods and have both an understanding and a love for nature.

The town of Bartlett is most fortunate to have an elementary school that offers its students far more than just the basics of an elementary school education. This newspaper has in the past covered the school's unique maple sugaring project and I covered their Trout in the Classroom Project in a previous article. Another great program offered at the school is the Fly Fishing School. Headed up by the school's Principal Joe Voci Jr., an avid fly-fisher himself, the seventh and eighth graders have the option of learning the art of fly fishing.

The fly fishing class is held each year in the spring. Over the past few years Joe has managed to gather the necessary equipment to outfit his students. No student needs to spend any money on gear to be involved. Much of the gear was either purchased by donations from parents or donations from local shops and organizations. Joe has assembled a group of volunteers from the community to help out as well. Local fly fishing instructor, Kathy Noonan, acts as the head casting instructor. A former graduate of the Bartlett Fly Fishing School, David Normandie, comes back each year to help out and as always several parents give their time. It has been my pleasure to act as the fly tying instructor.

The students are taught proper casting technique, basic knots, fly selection and fly fishing entomology 101, stream etiquette and a little fly tying. Graduates of the school are well equipped with the knowledge needed to be a successful fly fisher.

During the course the students make several field trips to practice the skills they have learned. Kathy Noonan gives casting instruction at the Great Glen Auto Road trout pond and more practical knowledge

is gained by fishing the nearby Saco River in Bartlett.

I have had the pleasure of knowing several of the schools graduates and I can tell you that some of these kids become hardcore fly anglers of the highest order. I mentioned David Normandie as a volunteer instructor; he is the perfect example of one of Joe's students who has become an avid fly fisher. A couple of school graduates, including David, were able to attend New Hampshire Trout Unlimited Trout Camp.

Whether or not a kid who participates in the school goes on to become an avid fly fisher is not important. The important thing is that a young boy or girl is introduced to a new sport and at the same time allowed to spend a few hours enjoying nature with their friends. Which I guess, in the end, is why many of us fish to begin with. The residents of Bartlett are fortunate to have a Principal like Joe who goes the extra distance for his students. My hat is off to him and his volunteers who make the Bartlett Fly Fishing School possible.

See you on the river.