

Generation Next: Youth Program

NUGENT CONNECTS WITH KIDS

By Ward Parker

In the history of hunting/shooting sports, the Ted Nugent Kamp for Kids (TNKFK) may be the greatest hunting story never told—or at least not reported on by the majority of the hunting press.

If recruitment of new hunters is indeed a committed goal by the hunting community, then TNKFK is one platform to have cracked the code. To put it in perspective, the 2011 TNKFK in Nebraska sold out in just six hours. Parents stayed up until midnight to begin registering their children online. By 6 a.m. the first day, all 100 slots were gone. And the waiting list is almost as large.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Tim Oran of the Papillion, Nebraska Parks & Recreation. "We always start taking calls from parents literally months before registration—which is literally months before the actual event. By far, the Ted Nugent Kamp for Kids is one of the most sought-after programs—by both parents and kids—of any youth event we're involved with."



"I started our Kamp in 1989 with a simple goal—to introduce kids to the great outdoors," said founder Ted Nugent. "I made a promise to Fred Bear before he passed away that I would get kids involved. And here we are 22 years later."

Since 1989, well over 4,000 kids have attended a Nugent Kamp session. In 2010 alone, more than 500 kids attended a TNKFK. Projections for 2011 indicate more than 700 kids will participate. And the mission doesn't stop there. TNKFK President Kevin Markt not only runs the Papillion Kamp, he has provided hands-on archery instruction to more than 14,000 kids in Nebraska schools and at other events.

"Kevin Markt is a volunteer stormtrooper for all things good. He is one of the best of the best," said Nugent.

The Nebraska Kamp is a one-day event providing fundamental outdoor instruction to kids aged 9-14. The core of the instruction focuses on archery, fishing, BB gun shooting, first aid, and traditional forms of conservation such as trapping and game calling. It's safety first, fun second, said volunteer Paul Milone.

Experts in each of the instruction areas provide one-hour instruction blocks to the youth. "We stress the fundamentals in a fun way. We have contests to determine who catches the biggest fish, is the best BB gun shot, and the best archer, and we then award medals. The competition can get pretty intense and fun," said Milone.

"We follow the KISS principle—keep it simple stupid. You have to reach a balance by trying to find just the right amount of necessary instruction and then letting the kids just have fun for the remaining time by flinging arrows, shooting BB guns, etc.," said Markt.

Gary Brunberg is a certified bowhunter-education instructor and has taught archery to Nebraska Kampers for more than 10 years. "There are things each of us can do to reach out to kids. All it takes is a little dedication and commitment to make a big difference in a young person's life."

"I've been hunting and fishing for over 35 years and realize the future is not in my hands but in the hands of the young people, the new hunters, trappers, and

fishermen. If we fail to reach and recruit them, then we have failed as conservationists, and I don't subscribe to failure," said Jeff Micek, TNKFK mentor.

"I'm convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that if Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone were still around, they'd be instructors at our Kamp," said Nugent.

When lunchtime rolls around, there's no drive-thru in sight. The Kamp menu includes wild game meat and fish, in addition to traditional camp fare. "I like cooking wild game and fish to serve the kids and staff," said Mike Trummer, Kamp cook. "This shows the kids how we utilize the game and fish that Nebraska has to offer."

The Nebraska TNKFK event has been held for the past 15 years. Due to its success, others in the area are taking notice. For the past two years at the Nebraska Big Buck Classic event, the proceeds from the auction have all gone to TNKFK. "We looked around for a bit about who we could help from the proceeds of the auction and we quickly realized that there was really only one program that was truly reaching out to youngsters – TNKFK. We've got a long-term commitment to TNKFK because they are making a difference," said Jason Schendt, founder of the Nebraska Big Buck Classic.

Other organizations such as the Nebraska Bowhunters Association, Full Draw Archery in Omaha, Pappio-Missouri River NRD, Orion Archery Club and individuals like Mike and Cindy Tomcak provide donations to the Nebraska TNKFK. "We are blessed that so many organizations and businesses help us out with their donations and time," said Markt.

Carol Ashurst of the Colorado Bowhunters Association has also organized and hosted a Ted Nugent Kamp. "We are losing our youth little by little to video games, television, drugs, alcohol—you name it. Colorado is a state filled with outdoor opportunities and yet we are seeing participation in them steadily decline. Camps such as the TNKFK provide us an avenue to pass on our outdoor passion and instill the hunting and fishing tradition that we all live for," said Ashurst.

The real proof of whether TNKFK is a success or not comes from those who attend: the youngsters. One young TNKFK participant summed it up best, "This was way cool!"

In addition to 2011 TNKFK events in Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota and Colorado, plans are underway to host Kamps in Michigan and Texas in 2012. The ultimate goal is to have TNKFK events in every state, with some states holding multiple events.

Nugent makes it a point to personally



"I'm convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that if Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone were still around, they'd be instructors at our Kamp," said Nugent.

attend as many Kamp sessions as possible. "While my schedule does not permit me to attend all of the events, I take this stuff very personally. Our Kamp for Kids matters. It changes young lives for the better," said Ted.

In addition to providing hands-on instruction, Nugent also performs a campfire rendition of his popular hunt songs and talks to Kamps about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. "It is impossible to have fun by poisoning your sacred temple with dope and booze. I get high by sitting 20 feet up in a tree with my bow and arrows," quipped the lifelong outdoorsman.

Nugent also believes introducing kids to the outdoors provides an excellent way to introduce them to physical fitness. "We have a pandemic of childhood obesity. Getting kids involved in the outdoors ultimately gets them involved in hiking, climbing trees, and other physical pursuits that will make them healthier. TNKFK may be the first step on this critical lifelong journey of a healthy, wealthy, and wise lifestyle," stated Nugent.



The Nebraska Kamp is a one-day event providing fundamental outdoor instruction to kids aged 9-14. The core of the instruction focuses on archery, fishing, BB gun shooting, first aid, and trapping and game calling.

Nugent is perplexed that the hunting press has largely ignored TNKFK. "Here we have a tremendously successful program for more than 22 years that reached out to youngsters who will ultimately buy the very hunting gear advertised in hunting magazines, and the hunting press writes another article on how to bugle an elk. This is status-quo journalism at its most counterproductive."

"I'm not interested in plaques, praise, banquets, or awards. I'm only interested in results," states Nugent. "I get all the rocket fuel motivation I need to keep moving forward when a smiling young kid comes up to me at Kamp and says he or she can't wait to go fishing or hunting." ■