



“I Have a Dream Too”

MEET KYLE CAPIN
“CATCHIN’ WITH CAPIN”

by Kathleen Wilson Shryock



Kyle Capin is a man of his word. So when a casual conversation about his favorite pastime turned into a

promise to take friends fishing, Capin knew he had to make this fish tale come true.

In 2007, Capin was a senior at William Henry Harrison High School in Evansville, IN. He was enrolled in a peer tutoring class that paired the congenial Capin and other peer models with special education students. Capin, who has a learning disability, found that he had a soft spot for the students who were learning to live with

disabilities more challenging than his own. He formed an instant bond with the students and shared with them his lifelong love of fishing and the great outdoors. “I realized that because many of the students were in wheelchairs and had other disabilities, they might never get to go fishing. Some of them told me they had always wanted to,” Capin says. “I promised that I would take them some day. I knew I would have to jump through hoops to make it happen, but once I decide to do something, I don’t give up.”

Capin began calling on the community connections he had built through the school, the local bass club, his father’s construction company, and other area organizations. He found that his enthusiasm for the envisioned “Catchin’ with Capin” was contagious. His fundraising efforts hooked \$2,600, enough to cover transportation costs, fishing equipment, t-shirts, and all the fixings for a lunchtime picnic. In addition, more than 30 volunteers signed on to assist with preparations or to serve as chaperones for the attending special education students.

In the spring of 2007, Capin’s vision became a reality as ten chaperones accompanied 25 students to Evansville’s Garvin Park for an afternoon of fishing, friendship, food, and fun. The inaugural event was so successful that Capin was inspired to turn Catchin’ with Capin into an annual celebration. “Each year, I try to reach out to more and more people,” he says. “It takes a lot of people working together to make it happen but knowing that I make a difference and that I am able to



give these kids a break from their routine makes it all worth it.”

Darla Chapman, teacher at Harrison High School, notes that the excursion has become a cherished tradition that many students look forward to all year. “The students light up the minute he comes into the room,” she says. “I had a student last year who told me that it was the best day of the whole senior year.”

In May 2010, the fourth annual Catchin’ with Capin welcomed more than 106 special education students and their peer tutors. Kirstie Dempsey, a 2010 graduate of Harrison High School, served as a peer tutor and spent the day assisting a young man with autism. She believes that she gained as much from the experience as the student she was helping. “I was hesitant to join the peer group and felt awkward around some of the students,” Dempsey explains. “But the fishing trip helped my heart grow. I learned to overlook the disabilities, and I realized that I want to help people too.”

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Through the years, Capin’s ability to lead the event has gained him the attention of others in his own community and beyond. In 2008, Capin received an outstanding service award for his work. His clear vision and proven track record also led to the receipt of an “I Have a Dream, Too!” Challenge Grant sponsored by Bob Tryanski Presents. Tryanski, a writer, speaker, and storyteller from Lawrence, Kansas, explains that the grant provides young people with financial resources that can help them make their dreams come true. In selecting grant recipients, Tryanski looks for individuals who exhibit social entrepreneurship by establishing projects that are scalable and sustainable. In the world of student leadership, Tryanski believes that Capin is one of a kind. “To me, Kyle is the perfect example of the type of student that is too easily overlooked as a resource in the traditional leadership structure of the school. He wasn’t in student council, key club, or honor society, but he had a passion for something and the desire to use that passion to bring out the best in others,” Tryanski says. “What really captured our attention was Kyle’s ability to engage diverse groups of people within his school and community and to build support for his vision. The Catchin’ with Capin team created a



whole new tradition at Harrison High School, a tradition that lives on three years after Kyle graduated. Kyle left a legacy. That’s real leadership.”

Capin is now a high school graduate and works as a pipe fitter, but his enthusiasm for the event and its beneficiaries is unwavering. Over the years, he has built a rapport with many of the special education students and visits some of them at their group home. He is pleased that he is a welcome visitor. “It warms me up to know that they remember me and that they understand what I am about,” he says.

As Catchin’ with Capin continues to grow, so do the costs associated with the project. Currently, Capin is looking for sustainable sources of funding, possibly through a corporate sponsorship. For now, he doesn’t mind knocking on doors in search of additional support. The advice that he shares is the mantra that has helped him to trigger an ever-expanding, affirmative ripple throughout his community. “Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t,” he says. “Don’t be scared to try. Once you put your mind to it, you can make a difference.”

Tryanski believes that the effects of Capin’s legacy will impact the community for years to come. “Ask the students at Harrison High School what they will remember most ten years after they graduate. Will it be the names of the Homecoming King and Queen or the names of the student they got to know through Catchin’ with Capin? I would be willing to bet that the memories they took away from that afternoon—helping another person to discover the wonders of fishing—those memories will not easily be forgotten.” ■



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