

Need Worms? A Place To Hunt?

by Judy Wells

Brothers Eric and Tom Kraus have long thought that a website that provides information on hunting, fishing and other outdoor sports in Ohio would be a helpful tool for those who enjoy such activities.

And now, after working with a Toledo-based designer who's created about 150 different websites and discussing the project with representatives from various key interests groups ... the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited and his fellow Outdoor Writers of Ohio members, to name a few ... Eric feels that he and Tom are in a position to make their vision a reality.

The startup company has positioned itself to publicly launch The Natural Resource (TNR) this fall, probably in October.

"TNR will offer an innovative, map-driven directory of information for those who like to fish, hunt, camp, boat, bike, golf and generally enjoy the natural resources of the Buckeye State," Eric says.

"It's not intended to replace all those who are currently working hard to promote Ohio's outdoor opportunities.

"Instead, it'll serve as a clearinghouse to collaborate and help direct visitors to the information



Eric stands in shoulder-high grass along the banks of the Maumee River, which he used to fish when he was a kid. Within a month or so, he plans to have his new website, The Natural Resource, up and running.

that can enrich their outdoor experiences."

A Free Service!

Because the site hasn't yet been officially launched, Eric and Tom and the rest of their team stress that, at this time, the beta site is intended only to demonstrate the essence of what the full-fledged site will become.

When completely up and running, the website will include six activity tabs at the top of its main homepage.

"When we launch this fall, we intend to focus on hunting and fishing, but boating and camping will also be near-term priorities," Eric says.

"When a visitor to the site clicks on one of the main tabs ... say fishing, for example ... he'll be taken to a list of subject-specific subcategories: vendors who sell licenses, deal in bait and tackle, provide charter fishing services, or rent and sell canoes and kayaks, just to name a few.

"By clicking on any of the subcategories on the list, the visitor will be taken to an Ohio map that shows the precise location of each of the vendors in that category.

"Then he can choose a specific vendor for the service and location

(Continued on page 9)

Farmland News, Archbold, Ohio, Tuesday, September 19, 2006-9

OUTDOOR WEBSITE

(Continued from page 6)

of interest.
 "All the contact information ... phone numbers, addresses, even links to independent websites ... will eventually be built into the listings.

"And best of all, it's FREE to all outdoorsmen and women!

"We're confident that TNR will be of great value to Ohio's outdoor community when it's up and running."

Save Our Natural Resources

Eric, who lives in Waterville, avidly fished the Maumee River as a boy.

After high school, he attended college in Minnesota and earned a bachelor of science degree in biology with an emphasis in aquatic ecology.

"I've always wanted to be involved in an outdoor-focused profession," he says.

"I used to envision myself working as a field tech or at least in a profession that would let me spend my days outside instead of

stuck behind a desk somewhere."

Ironically, he's now in charge of business development for the new website ... and spends many hours behind his desk.

But at least the subject matter is right.

Tom is his general business partner, and his shared upbringing has helped in the development of a unified mission.

"The mission of TNR is to provide Ohioans and visitors to the state who recreate ... either avidly, casually or somewhere in between ... more awareness of and direct access to the vendors, service providers and resources that cater to their outdoor recreational needs," Eric says.

"Our ultimate goal is an increase in responsible stewardship of our natural resources, now and for future generations.

"Ohio has so much to be proud of from a natural resource perspective, but part of the challenge is educating people about what we have in our backyards."

Back To The Ol' Fishin' Hole

After he finished college, Eric moved back to northwestern Ohio where he met Jenny, his wife-to-be.

Since she's originally fromsylvania, this part of the state just seemed like the logical place for them to settle down.

Their daughter, Mary Carol, was born last January.

In addition to TNR, Eric does some general environmental and ecological consulting and contributes in a volunteer capacity as

stewardship chair for the Black Swamp Conservancy, a land trust in nearby Perrysburg.

"One day," he says, "Jenny called me while I was on a job and told me there was a house for sale in Waterville that she thought I'd have an interest in.

"She'd already given it a few drive-bys and she thought it could be a good fit for us."

"But I told her I didn't think we could afford ANY house in that part of Waterville.

"Her answer was, 'This place is just run-down enough that maybe we can!'

"So after we'd looked at it together and considered all the remodeling it would need, we took the plunge and bought it."

"We've put plenty of sweat and dollars into renovating the house.

"Built in the 1930s, it was our 'Depression Era fixer-upper.'

"But now it's our comfortable, little home.

"We feel fortunate to be here."

With two outbuildings on site, the home property has also served as a home office for the fledgling startup company.

"We have ambitions to be in a more traditional office space soon," Eric says.

"But for now, it offers flexibility and all the technical amenities we need."

"Plus, Jenny and the baby can come out and see me periodically throughout the day.

"It's worked out well for us."

Besides, the back of their property borders the Maumee, so Eric is again able to fish his boyhood river whenever he has a few spare minutes.

Info At Your Fingertips

Under TNR's hunting tab, there will eventually be 15 or more subcategories of information.

"We'll have everything under that heading from license vendors and hunter-safety instructors to the locations of archery ranges, trap and skeet clubs, venison processors and taxidermists," Eric says.

"We'll also have information about public land access, wildlife areas, refuges and the like.

"We want to be able to offer mapping detail not only for the businesses that support outdoor recreation, but for many of the natural resources themselves."

"Our goal is to be accurate and

as thorough as possible.

"We'll be the state's only comprehensive and interactive mapping search tool for outdoor-related businesses and resources.

"Mapping is the critical component that sets TNR apart from the other search tools.

"It'll save the end-user time because it'll be a one-stop shop for accurate, dynamic, up-to-date information.

"The site will also build awareness by identifying surrounding resources and their specific locations.

"Many people ... including myself ... who are avid enthusiasts don't even know the full extent of who's around the corner."

"TNR will serve as a reference library, a phone book and a conduit to other pertinent information, too, and it'll offer new alternatives as to where and how to recreate."

Tell Your Friends!

Eric says any business pertaining to the subject matter can be placed on the appropriate map or maps at no charge.

In order to run a sustainable business though, TNR will charge for the display of any information beyond the company name.

"We plan to offer four subscription membership levels for businesses on the site," he says.

"We want to make the promotional packages affordable and

attainable, so pricing will depend on how much information is included with each business."

"We're looking to hire a few good salespeople right now to market our product all over the state.

"The value to the vendor is that it'll offer an inexpensive alternative to traditional print and on-line advertising. It'll create a website presence for those who don't already have one, and it'll direct focused traffic to those who do have independent websites.

"Ultimately, TNR will serve as an umbrella association for all businesses that cater to outdoor activities in Ohio and it'll simplify marketing and promotional efforts.

"We're really eager to get the site up and running!"

"We hope people will explore the beta (www.thenaturalresource.com), keeping in mind that the fishing tab has been expanded to demonstrate some of the capabilities of the interactive mapping.

"It's a hint of things to come.

"Hopefully, people will visit the site as it evolves, and then tell their friends and family members about it so they can check it out, too."

Judy's Note: If you have any questions or comments about The Natural Resource, visit the beta website at www.thenaturalresource.com. □