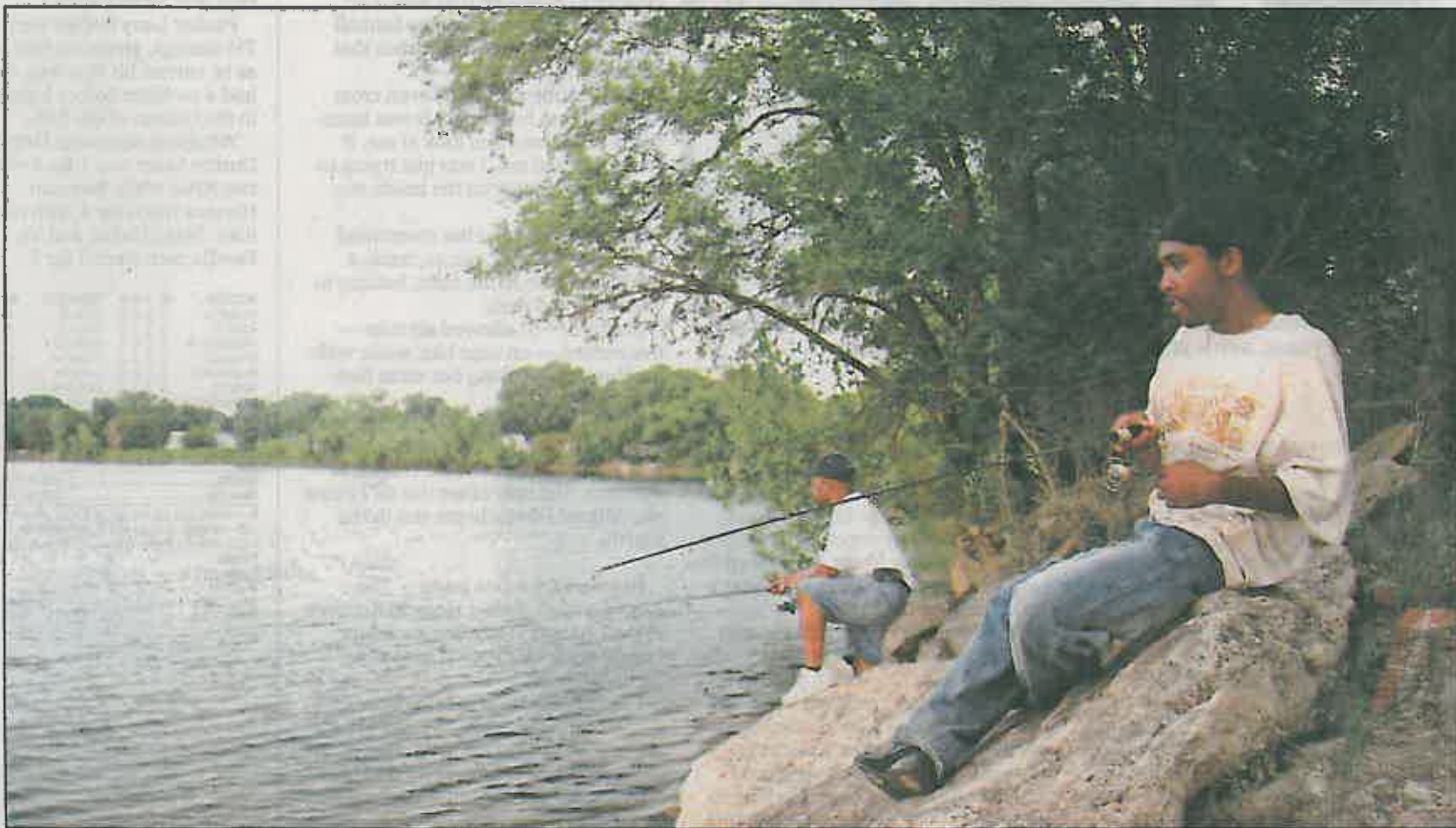


## Mentoring outdoors



Michael Pearce/The Wichita Eagle

Mentors helping with Pass It On programs get access to some special outdoor spots. Thursday evening Jonathan Goering, of Realmen, tried his luck at a private sand pit.

■ Organizations come together to give hunting, fishing opportunities to at-risk teen boys.

BY MICHAEL PEARCE  
The Wichita Eagle

**A**s a pastor and youth mentor, Bill Vann can quote the statistics of young men growing up without a father figure.

He thinks that's a major reason he's seeing "an entire generation" struggling with drugs, teen pregnancies and violence.

Vann believes putting outdoors equipment in the hands of such at-risk young men could help solve the problem.

"There's a lot of discipline involved in things like hunting and fishing — being safe, showing respect to others and nature, getting up early, caring for equipment," said Vann, a board member of Realmen, which has been mentoring teen males at Wichita Northwest High for three years.



MICHAEL PEARCE

OUTDOORS

Mike Christensen, president of the Wichita-based Pass It On Outdoor Mentors, said more mentoring groups are following the same path.

Christensen currently works with most of Kansas' Big Brothers Big Sisters organizations.

Groups from more than a dozen states have contacted him, wanting to know how to get more kids and mentors into the outdoors.

"No doubt the interest is there," he said. "There are about 1,000 kids on the (Sedgwick County) Big Brothers Big Sisters waiting list. About 75 percent are boys and about two-thirds expressed an interest in doing something outdoors on their application."

To attract outdoor-loving mentors, and provide quality outdoor opportunities for youth, Christensen spends much of his time arranging special target shooting, hunting and fishing opportunities for mentoring groups.

They annually fish and deer hunt on Ted Turner's Z Bar Ranch near Medicine Lodge.

There are outfitters who donate guided hunts for everything from released bobwhite quail to wild turkeys.

Several shooting ranges offer their services at throwing clay targets.

Though money is always a concern, Christensen's program is pretty well-funded by individual sportsmen and conservation groups.

Pass It On is also active in recruiting new mentors from within the outdoor community.

Many Pass It On outings are match-making events for unpaired youth and interested adults.

"The main purpose is to get the kids out fishing and hopefully pitch the benefits of mentoring to the (adults) and get them involved," Christensen said. "It's been working pretty well."

Thursday evening, he arranged for Vann to bring some Realmen youth and adults to a private sand pit in south Wichita.

Christensen and Rick Hodge, of Sportsman's Warehouse, a Pass It On sponsor, brought armloads of fishing equipment for use.

Nearly everyone caught fish. Several adults signed up to be Big Brothers for local youths and agreed to help Vann on future Realmen outdoors trips.

He thinks it'll make a great thing better.

"Of the original 14 young men we started working with, 11 just (graduated) at Northwest. Seven of those are going to college. You got to love those percentages, but it could get better," Vann said. "There a lot of great lessons to be learned in the outdoors. It'll make a difference in some young men's lives."

For more information on Realmen, call 316-619-2497 or 316-806-0014. For more information on Pass It On Outdoor Mentors program, call 316-290-8883 or [www.outdoormentors.org](http://www.outdoormentors.org).