

'Sharing the Flame'



Above, the group's gear--ready for a day of burning. At left, Johnny Stowe Ethan Robers, Jacob Barkalow, Michael Scharenbrock, Andrew Selfried, Cori Semler, Paul Priestley, Korey Badeau, George Jensen, Whit Player and Jimmy Bland, and kneeling, Kelley Harkins and McKenna Hammons "Share the Flame."

Wisconsin college students spend their spring break 'burning and learning'

By Lillian Turner
Staff Writer
Lee County Observer, Bishopville, SC

According to an ancient Greek myth, Prometheus was a Titan who famously gifted the fire of the gods to lowly humans. To add insult to injury, he had stolen the fire from Mount Olympus when no one was looking.

Prometheus figured humankind was worse off than the beasts without fire, and he took it upon himself to remedy that.

The ability to make and control fire is one of the things that sets humans apart from other species. Considering that Prometheus believed his gift would allow humans to warm themselves, cook their food, clear the land, eventually make metal tools, pottery and glass and to light the darkness, this gift was no little thing.

Unfortunately, Zeus didn't see things quite the same way and was not pleased. In fact, he was so not pleased that he created a special punishment for the clever trickster. He had Prometheus bound with unbreakable chains to a huge rock and every single day, he sent an eagle to eat his liver. For all eternity. (Or at least until Chiron and Hercules came along, but that is another story.)

Sharing fire is an ancient and powerful ritual. A sort of magic that links us to our distant past. Recently, nine University of Wisconsin at Stephens Point ("Pointers") students

had the chance to invoke that magic with Johnny Stowe, a land manager with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

Ethan Robers explained that this is the second year the Pointers have come down to South Carolina to work with Stowe in the field. "A couple of us met Johnny at an International Association of Wildland Fire Conference in Portland where he was teaching yoga and he said, 'y'all come down and burn with us' so we decided to take him up on that offer and now it's becoming an annual spring break trip for us," Robers said. "Last year was our inaugural year and it was such a big success we decided we wanted to come back."

Hailing from Central Wisconsin, the Pointer fire crew is a student organization that focuses on education, prescribed fire and wildland fires and appropriate ways to manage an ecosystem. For all of those in attendance, fire is their passion. Robers adds, "A lot of kids want to go to the beach on their spring break, but we like to light fires and help out where we can, doing an ecological service."

Robers is majoring in Wildland Fire Science and Ecosystem Restoration and says that he would like to pursue a career where he can do what Stowe does and work with local landowners. The trip has been inspirational for him and seems to have re-affirmed his commitment to his field.

"Last year we lit fire on preserves and this year we burned preserves, too, but we helped out with a private landowner yesterday," he said. "We work with private landowners in Wisconsin, but this was a whole different ball of wax. And it just worked out really well. We got to see a lot of things that we've never seen before, do a lot of things we've never done before. It was an incredible experience for us and we're definitely going to take it back to Wisconsin with us. Things that we learn down here, we always bring back with us and try to make our prescribed burning better. The South has been burning so much longer than us and you guys know so much more about it than us. And we're always, always willing to learn."

This year's group includes three women and six men and is a diverse group from a range of different backgrounds, including majors in general resource management, wildlife ecology, and forest management.

Robers admits his time in the state has left an impression, seeing how fire is used to manage the land. "We got to work with a landowner and got to see a different perspective, that of someone who's been burning his entire life," he said. "The biggest thing that I've taken away from this week is the cultural aspect of things. It's (prescribed burns) just so much more ingrained down here and that's something we want to take back and

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Ethan Robers,
University of Wisconsin at Stephens Point student



Johnny Stowe and Ash talk over plans for the day's burn at Longleaf Heritage Preserve near Mayesville.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

See FLAME, Page B2



Kelley Harkins and McKenna Hammons were the women who participated in the spring break burning.



Lee and Sumter counties landowner Jimmy Bland, far left, stands with students from the University of Wisconsin at Stephens Point and Johnny Stowe, center, with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

FLAME Continued from B1

share in Wisconsin." Then he thinks for a moment and adds, "And getting to bounce around the state and see all the beautiful wildlife areas you guys have here. It's just gorgeous."

Stowe has only praise for his crew of hardworking volunteers who have come down to help out on their own time. "It's cool to work with folks that hustle and are so highly trained in the field," he said. "I've got a degree in forestry and wildlife and there's fire involved in that, but the stuff I've learned about fire is from burning when I was a little boy and then coming to South Carolina and just becoming a fire fanatic."

Stowe says he's always learning something from the Wisconsin crew. "You know, when I'm burning, I'm always hearing trees getting hot and splitting but I didn't know that had a particular name," he said. "Yesterday I learned that's called 'cavitation.' I'm always learning new things when I burn with them. I learn new technology, new techniques, new terms, and I'm reminded of other things that I'd learned a long time ago but had forgotten. And working with them, seeing their excitement and energy, I get invigorated."

The crew had the chance to burn at the Longleaf Pine Heritage Preserve near Mayesville and observe that area's incredibly biologically diverse ecosystem. They also had the chance to

burn with private landowner Jimmy Bland.

It's tough to get anyone to help with a burn, especially when folks are getting geared up to plant corn, so Bland was glad to have the crew from Wisconsin help out.

When they arrived, Bland felt he was a little under-dressed compared to his fellow fire starters. "They had all their fire-fighting clothes and gear on and I told them I didn't know if I was qualified to be out there with them," he jokes.

Bland laughs as he talks about the difference between a farmer's way of burning and a college student's way of burning. "I'd tell them go down the side of the bean field then go right when you get to the break," he said. "They'd taken all

these courses and had to establish points and such. It was a big group, it looked like a parade out there walking through the woods. I've never had so many people at a burn. That's one I won't forget for a while."

In spite of their different approaches, Bland appreciated the help and enjoyed working with the Wisconsin crew, getting the chance to talk to folks with a shared interest and see a different way of doing things.

He stopped by Lee County farmer Whit Player's place in Elliott that night where the crew was camped and sat around a fire with the group while they recounted events of the day and Stowe recited poetry.

Stowe says of Lee County and landowners

like Bland, "It's a pleasure to work in an area where people see smoke and they know what we're doing. That's not the case in some other areas where people get very concerned if they see us doing a prescribed burn. We've been burning down here

since '96 and I love to teach and show folks stuff. I really enjoy working in a farming community because if you're not a farmer, there's a farmer in your family or you work in a farm support industry selling fertilizer or you go to church or the Lion's

Club with farmers. These people understand land management."

But Stowe admits, when all is said and done, "The main thing that I enjoy is the opportunity to Share the Flame."

Prometheus, I think, would have understood.

Proclamation Fair Housing Month

WHEREAS, April 2018, marks the 50th anniversary of the passage of the U.S. Fair Housing Law, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, as amended, which enunciates a national policy of Fair Housing without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, sex, familial status, and handicap, and encourages fair housing opportunities for all citizens; and

WHEREAS, The City of Bishopville is committed to highlight the Fair Housing Law, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, by continuing to address discrimination in our community, to support programs that will educate the public about the right to equal housing opportunities, and to plan partnership efforts with other organizations to help assure every American of their right to fair housing.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Alexander C. Boyd, Mayor of the City of Bishopville, South Carolina, do hereby resolve that April 2018, being Fair Housing Month, begins a year-long commemoration of the U.S. Fair Housing Law in Bishopville and urge all citizens to wholeheartedly recognize this celebration throughout the year.

APPROVED I, this 3 day of April, 2018.

Alexander C. Boyd
Alexander C. Boyd, Mayor

WITNESS:

Hannah M. Parler
Hannah M. Parler, Municipal Clerk



Lee County School District

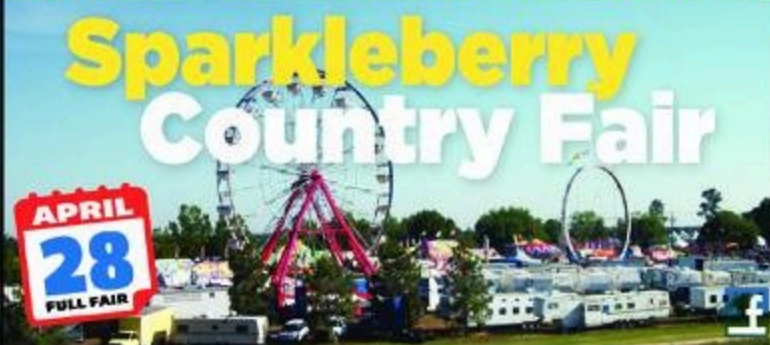
Public Announcement (March 2018)

Title I, Title II, Title III, Title IV, and Title V Grants

The Lee County School District anticipates receiving funds from the grants listed above for the 2018-2019 school year.

If you have suggestions concerning the expenditure of these funds, please contact the Office of Instruction and Federal Programs at 803-484-5327.

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