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Nature Center named in honor of Bourne

LARRY REA

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It was too bad Wade Bourne and Dale Sanders never got to meet.

Sanders would have been a great centerpiece story for Bourne, a prolific outdoors communicator who died of a heart attack in December, 2015. At 85, Sanders continues to do the unthinkable for someone his age.

Bourne penned more than 3,000 articles, appeared on television for many years as the co-host of Ducks Unlimited TV, authored six books and was the founder and host of the award-winning Wired2Fish/Hunt Radio.

If anyone could have written about Sander's exploits it would have been Wade Bourne, whose story-telling abilities were well-documented in a recent Ducks Unlimited film entitled "Wade" ([ducks.org/media/du-films](https://ducks.org/media/du-films)).

So, what we have here is a tale of two men.

One is Wade Bourne, whose memory will live on through the new Wade Bourne Nature Center in his hometown of Clarksville, Tenn. The other is Dale Sanders, affectionately known as "The Greybeard Adventurer," who over a six-day span in early October

became the oldest person to hike the Grand Canyon rim-to-rim-to-rim.

Memphis-based Ducks Unlimited, for which Bourne served as editor at large of DU Magazine for years, was well-represented at the dedication of the nature center named in Bourne's honor in Montgomery County's Rotary Park on Oct. 24. DU National President Doug Schoenrock was on the podium. In the audience was DU Magazine editor Matt Young and former DU employee and former DU State Chairman (2011-12) Larry Richardson. Several hundred people were there, too, all wearing masks and adhering to social distancing.

"As a writer and broadcaster, Wade Bourne informed, entertained, and inspired hunters and anglers across the United States," Young said. "He was also a leading voice for conservation, who used his gifts as a communicator to encourage others to conserve and wisely manage our precious natural resources. I can't think of a more fitting tribute to Wade than this beautiful nature center dedicated in his honor, which will help educate present and future generations about the importance of wildlife conservation."

Richardson, retired DU Director of Field Operations, agreed.

"I was involved in planning (the nature center) from the beginning and our overall objective was to encompass Wade's legacy for outdoor education of our youth," Richardson said. "We succeeded."

Naming the 4,300-square foot nature center after Bourne was an easy choice, according to Sally Burchett, Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Natural Resources and Programming Manager.

“To me personally when we started the project not long after Wade’s passing it really took on a personal meaning,” Burchett said. “I went to high school (Clarksville Academy) with Hampton and Haley (Bourne’s children) and knew Wade as one of the dads. He and Becky (Bourne’s wife) hosted the homecoming bonfire every year on their farm.”

Funds were first allocated for the nature center in July 2018. A month later the Tennessee Department of Environmental and Conservation awarded a \$500,000 grant to support the nature center’s construction.

“It has been a long labor of love,” Burchett said. “I had the privilege of hosting Becky on a tour of the nature center a couple of months ago, showing her the progress of construction. She wanted the building to always follow Wade’s vision and that we were staying true to the name of the building.”

John Gordon, a communications specialist for DU, believes Wade would be proud of the facility, especially since it is located in his home state.

“Wade was really proud of his Tennessee heritage,” Gordon said. “He wrote about it and lived it. He was always happy to share where he grew up with everybody he met.”

Burchett said the nature center ([wadebournenaturecenter.org](http://wadebournenaturecenter.org)) completes the Rotary Park master plan, noting that the nature center “provides great learning opportunities for children and adults and gives everyone a great place to visit and enjoy nature at its finest.”

Now, let’s move on to Sanders, and his latest accomplishment, one that he admits he was a little apprehensive about due to the Grand Canyon’s changes in altitude and unpredictability of the weather and trails.

Still, he was up for the challenge, just like he has been since he became the oldest person at 80 to paddle solo the Mississippi River from “Source to Sea.” He owns several hiking records for his age, including the Appalachian Trail.

“Paddling the Mississippi River, I knew I could do it,” said Sanders, who lives in Bartlett, Tenn. “There was one section of the (Grand Canyon) trail that I wasn’t sure about this time. That last mile was going to be tough. It was really sandy from all the mules they use. The dirt was like walking on dry sand on the beach.”

In the end, the last mile was no problem for Sanders. Neither were the historic hike’s 47 other miles. Five other people were in his group, including representatives of the Guinness Book of Records as they documented the six-day hike that included five nights camping at various locations in the canyon.

Sanders’ hike started at 8:10 a.m. on Oct. 5 and ended at 8:41 a.m. on Oct. 10.

As usual for one of his exploits, Sanders started the hike with a dance. He didn’t plan to do any dancing when he completed the hike, but a crowd of well-wishers who had gathered at the end of the hike asked him to dance for them.

And, he did.

“It makes everybody laugh,” Sanders said. “And that’s OK. The crazy thing was that I didn’t know I still had my backpack on until I saw the video afterwards. That backpack was flying back and forth. I was laughing and so was everybody else.”

Why, you ask, does Sanders do what he does at such a ripe old age?

“I think it goes back to when I used to be bullied a lot in junior high and senior high,” Sanders said. “About the second or third year in high school I got really good at acrobatics and all the bullying went away.”

Wade Bourne would have liked Sanders’ story.