

Walton League comes to town

Group cleans up to help preserve parks, rivers

By Ruth Schuller
Missourian staff writer

After the last bags of trash were stacked in the pickup truck, satisfied Izaak Walton League members did what seems to come naturally to "Ikes" — they went fishing.

"I used to fish as a kid," says member Rich Ahrens. "I started fishing again about a year and a half ago as a form of relaxation."

Ahrens organized Saturday's cleanup at Ashland Wildlife Research Area. It was the first project of the Greater Ozarks Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America.

Motivation to start the chapter was provided by Scott Christianson, who moved to Columbia in August from Green Lake, Wis. He had been a member of the environmental group there.

Christianson tried to find a local chapter, but there were none. Missouri only had one of 400 Izaak Walton League chapters nationwide, and it was located in Joplin.

Christianson contacted Jon Graznak, a fellow computer bulletin-board buff who shared an interest in the environment. Graznak had researched the Izaak Walton League for a class and shared Christianson's interest in starting a chapter.

"I was excited when Scott

called," Graznak said. "With the tremendous opportunities for outdoor recreation in this area, a local chapter seemed to be a natural thing."

With the help of Joe Barnes, whom Christianson was helping with part-time research, the mounds of paperwork needed to start a local chapter began.

Two more members, Scott Gammon and Walter Elliott, rounded out the group of six men, who began organizing the league last February. After much discussion and planning, they held their first official meeting earlier this month.

The local chapter was born just four months after its parent, the Izaak Walton League of America, celebrated its 65th birthday. In 1922, at a gathering in Chicago, 54 sportsmen founded the organization to conserve wildlife resources.

The group of hunters and fishermen named the organization for the 16th-century author whose popular book, "The Complete Angler," has been reprinted through the years.

Izaak Walton's book is said to be the first book written on fishing, and his name has become synonymous with the sport. League members have good-humoredly dubbed him "the patron saint of anglers."

A love of fishing is not required for membership in the Izaak Walton League, said Christianson, the group's newly elected president. He said the group's main interest is helping to clean and preserve the environment.

"We're always looking for projects," he said.

The Izaak Walton League of

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