

Funding a fun day

■ Thanks to the Larry Hatchett group out of Memphis, Tenn., foster children enjoy the experience of fishing.

By **RANDY DICKSON**
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DESTIN — It's a scene that is repeated countless times each year at the Destin Fishing Rodeo.

About 11 a.m. last Saturday, a boat pulled into the docks behind AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar and a handful of smiling youngsters prepared to weigh the morning's catch.

Only these aren't just any kids. They are part of Larry Hatchett Fishing Fund.

Since 1990, the Larry Hatchett group out of Memphis, Tenn., has made it possible for foster children from across the Southeast to experience the joys of fishing.

The day of fishing is a memorial to Larry Hatchett, a native of Memphis, who died of a heart attack at the age of 34 in 1990.

"He (Hatchett) was such an avid fisherman and he traveled around fishing places like Alaska, the (Florida) Keys and always in the Destin Rodeo," Bob Wilder, a member of the organization's board, said.

"Every year he would come down and he was always taking kids fishing — his nieces and nephews — whenever he could.

"So as a tribute to him we take foster home kids fishing."

In 1990, 25 kids participated and the largest turnout has been 106.

This year, 95 kids from Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida went out on the Al Lin, Rock Bottom, Donna Renee, Skip Jack, Sure Thing, Sarge, SS Enterprise and Ecstasy, and stayed at the Sterling Resorts. Bass Pro



Daily News/NICK TOMECEK

Bob Wilder (left) organizer of the Larry Hatchett Fishing Fund, high-fives Candice Barker, 13, after she brought in a king mackerel during the Destin Fish Rodeo at AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar on Saturday.

Shops also helped with the event.

Each year, the Larry Hatchett Fishing Fund puts out the word to foster homes in various locations asking them to send 10 kids, both boys and girls, down for a weekend of fun and fishing.

"They are there (in the foster homes) for various reasons," Wilder said. "Our goal is to give them some relief for a weekend to show them that there are people that care about them and have not forgotten them."

Captain Kirk Reynolds of the SS Enterprise has been taking Hatchett kids out on the Gulf for more than a decade and isn't ashamed to admit he has a soft spot in his heart for kids.

"I've been doing it for quite a while now," he said. "I like

doing stuff for kids.

"It's about watching them catch fish and seeing the smile on their faces when they are having a good time."

Reynolds said the kids on the Enterprise had a lot of action and landed nine nice size king mackerel and had about twice that many that got away.

One young angler that landed a big king was Drew Parrish. Parrish said it took him about five minutes to land his 10-pound king.

"It was a blast," he said. "I had fun."

"But the best part was being with my friends from school and having a great time catching fish."

The fun-filled weekend started with a diner Friday night followed by breakfast at the docks Saturday morning. By 7 a.m.,

half of the children were on their way into the Gulf for a morning of fishing. The rest of the children went out in the afternoon.

The day concluded with an awards banquet where every child was presented with a trophy and fishing rod.

Wilder, who serves on the board with Larry Hatchett's mother, Carmen, and sister, Susan Walsh, envisions the day when this year's 95 kids seems like a small crowd.

"I've laid a better foundation and I want to go forward and some day take 1,000 kids fishing down here," Wilder said. "There are many people that have helped and will help in the future."

"To grow this thing to 1,000 children, there will be a bunch more people (helping) in the future."