Southern Heroes
11 Visionaries Saving the South’s Wild Places

Ted Turner takes a stand on Nonami Plantation, near Albany, Georgia

THE HOTTEST New Band in Dixie
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FIVE YEARS AGO, GARDEN & GUN made its debut. A new magazine with a no-holds-barred title and a mission to capture the Soul of the South. Those who picked up the magazine quickly realized this was something different. Today, G&G continues to thrive, having survived a brutal economic downturn while, unfortunately, many other great magazines were shuttered. Along the way, we introduced the Garden & Gun Club so we could literally bring the pages of the magazine to life for readers. (Speaking of readers, from the start you have been a dedicated and passionate bunch; an editor’s dream, really.) We were also delighted to be recognized by our peers with a number of editorial honors, culminating with a National Magazine Award for General Excellence last May.

While many things have changed in the past five years, G&G remains dedicated to our belief that the goodness of the South springs from the land. Which is why for our anniversary issue we’re profiling a number of heroes who defend this wonderful landscape every day. And it’s precisely why I recently jumped at the chance to join Cyrus Buffum aboard a small center-console boat as he patrolled Charleston Harbor. Buffum single-handedly launched the Charleston Waterkeeper program at the age of twenty-four. The group, which is part of the international Waterkeeper Alliance, makes it its mission to defend public waterways from pollution. A lifelong sailor who came to the Holy City to compete on the College of Charleston’s sailing team, Buffum immediately knew Charleston Harbor was a special place. “I felt a certain way when I was out there,” he says. “It was a place where everything came into perspective—how it was supposed to be.”

Two years out of college, Buffum had a decision to make: pursue a master’s degree in environmental studies or start the Waterkeeper organization. “I put very little thought into how much work it would really be,” he says. While recognized by the Waterkeeper Alliance in September 2008, Buffum’s group initially received no funding, and he spent a number of years bouncing between office spaces, enduring a pile of bills and even many weeks without power and water. Now the group has an office on the harbor, a powerboat and two kayaks to take out on patrols, and plans for its own water testing lab. Looking back, Buffum grins when thinking about his blind faith. “I went against what any intelligent person would have told me to do,” he says. “But it wasn’t risky to me. This organization had to exist.”

Spoken like a true hero.

David DiBenedetto
Editor in Chief

Photograph by Ben Williams