



# it takes will POWERS

by Randy Snow

Giving people with disabilities a boost in life is something Shorty Powers is all about.

If 2004 was anyone's year, certainly it was his.

In May, he was the first person with a disability inducted into the Texas Parks and Wildlife Hall of Fame. He won the Southeastern PVA Bass Tournament in October in Augusta, Ga., where he not only took the title but also a \$20,000 Ranger® bass boat. And his brainchild, the Extravaganza, the biggest recreational fandango in Texas, birthing many successes including the Dave Kiley 3-on-3 basketball competition, for the thirteenth year provided new challenges to people with disabilities.

In addition, Turning POINT (Paraplegics On Independent Nature Trails), an organization he founded and directed ever since, will celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary this year.

Who am I talking about? Who else—Shorty Powers.

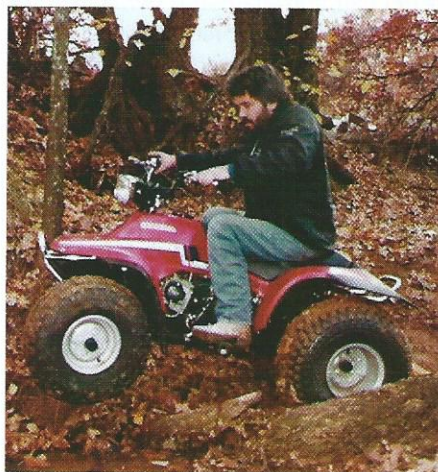
### Motivation: Fish

I resent the people in this world who early in life discover what they love. It seems from the beginning these individuals have known what they have wanted—known their cause all along. And often this is to make buckets of money—but not Powers. His cause was never about money. As he says, "If I had wanted to be a millionaire, I would've been one." No, money never was his primary motivation in life. In my opin-

ion, his first love has always been fishing.

To wit, after completing a river trip down the San Juan River (Utah) in the

In May, Shorty Powers—pictured here and above—was the first person with a disability inducted into the Texas Parks and Wildlife Hall of Fame.





Shown scuba diving (previous page), snake snagging (left) and kayaking (above), Shorty Powers, through his organization Turning POINT, has conducted hundreds of programs, events, and clinics. It continues to provide new challenges to people with disabilities.

early eighties, which included many past pathfinders like West Brownlow, unluckily Powers contracted a testicular infection called *epiditimitus*. From personal experience, this is a very painful, irritating, swelling problem. Skipping the necessary time it takes to recover, rather than risk missing the first-ever fishing tournament for people with disabilities in Texas, Powers had the inflamed private part removed and made the event.

Another time two days before a fishing event in Florida, he and legendary H. McCormick discovered from the local fishing gurus that they didn't have the lure du jour, which just so happened to be manufactured in Nashville, where McCormick resides. Powers phoned Vena, McCormick's better half, and adamantly demanded she locate the company, procure several bags of the bait, drive to the post office, and ship the lures to H. and the boys.

And there was the time Powers was driving to a tournament at Lake Eufala, Okla., when he received a call that his house was on fire. Someone's cigar had accidentally been placed in a trash can, which sent smoke billowing throughout his home. Well, of course he did the right thing: turned around and immediately

drove home to get things back in order. After spending one long night in a hotel, and intelligently turning the ordeal over to his much better half, Nance, a determined Powers left and made it to Oklahoma on time. Whew, that was a close one!

Yes, Shorty Powers loves to fish, but more than this he makes a difference in other people's lives. This is not an opinion.

### Making a Difference

I was a beneficiary of one of those first Turning POINT programs—a three-day trip down the Brazos River below Lake Whitney (near Waco, Tex.) in 1977. I remember the hope I felt after completing that pioneer-

ing excursion. Granted, it was one of those commit-first-and-figure-it-out-as-you-go experiences, but my self-esteem was catapulted after that trip. I can credit this experience as a platform-of-confidence to many other accomplishments. As Powers so eloquently says, "What's a curb cut once you've crawled through the swamp?"

Ironically, while the Extravaganza takes place each year for more than 300 participants, it was in 1979 at Bachman Lake in Dallas where Powers and trailblazer John Galland held a kayaking clinic for 11 attendees. Acknowledging the mysterious tipping point that can come from one event, Dallas City Councilman Sid Stalls



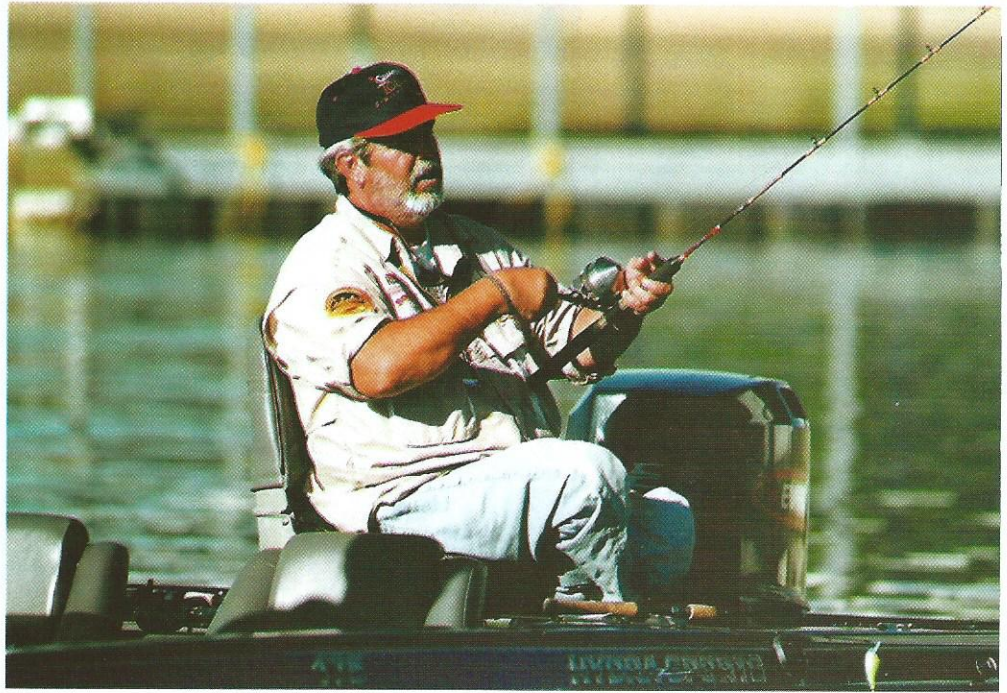
**Shorty Powers loves to fish, but more than that he makes a difference in other people's lives.**

**At the Southeastern PVA Bass Tournament in October 2004, Powers took home the title and a \$20,000 Ranger® Bass boat.**

was so moved by an article in the *Dallas Morning News* that he invited Powers to his office, saying, "Let's do something really big." From here the idea for a recreation center specifically for people with disabilities was born. Bachman Recreation Center was conceived, and later (through the help of many influential people) completed, opening in January 1981.

In 1982, Turning POINT put together another sally that would dare six of the top outdoorsman of the day (Galland, Bobby Leyes, Don Rogers, David Kiley, Joe Moss, and Powers) to climb the highest mountain in Texas: Mt. Guadalupe, which reaches 9,781 feet. While three of the climbers failed to meet the lofty goal, for six grueling days and out of their chairs 95% of the time, Kiley, Moss, and Rogers finally reached the peak. Rogers framed the essence of the accomplishment best when he said, "I have just climbed the highest mountain in Texas, so for the rest of my life I can do whatever I want." He went on to earn his Ph.D. in therapeutic recreation and currently teaches at Indiana State University. The climb's spinoff was an *Airwolf* episode set around the struggles of these men, and a congratulatory phone call from President Ronald Reagan.

Powers's latest inspiration is a program called the Turning POINT Mentor Camp, held in October 2004 at his private heaven, Caddo Lake, near Dallas. Among the cypress trees and dangling Spanish moss, and the mystical home of the once flourishing Caddo Indians, prescreened candidates who were at or near six months post-injury and needing the emotional closeness of one-on-one interaction were matched with leaders in the disability community. The duos participated in kayaking, fishing, campground setup, personal hygiene shortcuts for the outdoors, and mobility skills—which all lay waste to the negative self-talk that lives early after an accident. The pinnacle of the program came under the glow of a campfire as one by one the truth bubbled up from family and friends with meaningful laughter, tears, pain, and healing.



## Giving Back

Asked about the drive that motivated him to create an organization like Turning POINT, Powers responds, "There was a serious need for me to make up for my questionable past. No, seriously, it was the feeling I got from getting back out on the water. I was afraid, but I was more afraid of myself if I didn't do it. The reward was grand. This is what I wanted other people to feel."

Through the mechanism of Turning POINT and his personal contributions, Powers has conducted hundreds of programs, clinics, and events. I could go on and on scribing through stories and framing the people he has influenced, the domino into others, but I think you get the point.

Someone great once said, "If you don't stand for anything, then you don't have any enemies." Granted, Powers has not stood in more than 30 years, but if you have met him once you know he has stood for what he believes.

Powers does not care what others think; he lives the truth. During his entire tennis career, he wore cowboy boots while he played. Boots. John Box told me, "That is the most real guy I have ever met."

With a bigger heart than Shamu, Powers stands for giving to others. It is the size of his heart, not the speed of his wheels that has mattered. He would give you the last cushion from under his bottom, if you asked him. He is the kind of guy that if he wants you to buy in to his

cause, he will bother you like the Texas summer heat until you finally say, "Okay, enough, please leave me alone; I'll be there." I think we could all learn from his style of persistence.

Whether a friend or a determined foe, Powers stands for all of us. And he stands for family.

"That my wife and son, who I love so dearly, were along to share all of this has meant the world to me," he says. "I am so very lucky."

When considering how far he has come since that first Extravaganza in 1979, Powers says, "The feeling that John Galland and I felt that first day out at Bachman was a little bit of fear, but really it was overwhelming excitement. I suppose it was the freedom we valued most. We felt so alive. I wanted others who may have felt the same initial fear to not forget that beyond the downsides of life, if we put our head then our heart into whatever we are doing, there is an incredible freedom that cannot be put into words. It can only be felt. This is what I wanted them to understand." **SNS**

Randy Snow lives in Terrell, Tex. He is an inspirational speaker, author, Olympic Hall of Famer, Paralympic gold medalist, and consultant for Quickie Designs. In what little spare time he has, he fishes, exercises, reads, and baby-sits 11 nieces and nephews.