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Mari Gruber, owner of Bear Mountain Butterfly Sanctuary, Penn Forest Township, explains the Indian legend about butterflies and wishes, prior to a release of live butterflies that benefited the Blue Ridge Chapter of Dream Come True.

Butterfly sanctuary opening benefits Deam Come True

By KAREN CIMMS

Saturday's rain only slightly dampened spirits at the Wings of Hope Celebration at Bear Mountain Butterfly Sanctuary in Penn Forest Township, but did nothing to diminish smiles on the faces of those participating.

The event was hosted by Mari Gruber and the butterfly sanctuary to benefit the Blue Ridge Chapter of Dream Come True, an organization that fulfills the dreams of children who are seriously, chronically, or terminally ill. The fund-raiser coincided with Bear Mountain Butterflies 2004 season grand opening.

"The weather couldn't have been worse," said Gruber, "but everyone who came seemed to have a wonderful time."

The highlight of the event was a live butterfly release. Due to the weather, it was held inside, in the butterfly garden. Everyone who gathered in the garden was given an envelope, containing a live butterfly.

Gruber explained the Indian legend behind releasing a butterfly] If you have a wish you want to come true, you must capture a butterfly and whisper the wish to it, then release it. Since butterflies make no sound, they cannot reveal the wish to anyone but the Great Spirit. In gratitude for giving the butterfly its freedom, the Great Spirit will grant the wish.

At Gruber's countdown, dozens of butterflies were freed from their glassine confines and fluttered about the garden, landing on the wishers as well as the brightly colored flowers they find so attractive.

Particularly enjoying the experience was 11-year-old Voula Sabol of Palmerton. She is the first child to receive a dream from the newly formed Blue Ridge Chapter of Dream Come True.

In April, Voula and her parents, Kay and Adam Johnson, spent a week in Florida, visiting Disney's Magic Kingdom, Epcot, and Animal Kingdom, as well as Sea World and Universal Studios.

Voula suffers from a rare condition called Towne's Syndrome, which caused her to have heart surgery at the tender age of 2. She must see a cardiologist regularly and experiences other health problems due to her illness.

Despite her illness, Voula is a bright and cheery child with a big smile. Her laughter was contagious as she sat patiently in her wheelchair, while a large tiger swallowtail butterfly made his way up her long braids, finally locating a comfortable perch on her ear.

Voula said she had never been so close to a butterfly before, let alone dozens of them, as two Monarchs rested on her colorful barrettes and a Painted Lady perched on her knee, while another collected nectar from a feeding stick she held in her hand.

"They're so colorful," she said, squirming as a Monarch walked up her arm, tickling her. So that Voula and the other children who came to the Wings of Hope Celebration could undergo the true experience of wishing on a butterfly, Gruber gave each one a live butterfly to take home and release as soon as the weather cooperated.

Other activities for the Wings of Hope Celebration included free crafts and face painting for children, live music provided by Ricky Bell, Nazareth, and his band, and Jim Cimms, Penn Forest Township.

The event also included an Eagle program that featured Fred Wallace and Miss Charles, a 4-year-old Golden Eagle from the Carbon County Environmental Education Center in Summit Hill.

Noted author and butterfly expert Rick Mikula was on hand most of the day, answering questions and autographing copies of his books.

In addition, selected works by children in grades four through 12 were featured in the Carbon County Young Artists Show, located in the new classroom in the Kite Wing at Bear Mountain Butterflies. Some of the artists donated their work to be "auctioned" off to benefit Dream Come True. The auction was originally scheduled for Saturday afternoon, but in order to allow more people to see the work and "bid" on it, it will remain in the Kite Wing until 5 p.m. Sunday, June 27, at which time the auction will take place.

The work can be viewed on Fridays from 1-6 p.m.; Saturdays from 11-6 p.m.; and Sundays from 1-5 p.m., when Bear Mountain Butterfly Sanctuary is open.

For more information about the artwork or the butterfly sanctuary, call Bear Mountain Butterflies at (570) 325-4848, or log on to its Web site at: www.bearmountainbutterflies.com.