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OU alumnus provides grant for bat education

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

Bats are often misunderstood. They are often thought of as big-eating, rabies-ridden, scary creatures that fly around at night. OU alumnus Dave Kugler, CAS '95, is helping to educate the public about bats. Through his company, Critter Catchers, he has provided a \$1,000 grant, which will be administered by the Organization for Bat Conservation and will enable the nonprofit organization, based at the Cranbrook Institute of Science, to offer supplemental funding in support of live bat programs.

Kluger knows how the downturn in Michigan's economy is hurting schools. He said one of the most common targets for budget cuts is the service of outside speakers. With the grant, the Organization for Bat Conservation will be able to visit more local schools and keep students informed.

"It is amazing how many people they impact in the classroom, or on television," Kugler said. "They have appeared on 'Martha Stewart,' 'Today Show,' and 'National Geographic.' I believe that they fill an important role in the classroom and that their work can help to inspire young kids to become scientists," Kugler said.

Kugler has a bachelor's degree in biology from OU and a master's in hazardous and waste management from Wayne State University. After working in the automotive industry for 12 years, Kugler decided to pursue his passion and formed Critter Catchers. The company provides animal control services including trapping, removing critters cleanup and installation of chimney caps for bats, raccoons, skunks, squirrels, chipmunks, opossums, woodchucks, rats, mice and moles.

"The bachelor's in biology that I obtained from OU provides the technical background that is required to operate a wildlife control company such as Critter Catchers. One area of particular interest is the incidence of rabies in bats. There is much media attention on the number of bats that test positive each year. Rather than focusing on the hype, we consulted a 30-year study that was conducted at Indiana State University. With the technical background that I obtained from OU, we were able to better explain the findings to the public. We communicated much of the information to the public through our Web site. Rather than just accepting hearsay as fact, we consult scientific fact," Kugler said.

Through Critter Catchers, Kugler was able to establish the grant and help to educate the public.

"Children have a keen interest in hands-on science, and the Organization for Bat Conservation's live programs provide an opportunity to foster an interest in bat conservation at an early age," Kugler said. "While it's well-known that bats can cause problems when they're flying inside our homes, what's less understood is the important role that they play in local neighborhoods. Michigan's brown bats are tremendous insect eaters, consuming half their bodyweight in insects each night. Imagine the impact of a single bat house that contains a colony of 300 hungry insectivores. Bat colonies provide a natural way to reduce our reliance on pesticides."

To qualify for the grant, recipients must submit a letter of need and publicize receipt of the grant established by Critter Catchers, Inc.

For more information on the grant, visit the **Critter Catchers** Web site.

SUMMARY

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