

On Golden Pond



One hails from Illinois and the other is from Georgia. But their common interests and goals lead them to southeastern North Carolina where they've been partners since 1998 in a successful pond stocking and management business.

Kevin Patterson and Rick Stuckman's paths crossed while pursuing degrees in marine biology at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and later, aquaculture at Brunswick Community College. Immediately after completing their educations, they pursued their mutual desire to get into the private fish business and started Southeast Pond Stocking, LLC.

Today, they sell quality fingerlings (small fish) throughout the Carolinas and Virginia and provide maintenance and complete pond services such as surveys, licensed aquatic herbicide applications, grass carp for weed control, liming and fertilization, and pond maintenance. They manage everything from water sites in public parks and gardens to private residential farm ponds to 100-acre



Top: Southeast Pond Stocking, LLC is owned and operated by Kevin Patterson and Rick Stuckman and their families. Pictured here (from left) are Rick and his wife, Amy; Kevin and his wife, Shannon, and son, Kale. Other family members, Brandon and Alisia, are not pictured.

Right: Their business sign on Hwy 421 north of Wilmington, N.C.

lakes in housing development communities. They also sell and install aerators and fountains, such as the one they installed at Hugh MacRae Park in Wilmington.

While Kevin and Rick's venture began in Brunswick County, where they leased property for their first farm, Southeast Pond Stocking is now established on a 50-acre fish farm in Pender County on Hwy. 421 just south of Malpass Corner. On the site, they raise a wide variety of fish including bluegill, shellcraker, largemouth bass, channel catfish, black crappie, triploid grass carp, fathead minnows and koi. Other varieties, such as tilapia and hybrid bluegill as well as larger fish, are available upon special request.

As they grew their regional business, they contacted Jim Fouche in the Burgaw branch office of Cape Fear Farm Credit. They first came to Jim in 2002 for the financing of a business truck. Later they turned to Farm Credit as they expanded their fish farm.

"They had a sound business plan when I first met them," Jim said of the pair. "They were adapting a site that was formerly a catfish farm and they have always known what they wanted to accomplish."

While their fish farm is located in Pender County, their reach is much broader as a result of a special marketing effort they call "fish

days." These fish days may be held at plant nurseries or farm supply operations. Rick explained, "Each spring and fall, we sponsor fish days throughout North Carolina and parts of Virginia."

"In total, we'll have about 200 fish days this year at 50 to 60 locations," he continued.

"We begin with advertising on the local level and we'll take orders in advance. From there, we go on site to the various local businesses and deliver the orders, but we will also sell and bag fish for any customers who drop by the site without advance orders. This provides the private pond owner a convenient opportunity



Feed training of bass is another part of fish husbandry as Kevin points out during a farm tour.

Kevin shows catfish eggs in the hatching stage. The paddle at the top of the picture mimics the male catfish that hatches the eggs after being laid by the female.



to buy fish and stock them in their own ponds.” They also answer pond-stocking questions and supply pond water quality checks.

This type of first-class, quality customer service has been a key to their success, according to Kevin and Rick. “Having what the customer wants and being in close proximity to the customer who needs you is important,” Rick commented. “We learned that early on in our business,” he said.

They also learned that marketing themselves as water quality professionals who offer complete pond packages that include not just pond stocking, but also seasonal maintenance contracts was important to their business. Rick elaborated, “This is a seasonal business, but we have done a lot to create off-season opportunities with our maintenance contracts. Of course, we still have a slower time between Thanksgiving and January. Folks may buy fish for Father’s Day, but they don’t for Christmas.”

In addition to their high level of customer service and targeted marketing, Southeast Pond Stocking is also unique in another way—they raise the vast majority of their own fish and do very little brokering.

For more information on the products and services that Southeast Pond Stocking offers or the next fish day in your area, contact Kevin or Rick at 910-253-7880 or 910-283-1428 or check their web site at www.seponds.com. ■



Fathead minnows are another species offered by Southeast Pond Stocking.