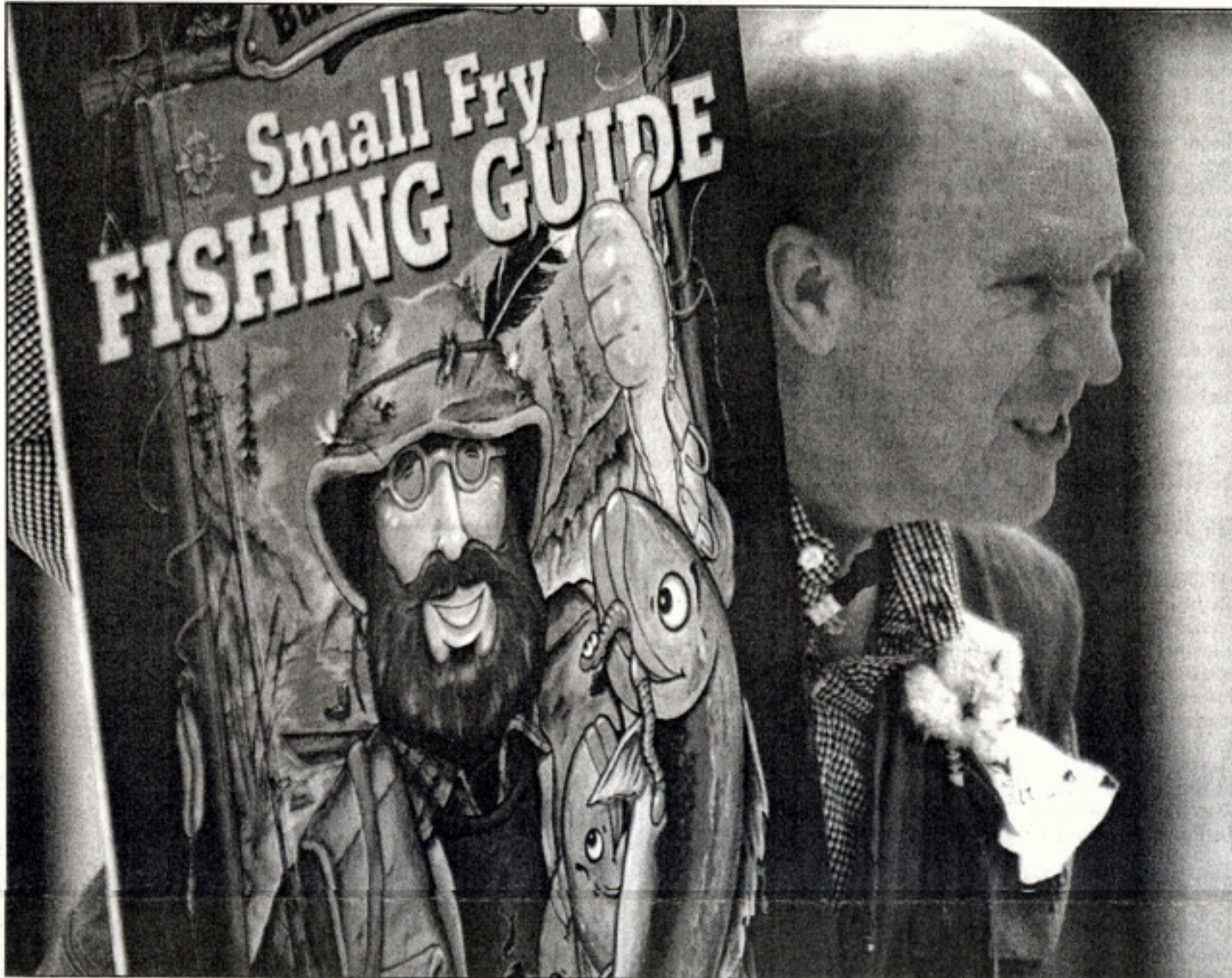


Thursday, March 18, 2004

## It's National Reading Month



Photos by ALAN WARD/DAILY PRESS &amp; ARGUS

Author Tim Smith entertains students at Hartland's Round Elementary School. Smith, who writes the Buck Wilder series of children's books, related humorous stories from his life and books.

## 'Buck Wilder' author visits Hartland

Hartland, Pinckney schools schedule special events to focus on literature

By Christopher Nagy  
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

"We talked about it. We read about it ... He's here."

So went Barb Benford's introduction of the famed and fabled "Buck Wilder" this week at Round Elementary School in Hartland Township.

It was Hartland schools' way of celebrating March as National Reading Month. Other Livingston districts are celebrating as well.

In Pinckney, Wednesday was Authors Day at Farley Hill Elementary School, which invited in a host of professional writers and illustrators.

Round students heard from Wilder, who is the altergo of Traverse City resident Tim Smith, the creator of the "Buck Wilder" children's book series, who Benford, media specialist at the school, helped bring to the district to celebrate March

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First-grader Julie Sherman turns in amazement to her classmate Megan Wencil as author Tim Smith makes an impromptu water bucket by folding a piece of paper.

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as National Reading Month.

"I serve on the March is Reading Month Committee, and we were looking to bring an author to the district's elementary schools as well as the fifth- and sixth-grade building," Benford said. "This is something we've been planning since last spring. I think the kids really love it."

Smith arrived in Hartland Consolidated Schools Monday with plans to visit all of the district's primary facilities by today.

So far, he has authored three books in the Buck Wilder series, starting with "Buck Wilder's Small Fry Fishing Guide," and rounding off the series with

"Buck Wilder's Small Twig Hiking & Camping Guide" and "Buck Wilder's Little Skipper Boating Guide."

"I'm an outdoor guy," Smith said.

"But I don't have an outdoor look," he added.

Fortunately, the gruff and bearded "Buck Wilder" does have the look of an experienced outdoorsman, so, with the help of Smith and some of his employees at his stained glass shop in Traverse City, Buck Wilder graciously stepped in Smith's books as the central character.

"The best decision I ever made was not to put my name and face in my books," Smith said.

With his books, Smith's presentations are geared toward inspiring students to read, write, use their imagination and believe in themselves.

He explains the value of hard work and persistence, but shows that work can be fun and that growing up doesn't mean shutting down your creativity.

He also talks about how it's OK to make mistakes, and that they can be learning experiences.

"It's OK to goof up sometimes," he said.

Throughout the day Tuesday, Smith spoke to several assemblies of students at Round Elementary about how he became an author, how he uses

his imagination to create his books and how he comes up with characters in his books.

"I never wanted to be an author," Smith said. "I wanted to do just one thing: Go fishing. You're not looking at a guy who likes to fish. You're looking at a guy who loves to fish."

In 1995, Smith began his work on Buck Wilder's fishing guide.

The book sold more than 100,000 copies, prompting Smith to spend a year reviving the Wilder character for the follow-up "Buck Wilder's Small Twig Hunting & Camping Guide."

His second book, Smith said, contains his favorite drawing.

Inspired by his own children's inquiries and explorations in their own back yards, Smith

drew Buck Wilder crawling through the woods, tracking animals.

The picture includes a chart of both animal tracks as well as droppings.

"I made a poop chart," Smith said. "This is the only book in your library where you'll find a poop chart. I'm very proud of that."

His third book, "Buck Wilder's Little Skipper Boating Guide," came out in 2001. The series has kept Smith busy ever since, speaking to fans at schools around the state.

Buck Wilder is about to get a little bit wilder. He's making the leap from the page to the living room on a nationwide daily 30-minute television show on PBS.