



## **‘GOOD NEWS ON EARTH DAY BEAMED THROUGHOUT NATION FROM ARKANSAS MIDDLE SCHOOL’**

*Logging, farming, ranching cultures celebrate progress on Earth Day at Middle School*

**Mabelvale, AR** - On Monday, April 23, rural ambassadors of the award winning Provider Pals™ program will visit students at Mabelvale Middle School for a cultural exchange and Earth Day celebration in what the Wall Street Journal has called ‘one of the most exciting education initiatives in years.’ The message will not stop at Mabelvale; however, since the program will be partially web-cast live to students in other Provider Pals schools in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, St. Louis, and Plantation, Florida, and Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Libby, Montana, based Provider Pals™ is receiving national attention since being awarded the Preserve America Presidential Award for its innovation and creativity in protecting and preserving America’s cultural and natural heritage.

The mission of the program is to build a bridge of understanding between our nation’s youth and the rural resource cultures that provide the products they find on their store shelves. Piloted in Montana, Ford Motor Company made a generous donation that has enabled the program to expand into cities throughout America and British Columbia, Canada. Over 8,000 students are in the program this year. The Mabelvale volunteer participants’ travel costs and are paid for with donations from Ford Motor, the Arkansas Forestry Foundation, Potlatch and Caterpillar.

The Providers – two loggers and a miner from Arkansas, ranchers from Wyoming, two farm women from Montana and fisherman from California and North Carolina will arrive dressed in their cultural attire and bring with them tools and equipment such as a logging and a mining truck, chain saws, safety equipment, live urchins, shark jaws and lassoes. The students will be able to ask questions about the providers lifestyle and work, try on each culture’s ‘work clothes,’ pose for pictures, rope a plastic steers head and earned a certificate pronouncing them ‘Pals.’

“The rural resource providers, representing the natural resource providing cultures were ‘adopted’ last fall by classrooms at Mabelvale,” said Echo Venn, Provider Pals communications director. “Monday will be the first face to face meeting of the Providers and the students that have adopted them,” Venn said.

Jason Williams, a rancher from Kaycee, Wyoming, who has been adopted by Mabelvale and other schools throughout the nation said, “The exchange that takes place at these school is truly remarkable. It’s really rewarding to talk with the kids about life on a ranch in Wyoming, and then teach them to throw a rope,” he said. “Amazingly, lots of the kids will ask me for my autograph when we’re done. I don’t get asked for autographs much around Wyoming,” he said.

“The kids are really interested in our lifestyle and our work,” said Greg Wahl, a logger from Arkansas. Venn concurred and said, “A lot of Americans no longer have a direct connection to the land. This was among the first five schools in the country to be engaged in the program and they are excited to be able to give the students a glimpse of the people and the processes that provide the products they purchase every day at the store.”

“We’re excited to be able to web-cast part of this program,” Jill Lorang of Montana said. “Often times the only news we here on Earth Day concerns the problems and challenges we face. It will be good to talk about the solutions we have found and the challenges we have overcome since Earth Day in 1970,” she said. We certainly have problems that must be addressed, but we should never lose sight of how far we have come.”

Provider Pals programming also includes classroom exchanges of rural students traveling to the city and urban students visiting rural northwestern Montana for a week of fun and learning. This year, for the fifth year, students from Mabelvale will participate in Provider Pals Presidential Award winning summer camp in Libby. Mabelvale teacher Heidi Campbell said, “The year ending summer camp is worthy of the Presidential Award it recently won. Being involved in this hands-on educational program that celebrates our nation’s cultural diversity is one of the best teaching experiences of my life.”

Also on Monday, Provider Pals virtual village interactive education website will launch at [www.providerpals.com](http://www.providerpals.com). This site, sponsored by Caterpillar Foundation, will allow students to participate in games that will make learning about rural cultures and natural resource management both fun and educational.

On Monday, Provider Pals will be at Mabelvale Middle School to build a bridge of cultural understanding and celebrate our environmental progress since Earth Day 1970.

**For more information on Provider Pals call 406-293-8822 or visit them online at [www.providerpals.com](http://www.providerpals.com).**