

# Foundation turns dreams into reality

Lincoln native and former professional football player Tony Semple recalls an encounter he had with a kid named Tyler. It happened at the movies a few years ago when Semple was a starting lineman for the Detroit Lions. Tyler was 8.

"He was a young boy who had the rare disease that made him age 8 years to our one," said Semple, 37, son of Jan and Gene Semple of Lincoln. "He looked like a 90-year-old man, but he was a boy when you sat and talked with him. ... I was able to get him to a Detroit Lions' game while I was playing ... It was my first time ever doing something of that nature but truly a rewarding experience. ..."

"After the game, he passed away a couple weeks later. That event



Scott Richardson

changed my life forever."

Semple, whose sports career spanned 1995-2001, now leads the Tony Semple Foundation based in Lansing, Mich. His mission is to take young people with life-threatening illnesses or special challenges on outdoor adventures. They hunt. They fish. They

meet sports figures. Most of all, they and their families have a chance to share time away from hospitals and doctors. They don't worry about the future. Their only concern is to have fun.

"It's a great escape," Semple said.

The foundation came from a marriage of Semple's desire to help others like Tyler and his passion for the outdoors. Semple saw the need to do something after other charities designed to fill the wishes of youngsters with terminal illnesses stopped offer-



Tony Semple

ing hunting outings as an option.

He cleared the path with the NFL, corporate sponsors and individual donors to raise money to cover the \$5,000 the average adventure costs.

"Sponsorships and people drive this program," he said.

To take part, young people from age 10 to 25 can apply to attend one of the foundation's camps held at lodges in five states. Participants have life-threatening illnesses or severe life challenges, like a boy who is wheelchair-bound after he was struck by lightning. Others have conditions ranging from heart trouble to spinal bifida. One suffered a permanent disability from a head injury when he was struck by a drunk driver.

# OUTDOORS

FROM E1

"We pride ourselves on overcoming any obstacle these special individuals have," Semple said. "We have special adaptive equipment ..."

The foundation pays all costs, including travel and lodging, and any intensive medical care the young people might need, including nurses.

Adventures range from white-tail hunts to elk hunts to an alligator hunt in Florida. But the trip gives the kids and their families far more than just the hunting experience.

"It gives kids hope, something to look forward to," Semple said.

"They experience contentment with no regard to the future. With what they're going through, it gives them another outlook of life. Up to now, they have negativity. This broadens their view of life. It's a ray of hope.

"Sitting around the camp fire, they feel special because these guys (former and current NFL players who attend) took the time to come," Semple continued. "It gives them a new zest for life. It's about loving these kids and letting them know someone is out there who loves them. Love is not a bad word. I don't have to be a family member to tell someone I love them."

Semple believes he gets far more than he gives from his effort. He watches kids who are facing death give each other a hand.

"All they are concerned about is helping others. In a greedy world, they're a lesson for all of us. All they want to do is help others. To me, it's powerful. I

love the fellowship we have.

"It's more rewarding for me doing this for these kids than playing in the NFL. I have a passion for others. I thank God for doing that. I'm at every camp, and what we get to experience with these kids is priceless. We are the lucky ones who get to interact with these special kids. They make me stronger.

"... It is very rewarding to get up and go to work knowing you're going to do something that's going to change someone's life forever. I feel God blessed."

If you know a child who might benefit or if you would like to donate, visit [www.tony-semplefoundation.org](http://www.tony-semplefoundation.org).

## Award given

Dale Hunter of Springfield, a member of the United States Power Squadrons since 1968, will receive the 2008 Northern Association of Boating Administrators prestigious Leroy Orvis Award in ceremonies Sept. 8 at Clearwater Beach, Fla. The Leroy Orvis Memorial Award for Excellence in Boating Education honors boating educators within the 20-state region "who uphold the standards and commitment demonstrated by long-term Nebraska boating safety administrator Leroy Orvis," officials said. Hunter is past commander of the Land of Lincoln Power Squadron, District 20, U.S. Power Squadrons.

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