

# HIDDEN TREASURES

## Sharing the Pleasure of the Great Outdoors

By Elishia Ballentine, Editor

Expressing what most TREASURE Forest landowners know is the true joy of land stewardship, Bruno Tropeano says, “Half the enjoyment of having property is watching *others* enjoy the land and nature.”

He experienced that pleasure earlier this year, when a dozen or so “senior” folks from Plantation Manor in McCalla, accompanied by a caretaker, came and fished in the Tropeano’s pond. Although most were in wheelchairs, it did not present a problem as the pond’s arrangement is handicap-accessible.

This is just one of the activities hosted by Joanne and Bruno Tropeano, opening their place for other people to benefit from the great outdoors. They also welcome youngsters who experience fishing for the first time, local folks hunt deer and turkey, and neighbors ride their horses along the fire break. They had previously hosted a “Classroom in the Forest” session when Brenda Morrison and Jerry Moss (now retired) with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources contacted the Tropeanos about a pond mentoring program, having youngsters come and fish at the pond as part of a reward system in the schools. The first class – an elementary school in Bessemer – was scheduled to fish in October. It was also through Brenda that contact was made with the folks at Plantation Manor.

Located in the extreme southern end of Jefferson County, the Tropeano property is about 107 acres. They purchased the land in 1995, initially building the pond. Now an Alabama TREASURE Forest, the

Tropeanos have come a long way. Literally! Commuting from New Jersey every two months or so, Joanne and Bruno built their home, doing most of the work themselves. With low maintenance and low cost in mind, they were very

property. Utilizing the services of the Alabama Forestry Commission, they had fire breaks installed that same year. They have had some of the lesser trees removed, replacing them with longleaf pines. For their own personal use, they harvest a variety of fruits from the land: figs, kiwi, blackberries, blueberries, hybrid muscadines, and American plums. It’s obvious that Bruno likes working and experimenting with plants, starting some from cuttings while grafting others. His latest project is a 28’x32’ greenhouse.

He noted that at their farm in New Jersey where they lived before moving South, they started and maintained a Christmas tree farm for 33 years. Although demanding at times, Bruno said he thoroughly enjoyed the operation and the family clientele. He even considered growing a plantation here in Alabama, but they both decided it was time instead to begin enjoying life without so much hard work.

Nowadays, not only do they stay active on their property and take pleasure in sharing it with others . . . Bruno also chairs the

Jefferson County TREASURE Forest chapter, sits as a supervisor of the Jefferson County Soil and Water District, and is a member of the Cawaco RC&D Council. He and Joanne recently celebrated their 47th anniversary. Both of their two children are married and also live within 10 miles of them. Without a doubt, the Tropeano family seems to have taken firm root in Alabama soil. 🌲

attentive to shading from trees and directional facing so as to eliminate direct sunlight intrusion during the summer. Along with high-quality insulation, they employed geothermal heating and air-conditioning. These efforts must have paid off, as, according to Bruno, the all-electric 3,000-square-foot home was only billed \$1,226 for electricity for the entire year of 2009 – “a pretty good average for a house that large!”

Since moving to Alabama in 2001, the couple has continuously improved the



Former AFC employee John Morris (left) and AFC Forester Tim Browning (right) congratulate Joanne and Bruno Tropeano on receiving their TREASURE Forest certification a few years ago.