

Alex Bell

By Jim Brady

After a career in education that culminated in serving as principal of Smoky Mountain High School in Sylva, NC, he thought he could finally pursue his lifelong passion for fly fishing on an uninterrupted basis. He established AB's fly fishing guide service in Sylva to offer guiding services across western North Carolina.

It was not to be, at least in a conventional sense. When Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Julie Spiro needed help, she corralled Alex and fellow fly fishermen Bobby Kilby and Craig Distil. Their task was to find a way to showcase the wonderful fly fishing in western North Carolina to increase tourism. Like many teachers, Alex was also a coach; in his case, the aware of the Robert Trent wondered if a fly fishing trail Western North Carolina Fly



golf coach. As a golfer, he was Jones golf trail in Mississippi. He existed. Research said no and the Fishing Trail was born.

The trail encompasses fifteen County. "The trail has something for everyone," says Alex. "If you like big water or small creeks, the trail has it." If you like to get out of your car and into the water or



prefer to hike before you fish, there are locales to suit your taste. Delayed harvest, hatchery supported and wild trout waters are in the mix. He says "there's something for the beginner and the expert." Although the first trail map was published in the depths of the recession in 2009, the trail has been a success. Currently thirty percent of all inquires to the Chamber are related to fly fishing. The trail remains the first

and sole fly fishing destination of its kind in the country.

On Saturday March 3, Alex Bell will bring his passion for fly fishing to the Nat Greene Flyfishers' annual banquet and seminar. Alex will present a daytime seminar on how to fish Jackson county



waters including small stream and delayed harvest techniques. He will also demonstrate the traditional Japanese style of fly fishing called Tenkara, which challenges Western ideas about the sport. His evening talk will highlight the WNC fly fishing trail.

Not content to operate an ordinary guiding business, Alex organized "Operation Grateful Guide" as a way of giving back to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. He offers a free day of fishing on the Tuckasegee River to veterans to teach them a new sport and provide a carefree day on the water. His early success with the program has been acknowledged by Pentagon personnel and a former brigadier general now in charge of the armed services division of the YMCA. Alex hopes to make the program national in scope. He says the door is open for other guides to participate; all they need do is contact him.