



PROFILES

Hazardous Waste Management alum goes batty

Dave Kugler, MSHWM'02, was in the process of applying to Wayne State's graduate school when his work brought him to the home of the future dean. The animal control company that employed Kugler received a call that Ralph Kummier, then director of the Hazardous Waste Management Program at the College of Engineering, needed help removing bats from his attic.

Kugler seized the opportunity: "While he was asking questions about the habits of bats, I was inquiring about Wayne's environmental engineering program," Kugler says. "It was a great way for me to break the ice prior to starting the program."

As an undergraduate in biology at Oakland University, Kugler worked part-time for A&D Animal Control in Oakland County. "I really enjoyed the work and I wanted to eventually start my own business."

Kugler's dream was finally realized in 2005 when he founded Critter Catchers, Inc. after working in the environmental, health and safety field for more than a decade. Critter Catchers, Inc. provides animal removal services in Southeastern Michigan, specializing in humane bat removal.

Based in Ortonville, Critter Catchers is the only bat exclusion company affiliated with the Organization for Bat Conservation (OBC), a non-profit based at the Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills, whose mission is to preserve bats and their habitats through education, collaboration and research.

Kugler considers bat education to be a large part of his company's responsibility, and makes great efforts to dispel common misconceptions about the creatures and to emphasize their environmental importance. "Humans instinctively fear the things in our world we don't understand," he says. "And bats, unfortunately, seem to land at the top of that list, regardless of the many benefits they provide, like insect control around the home and garden."



Dave Kugler with an African Straw Colored Fruit Bat

photo by Dave Kugler

The company's Web site, www.crittercatchersinc.com, serves as a useful educational tool, providing ample information on the environmental benefits of bats and the myths surrounding them.

In addition to the educational efforts made through the Web site, Critter Catchers offers a \$1,000 grant to let the OBC grant provide supplemental funding toward its Live Bat programs, which give young students and educators an invaluable learning experience.

For college-level students who have already cultivated an interest in the animals, Critter Catchers created a Bat Conservation Scholarship. Started in 2007, the scholarship is available to students from Indiana State University (ISU) and six Michigan universities, including Wayne State, which have research programs linked to the research associates of the Indiana State University Bat Center.

"The ISU Bat Center consists of the largest group of bat biologists in North America," says Kugler. "The scholarship is a way for Critter Catchers to support the

center and participate in the expansion of our understanding of many of the bats that are common in the Midwest."

If the first three years of Critter Catchers are an indication, Kugler will be busy. He is now considering adding another vehicle to the fleet to better meet the needs of the company's growing customer base.

While the transition from hazardous waste management and environmental engineering to critter control and bat conservation may appear extreme, the two areas can be viewed as very much related. Both require a thorough understanding of the ways in which systems work and the importance of all the parts.

"Bats are important to the ecosystem," says Kugler. "They have many environmental benefits, such as reducing pesticide use. Reduce, reuse and recycle – that's my environmental engineering side showing through!"

—by Sydney Redigan