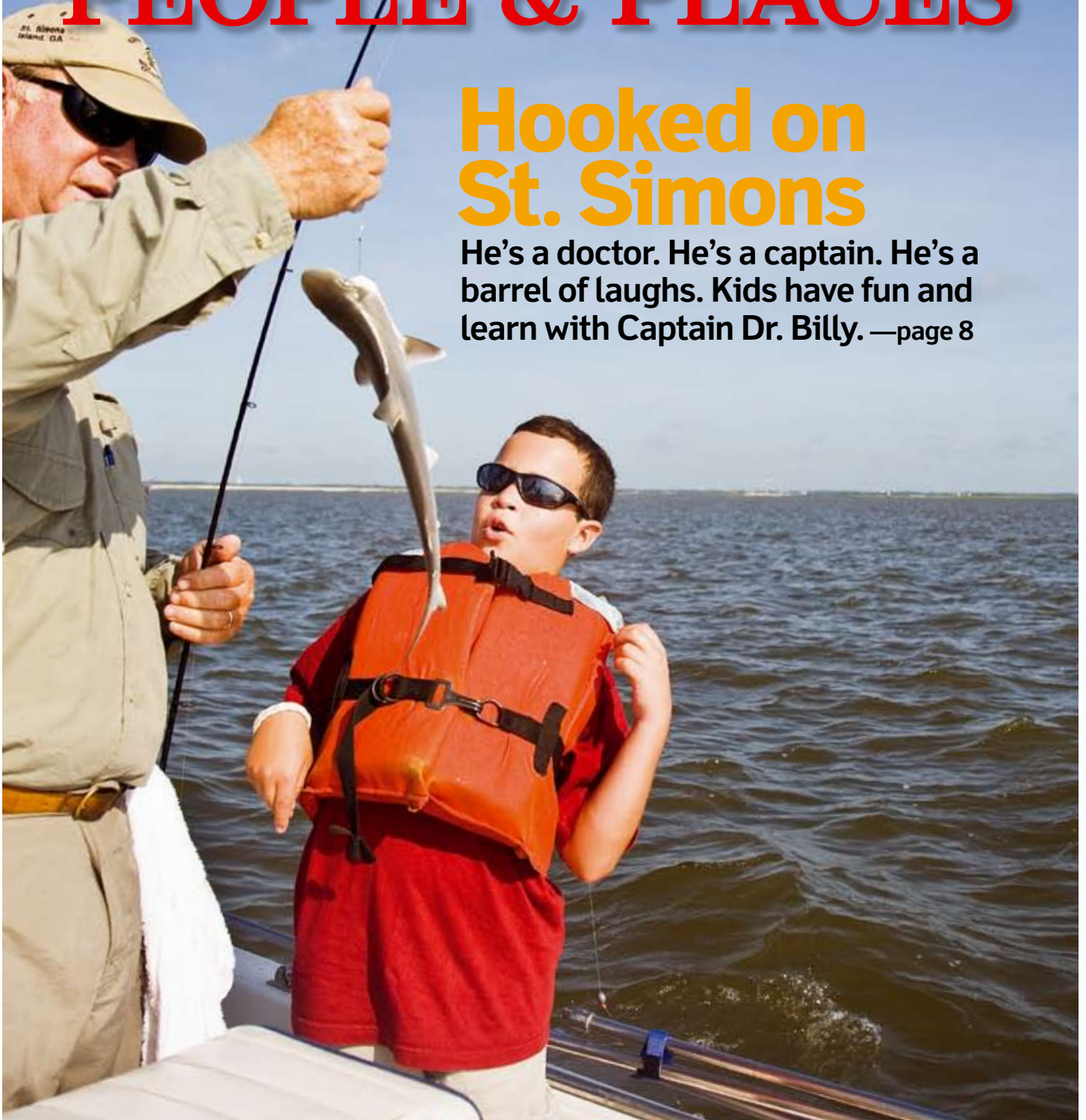


# Georgia Living PEOPLE & PLACES<sup>®</sup>

## Hooked on St. Simons

He's a doctor. He's a captain. He's a barrel of laughs. Kids have fun and learn with Captain Dr. Billy. —page 8



# On Board With Billy

Kids are in for an educational adventure in coastal waters around St. Simons Island. BY JOE RADA

Getting to steer the *Billy Bee* offshore from St. Simons Island counts as a major highlight for kids such as Drew Keen, who go fishing with Capt. Dr. Billy Bice.



Soon after reaching open water, the captain of a 22-foot charter boat surprises a 9-year-old passenger with this order: “Take the wheel, Drew, and steer toward the mouth of the river,” he says, pointing the way. “You’re our designated driver for now.”

Stunned but grinning, the new pilot grips the helm. “You’ll get a chance too, J.R.,” the captain tells Drew’s year-older brother. “Meanwhile help me get these fishing rods ready.” Karen Keen, perching like a windblown bowsprit, registers a smiling astonishment as she watches her boys hop to their appointed tasks.

This take-charge approach makes Billy Bice (aka Capt. Dr. Billy) popular with the clientele drawn to his guide service, Kid’s Fishing. Besides catching fish around St. Simons Island, guests aboard the *Billy Bee* learn about navigation and ecology, spy breaching dolphins and nesting birds, and more.

**Doing Double Duty** A doctor of education, Billy put in 31 years at public schools in Statesboro and Dalton. He retired to the Georgia coast in 2003 with his wife, Florence Ann, to pursue a dream of earning his captain’s license and launching Billy Bee Charters. Combining his titles seemed to fit nicely with his target audience—kids.

“I grew up hunting and fishing in Statesboro and set out to be a game warden or a forest ranger,” Billy says. “Instead I became a science teacher, was named one of the state’s youngest principals at age 25, and before long rose to superintendent. I’m not knocking all that, but I’m finally doing what I’ve always wanted to do.” ➔ *turn to page 10*

PHOTOGRAPHS: MICHAEL HANSON



**Still Teaching, Sort Of** “What really caps it off,” Billy adds enthusiastically, “is that in a way I’m still an educator. I just traded an office for a fishing boat and textbooks or labs for everything out there in nature.”

Without realizing it, his young charges learn things during a typical half-day excursion. They might think they’re just steering a boat, but they’re also gaining an understanding of navigation. They might think they’re just hooking fish for fun, but they’re also hearing about the food chain and how tides, predators, and pollution influence wildlife’s prospects.

They even get a history lesson, learning how Quarantine Island got its name, plus a geography lesson, seeing such landmarks as the huge Sidney Lanier Bridge from a new angle. “Instead of crossing it in a car, they look up at it from down on the South Brunswick River,” Billy says. “Sometimes we catch fish right near the pilings. They’ll remember that every time they pass.”

**Har, Har** “There’s only one rule on my boat,” Billy tells his crew-for-the-day. “Stay in the boat! Oh, and have fun. I guess that’s two rules. And try not to hook each other. That makes three. I’d better stop.”

But he doesn’t. Billy believes in humor. With puns, tongue twisters, knee-slappers, and other asides, he keeps passengers chuckling. The jokes

might seem dated to adults but not to his young audiences. The result casts him as a kindly uncle or grandfather, eagerly entertaining visiting relatives.

It’s all part of the seafaring professor’s unstated syllabus. “If I can get them laughing, they’re going to remember this as a good experience and want to do similar things again,” he says.

**Fish on the Line** On the *Billy Bee*, J.R. Keen finally gets to steer. He threads a narrow channel between Jekyll Island and Brunswick. His mother closes her eyes, feeling the sun and breeze on her face. His brother recites every fish—by species and number hooked—they’ve examined and released in the past three hours.

“In summer, there are so many little sharks around here, you’d have a hard time not catching one,” Billy says. “When a kid catches a shark, no matter how small, that’s one happy kid.” Both boys nod in fervent agreement.

“People today are so focused on computers and indoor activities that they’re not being exposed to the outdoors,” Billy laments. “These excursions are my way of contributing, at least a little, to showing them the wonders of nature.” ●

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KID’S FISHING: 134 Laurel View Drive, St. Simons Island, GA 31522. For more information, including rates, visit [www.billybeecharter.com](http://www.billybeecharter.com), call (912) 269-9983, or e-mail [bbice46@yahoo.com](mailto:bbice46@yahoo.com).