

After driving six kids back from a Girl Scout jamboree, he inadvertently flicked a candy wrapper out the window, to the girls' horror.

"It was like, 'Woodsy is a litterbug?'" he said.

Kimber met his wife, Pam, a Burton native, at a California music store, where he gave away Woodsy freebies to promote the campaign. After marrying in 1979, the couple moved to Australia, where Pam worked as a teacher and Dave became music director at a TV station. They settled in Burton 10 years later, where they live with their children, Allison, 13, and Simon, 6.

Woodsy's success inspired three more educational music CDs, and last year, Kimber was voted Michigan Social Studies Teacher of the Year by the Michigan Council for Social Studies.

But he always wondered what happened to Woodsy.

The campaign lost momentum when it was shuffled from the Forest Service to a string of other government agencies, and the message was replaced. It's now bouncing back after being taken over by the U.S. Conservation Education Program.

There's no TV comeback planned for the little owl. With such heavyweight issues as hunger, AIDS and domestic violence vying for the public's attention, Woodsy can't compete for airtime, said Iris Velez, the CEP's national symbols program manager.

But preschoolers are once again embracing the environment, thanks to a recently developed partnership with select Head Start programs.

And Woodsy's original slogan is now back, Kimber recently learned.

After a department survey in 2002, CEP brought back "Give a hoot" in partnership with the "Lend a hand" message.

Since the government isn't dedicating funds to the program, Velez credits passion for keeping Woodsy flying.

"Woodsy is so embedded in people's values that they cry when they talk about him," said Velez. "They are committed to keeping Woodsy alive because they truly believe in what they're doing."

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