

Local sportsman charity recognized for leadership

by Cassandra Colson
Reporter

A Jackson County-based non-profit organization has been recognized by a state organization for its leadership.

United Sportsman Alliance was named a 2011 Leadership Excellence Award finalist in March by Leadership Wisconsin, a leadership development organization. USSA is a dream-wish granting charity that sends disabled and critically ill youth and disabled veterans on outdoor adventures.

It has grown to be a country-wide program since its inception in 2000.

"I was a little bit overwhelmed (by the nomination)," said USSA CEO and founder Brigid O'Donoghue. "We had never been nominated for something like that and just

being nominated in itself was a wonderful thing."

USSA was one of 13 finalists but was not named 2011's winner. O'Donoghue said just the nomination is a testament to the organization's growth across the country and more volunteer interest in seeing youth and veterans get their hunting-based wishes fulfilled.

"I think the reason why they chose us is we were founded in 2000, and now we're the largest outdoors hunting and fishing charity in the United States," she said. "We've come a long way."

Last year, the USSA broke a world record for bear hunt participants, sending 45 participants into the woods. USSA also has done more than 100 turkey hunts in several states, and it now boasts a roster of more than 500 volunteers.

"It's really expanding,"

she said. "I think it's just that these children give us a different perspective on life. We see all the pain and suffering they're enduring and they never complain.

"Your hearts are very drawn to be like them."

USSA also recently developed a new program for disabled veterans that will allow them to take trips outside the country. In fact, USSA will send a veteran to Africa in the near future, and O'Donoghue hopes to grow the new program in the coming months and years.

"We need to give (these types of things) to the soldiers of Iraq and Afghanistan," she said. "We're going to do a lot more of these people.

"They're just wonderful, and without them, we wouldn't have our freedom."