

Lifestyles

Annual Dream Hunt a great success

BY JOHN STERNBERG

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The 14th Annual Illinois Dream Hunt was held in Southern Illinois earlier this month. The hunt is a united effort of the United Special Sportsman Alliance and the Illinois Bowhunters Association that provides a "Wish Hunt" for youths and veterans with terminal or near-terminal diseases.

In a departure from previous hunts, this year saw the youths hunting on private land in Saline, Hardin and Williamson counties after having previously used the Sahara Woods Fish and Wildlife Area near Carrier Mills.

This year's results saw eight of the 13 youths participating in the event bag a deer with the last one being taken on Monday morning by a young female hunter.

USSA CEO and Founder, Brigid O'Donoghue, was present for the week-end hunt.

"My husband and I ran a company that provided nutrition supplements for game animals on hunting preserves and hunting ranches," O'Donoghue said. "I had the opportunity to provide a dream hunt for a man with pan-

creatic cancer. His joy and enjoyment from his experience touched my heart in such a special way. I never could have imagined that what to me was such a simple thing could be so fulfilling. It was a feeling that I had never before felt. I was committed from then on."

O'Donoghue went on to say that, as her company was scheduled to attend a convention in Las Vegas shortly after that, she refocused her efforts to beginning to promote the dream hunt idea.

"I already knew a large number of people in the industry," she said. "The response was overwhelmingly positive. It all started to come together very quickly. Since 2000, we have granted 11,000 wishes. It's 100 percent about the participants."

Saline County has been the focus of the dream hunts for 14 years. The rich deer population and abundance of willing donors and guides were tailor-made to insure a good hunt and harvest.

Area churches, organizations and individuals have come forward to assist in providing an exceptional deer hunt experience. The hunters are paired with volunteer



Right, United Special Sportsman Association CEO and Founder Brigid O'Donoghue and local organizer, Dee Rader, at the Sunday morning breakfast sponsored by the Carrier Mills Fire Department in the Municipal building in Carrier Mills.

guides from the area and get to enjoy the glorious beauty of early fall in Southern Illinois. This year was another good hunt for the USSA team.

The Ohio Association of General Baptists provided free lodging and meals at Camp Oxford and numerous businesses and individuals provided supplies and monetary contributions. The Carrier Mills Fire Department provided a breakfast in the village municipal building free of charge.

Dee Rader, a longtime leading local organizer for the dream hunt, spoke about local support.

"It has always just been overwhelmingly positive," he said. "Groups and individuals who knew about the effort and those who were newcomers to the event all wanted to get on board with the program. The landowners' support is especially appreciated."

Any individual, group, business or organization wishing to participate in or contribute to the Illinois Dream Hunt can contact the United Special Sportsman Alliance by phone at 800-518-8019 or via the Internet at www.childswish.org. Locally, contact Rader on Facebook.