

Day dreams: Dixon man helps youngsters experience adventure

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Terry

Day flips through a picture book, rattling off names of kids next to fallen deer or turkeys. Day is in many of the pictures, standing somewhere in the background.

He pauses for a bit while looking at a few images, trying to avoid the full depth of emotion, trying not to gloss over the end met by a child he spent a weekend hunting with sometime during the last 6 years.

"It tugs at the heartstrings," Day said. "There is nothing else like it. When you see their faces, when they get a deer or whatever we're hunting, it's all worth it."

A string of chance meetings introduced Day, a hunter since the age of 12, to the United Special Sportsman Alliance, an organization based out of Pittsville, Wis., a little over six years ago.

Now Day is bringing the Dream Turkey Hunt to the

Sauk Valley. After a 1 1/2 years of planning, six youths and their families will converge on the Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center (LOMC) located south of Oregon.

The USSA seeks to provide children with life-threatening illnesses, disabilities and other challenges with the outdoor adventure of their dreams.

Day, 50, is employed by the Dixon Correctional Facility. He began contributing to the USSA when he became a mentor during "Dream Hunts" set up by the organization.

Day has participated in several of these hunts, forming relationships with kids from all over the country. Like Hunter Ridenour, an autistic boy from Tennessee. Day and Ridenour were paired together during a Turkey Dream Hunt in Wisconsin a few years ago. It's a bond that has lasted.

"He'll call me once every couple of weeks," Day said. "He'll just want to know about where I am hunting or fishing, if I've had any luck. He just loves to talk about that stuff."

This weekend's hunt will take place at several different blinds set up in five local counties, including Lee, Ogle and Whiteside.

Day worked with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and director Marc Miller to get tags and special exemptions for the hunt.

The hunt also was made possible by the contributions of several local hunters, groups and businesses, including the Rock River Turkey Chapter, National Wild Turkey Federation, both Lee and Ogle County Pheasants Forever, Kodiak Outdoors, Masonic Lodge of Dixon, Rock River Ready Mix, AFSCME Local 817, Woodcrafters, and Sauk Valley Archers.

"Everywhere I went, the people provided above and beyond what I was asking or expecting," Day said. "People wanted to do what they could to help the kids."

Each child and a least one parent will be paired with a mentor, who is an experienced local hunter.

The hunts will begin early in the morning and end at 1 p.m. each day. A lunch, packed by a Lee County 4H Club, will be taken along.

Several activities are planned after the hunts at the LOMC.

Day hopes to make this an annual event and considering adding a deer hunt.

