SCI, USSA & Point Fastpitch Join Together
by Joseph Koback

Two years ago I was told by our Vice President Bob Jakusz that some of our friends had helped start a local chapter of USSA and were doing turkey hunts for disabled children in the area. The problem they had was they needed more blinds and the blinds they did have weren’t big enough to fit a wheelchair, a guide and a parent. Wanting to help out, the Central Wisconsin Chapter of SCI purchased four quality oversized blinds. The blinds were a great investment and USSA, with the help of the Central Wisconsin Chapter, has been doing a great job of getting children out in the woods to experience the sport of hunting.

This summer, Brigid O’Donoghue (founder of USSA) called me about bringing the Central Wisconsin Chapter’s Sensory Safari Trailer to the USSA summer camp-out at their property between Pittsville and Black River Falls. She had heard about our trailer from numerous USSA members and thought it would be a great program to teach to the children attending their event. She expected somewhere around 250 handicap or terminally ill children (and their families), plus 20 to 30 disabled veterans. They would be doing various events such as shooting guns and bows, fishing, four-wheeling on ATVs, horseback riding and of course, swimming and games. I told Brigid this is what the trailer was built for and that we would come and teach wildlife education in the trailer, along with track identification and skull study outside the trailer.

In early July, I realized that our daughter BriAnn, who plays for the Point Fastpitch traveling softball team, had a tournament in Eau Claire that weekend. We would all be going to Eau Claire Friday evening because of an early Saturday morning game. The USSA event was on the way to Eau Claire and started Friday morning and ran through Sunday. Our family volunteered to teach at the trailer Friday until 5:00 pm.

Throughout the season, I have learned that BriAnn’s team is a great group of young ladies, always thoughtful of others. I had an idea that it would be a great learning experience for a few of BriAnn’s teammates to come along and volunteer to help Safari Club teach at the trailer on Friday. Kathe, my wife/Chapter Board member, put together a packet of information about SCI, our trailer, USSA and what we do. I presented this to the coaches at the next practice explaining to them the importance of teens doing humanitarian work and that I would like them to wear their uniforms if they volunteered to help.
I didn’t have to do any convincing, the coaches were all for it. Then I asked the players and their parents. Two days later at their next practice, I had the whole team wanting to come. What a sign of their heart and of sound moral values.

I talked to Brigid from USSA and told her that I was planning on bringing the team to help with the Sensory Safari Trailer. Brigid was ecstatic that these girls would come and volunteer, but that she could use them for something else and that they should bring their swimsuits.

We all met Friday morning on the west side of Stevens Point and headed out to Black River Falls. We got there about 9:00 am and set up the trailer. There were quiet a few campers already there. We had kids coming through the trailer as we were setting up and the line never stopped all day. It was unbelievable talking to these children with terminal illnesses. They all had such high spirits, because they just went turkey hunting this spring or were getting ready to go on a bear hunt this fall. I heard story after story of how a hunting or fishing trip gave them something to look forward to or just got their mind off their upcoming surgery.

I spent 30 minutes in the trailer helping this young boy who already had three heart surgeries. He met Brigid right before his first surgery. He told her he would like to go hunting after he got better. Brigid asked him, “How about now?” So, one week before his heart surgery, he shot his first turkey. His mother told me how great it was for him to get his mind off the surgery. Last year, he went on his first bear hunt.

This young boy was so enthusiastic that I assumed he was better. He then told me why he was spending so much time in the trailer. He was trying to decide what he wanted to hunt because he just qualified for any hunt he desired. But because of his heart, he can’t do a strenuous hunt. We spent a long time going through all the animals he was interested in hunting, where they were hunted, how you hunt them and how strenuous the hunt was. Being the perfect gentleman he was, he shook my hand, thanked me and said he was going to ask for a caribou hunt. I was honored to help him make his decision and would hunt with this young man anytime.

Brigid stole the softball team away about 45 minutes after we arrived. After a while, I tracked her down and asked what she had the girls doing because I noticed they all changed into swimsuits right away. Brigid sensed I was concerned that the team was just having fun and not helping out. She promptly explained to me the best experience these campers could have is just hanging out with the girls, being one of them and not being “helped” by them. The girls were out there swimming, boating and tubing with the campers, helping them out by truly being their equals and not feeling sorry for them.

Board members Ray Wolski and David TerMaat taught at the trailer the rest of the weekend. When I picked up the trailer Sunday evening, it was very evident that it was a great weekend for everyone. Many SCI chapters across the United States help USSA to match-up disabled, ill or special needs hunters with their dream hunts. Many of
these hunters would never have these opportunities without the help of SCI and USSA.

We got the softball team to the hotel by 6:00 pm. The girls were all pretty tired, which didn’t impress the coach, but they bounced back Saturday to play some of the best ball of the summer. All in all, they all agreed the highlight of the weekend was helping out at USSA.

Thank you Point Fastpitch for your selflessness and willingness to give to others. Also, thank you to USSA and Brigid for inviting us to join their event.
This summer we were in the fast lane going all over the state with girls fast-pitch softball, soccer, little league baseball and the Sensory Safari Trailer. In July we actually put two of them together at the USSA youth outing. The Point fast-pitch traveling team had a tournament in Eau Claire the same weekend as the USSA youth event.

USSA asked us to bring the SS trailer to teach wildlife education. The girls volunteered their time all day Friday and were a great asset to SCI, USSA and the hundreds of children that they helped. I commend the Point fast-pitch team for their unselfishness and willingness to help out and sometimes just swim and play games with other children less fortunate than them. It was a great experience for them and hopefully instilled in them the importance of volunteering. Every one of the girls left their names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses with Brigid O’Donoghue (USSA founder) to come back next year. Like I told Brigid, a couple of these girls might be future board members for SCI, USSA or both.

As I write this we are getting the SS trailer set up for the National Trappers Convention, which is being held in Wisconsin this August. When I was contacted by their education director I was told that we were one of only two educational programs that they believe were a must have at the National Convention.

Knowing your program has this level of respect is a great thing, but also it’s another example of SCI making great partnerships with other organizations. The Wisconsin Trappers Association has been a huge supporter of our chapter. These types of partnerships are vital to us keeping our rights to hunt, fish, trap and enjoy all our outdoor activities. This is the basis of the Hunters Rights Coalition (HRC), to bring all sportsmen’s groups together as one powerful voice. The HRC is helping win a lot of these battles. But one thing you can count on is the antis won’t stop coming at us from any angle.

This fall we have a chance to make our efforts a lot easier. We have an opportunity to put some more hunter friendly people into office. Do your research and vote wisely this fall. We can make a big difference in the future of hunting and for the direction this State and Country are headed.

On the lighter side, as I pack for Alaska and Canada, I need to remind all of you that we are always looking for presentations at our membership meetings on the great hunts our members have been on. It’s not only a great way to show your friends your trip, but if it was a great outfitter, there isn’t a better way to thank them than to tell other hunters who might be interested in the same hunt. This also cuts down the chance of a hunter booking with a bad outfitter. You’re helping the outfitter, your friends and other SCI members. If you would like to give a presentation please contact our meeting coordinator — Jb Moody or me (Joe) at 608-297-8401.

Lastly, I would like to remind everyone there are still Big 10 tickets left. They are $50 each, but only 300 printed and it includes food, beer and soda during the fall social with many more prizes to win. Also we will be drawing the winner for the Sables Raffle (Kimber 84M 243 Win with a Leupold 3X9X40, including rings, bases, and a nice camo hard case). Tickets are still available for this raffle also.

Hunt hard, hunt often and if your spouse says you’re gone huntin’ too often, take them with you.