picture the Cherokee hunters as they once traveled this route many years ago. Michael’s destination was appropriately called “Whitetail Dreams,” owned and operated by Sam James of Jefferson City. Sam is a wildlife biologist and teaches at the University of Missouri. Like many sportsmen, Sam has a passion for whitetail deer and wants to share that passion with all Americans, regardless of their physical condition. When Brigid O’Donoghue of United Special Sportsman’s Alliance (U.S.S.A.) told Sam about Michael’s dream, Sam jumped at the chance to grant his wish.

After the Keen family arrived and were settled in outstanding accommodations, Sam took Michael down to the rifle range for some practice. A retired serviceman taught Michael the mechanics of accurate shooting and the significance of proper shot placement. Michael was an eager student and did quite well! So well that Sam nicknamed him “Cherokee Trigger.”

The next day Sam James, Cherokee Trigger and his dad, Tim Keen, were sitting high in an elevated boxstand overlooking prime Missouri deer habitat. As a warm day progressed, an excited young hunter detected little deer movement. Chemo treatment has a way of sapping the endurance out of anyone and Michael was no exception. As the sun started to sink toward the western horizon, Sam’s teaching background got the best of him. He began whispering math problems with a “wildlife theme” to a semi-dozing Michael. Cherokee perked right up and answered quite well, considering that his primary focus was still deer. The math class was interrupted by a doe that calmly strolled across the field past the watchful eyes of Michael. Later, a nice buck was spotted at the backside of the same field. Although the buck was out of rifle range, it seemed to be mildly interested in what the doe was doing. Slowly and deliberately the buck quartered toward the stand, which held a boy named “Trigger.” Through their binoculars they could see the buck was in no particular hurry and would pause to grab a mouth full of lush forage as well as shake some pesky insects from its face and ears. About 140 yards from the stand, it seemed the buck was about as close as he cared to get to Trigger and his comrades.

As happens to all whitetail fanatics, the moment of truth had arrived for the young hunter and his quarry. The sharp crack of Trigger’s .223 sent the surprised buck wheeling back where he came from. Forty yards later, the buck did a circus-like cartwheel and landed on its side kicking. Cheers erupted from the stand’s occupants, and Trigger couldn’t wait to see his prize.

For the last year, Michael had spent little time out of his wheelchair and his walker was seldom used. To the surprise of all he grabbed his walker and took off across the uneven field toward the magnificent buck lying silently in the fading Missouri sun. Sam and I watched as his father caught up with his son to claim a beautiful 12-point buck. Brigid felt a lump in her throat as they watched the scene unfold before them. This is what sportsmanship is all about, people helping people,
Sam James, wildlife biologist at the University of Missouri and the gracious donor of Michael’s hunt, poses with Michael and his trophy whitetail.

friendship and family bonding and the beauty of the great outdoors. Brigid said she couldn’t help but reflect on a proud father’s face.

Had Sequoyah looked the same way when his son downed his fist whitetail 180 years ago? I’m sure he did, since fathers have been passing on the hunting tradition to their children from the beginning of recorded history. Yes, Cherokee Trigger’s trail was a trail of “cheers,” thanks to the compassion of concerned sportsmen. Another whitetail fanatic was born along the trail walked by Cherokee hunters long ago!

Special thanks to Whitetail Dreams, Mathews Solocam, Northland Cranberry and the dedicated sporting media like The Whitetail Fanatic magazine.

At the left is Brigid O’Donoghue of the U.S.S.A. posing with Michael Keen and his father, Tim.