Successful bear hunts make for some very happy young hunters

By JoDee Brooke

Fifth-grader Steven Urbanek has a headstart on most hunters when it comes to sharing his hunting stories. The 10-year-old shot a bear opening day of bear hunting season Sept. 4.

Urbaneck's hunt was made possible by many passionate hunting enthusiasts who continue to make hunting, fishing and just about any other outdoor activity possible for disabled youngsters, soldiers and vets as well as, critically ill youth.

Specializing in making these trips happen is Brigid O'Donoghue, founder of United Special Sportsman Alliance Inc. (USSA). USSA adventures and all the volunteers helping accomplish its mission give people something to look forward to while focusing on all nature provides.

O'Donoghue donated her bear tag to Urbanek and accompanied him on his trip to the area in which he would hunt, about 13 miles east of Park Falls.

"I practiced shooting the day before after I got home from school," shared Urbanek. "Brigid picked me up the next morning, that was Tuesday, I think. I was so excited on the way up.

"We went out to check the bear bait. They put food in the stump. It was really dark yet, so it was hard to see." We got in the woods a little bit, and they let the dogs go," he recalled. "They had tracker collars on, and then we just had to keep up with the dogs. My guide had a GPS. A little bit after that, about two hours, the dogs had treed a bear. He was pretty high in the tree. I was really excited to see it so I could shoot it. I couldn't shoot it right away. We had to wait until everyone (guide group) got there to watch me."

The Mader, Siegler, Normington, Tremil and Brandl bear group members guided Urbanek on his hunt. They also owned the land on which he hunted and the camper in which he stayed, and they shared their smiles in the pictures taken after the successful hunt.

"The bear dressed out at 101 pounds. A tooth was taken to send in to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to record its age and bear count numbers."

"I helped them skin it," added Urbanek. "I'm getting a shoulder mount. I his bear and hunt adventure for a future school project. "I fell asleep on the way home," Urbanek said. "The DNR issues bear tags on the lottery system," shared O'Donoghue. "Some of these guys that donate their tags have waited for 12 years, yet they donate their tags to these children.

Also granted a bear hunt was 10-year-old Travis Hammond of Taylor. Hammond harvested a bear Sept. 8 on a hunt guided by the Brent Evitch group. It field dressed 110 pounds.

Hammond was diagnosed with diabetes when he was just a year and a half. He is now insulin-dependent.

"We found out about this great opportunity from good friends of ours, Jeremy and Misha Shramek," shared Travis' mom Kandi. "I contacted Brigid, and she got the bear hunt set up very quickly for Trav. She set us up with George from the Hayward area. George was great. He put Trav and Wes up right at his home. Trav got his 120-pound bear on the second day of hunting. Trav was so excited."

"The best part next to getting the bear is the new friends I made," shared fifth-grader Steve Urbanek got his bear this season opening day while hunting through Brigid O'Donoghue's United Special Sportsman Alliance. Urbanek and O'Donoghue traveled to northern Wisconsin where they met up with the Mader, Siegler, Normington, Tremil and Brandle bear group who were Urbanek's guide for the hunt. O'Donoghue donated her tag to Urbanek.
We stayed in a camper that night. The next morning, the guides picked us up real used a 350 Remington. It had a kick to it.

Urbanek intends to use

"Trav was able to make a life-long friend that weekend," said Kandi. "They have already talked again since he came home."

There are a number of other youth with hunts planned yet during this year's season, which runs through the first Wednesday in October.

USSA has granted 9,000 wishes in 43 states and Africa. "Our goal is to continue to make a difference in granting as many free wishes as possible," shared O'Donoghue.

So far, this year's hunt has resulted in the harvesting of 18 bear for those having wishes granted by USSA.

Travis Hammond of Taylor harvested his bear Sept. 8 on a hunt guided by the Brent Evitch group. His bear license was donated by Rich Stewart of West Bend. The bear field dressed at 110 pounds. He is the son of Wesley and Kandi Hammond.

The crew joining Hammond on his hunt gathered around the happy 10-year-old for a photo. The successful hunt was near Hayward. Hammond's guide for his hunt was George Hrdlicka (back, far left).