The trip was arranged and the Kohlman’s arrived at Joe and Diane Eckert’s home east of Colby on Sept. 6, the opening day of bear hunting season. The first night was unproductive, but the second night was a bonanza. At about 7 p.m., hunting over bait, John dropped the huge bear with a 30.06 caliber gun.

“It was a beautiful night with a full moon brewing,” Joe said. “John did an excellent job. He did everything I told him to do. It was an awesome shot. Then the shakes started to set in.”

Joe instructed his young charge to stay still and not to make any sudden movements. Hunters must read what the bear is doing and then bring up the gun nice and slow for a clear shot.

“John let the bear move around a little and turn some,” Joe said. “He acted like a seasoned hunter. Many adults don’t get a chance to shoot a bear this size.”

John said his trophy will be made into a bear rug.

“It will bring back many fond memories of the hunt,” he said. “I had fun tracking it. I tried not to show it, but I was pretty nervous.

“I was looking to have fun. I really enjoy the time outdoors. I may try deer hunting next.”

Theresa said she was amazed how fast things happened.

“It was a very positive experience,” she said. “The Eckerts invited us into their home. Joe was very patient with John.”

John is making progress toward his goal of becoming an independent hunter.

Battling pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) not otherwise specified (NOS). He was diagnosed with the condition before age three.

An autism specialist has conducted intensive in-home therapy, and some medication has been prescribed. John attends Sauk Prairie High School as a freshman, and even decided to tackle football this year.

“I got a few bumps and bruises from doing the wrong thing at the wrong time,” John said. “I got tackled one time and I flew back about five yards.

“The coach was fine with me taking a few days off to go bear hunting. They said I can catch up when I get back.”

Joe said it was rewarding to see John doing things he wants to do, with a little assistance. He said some cuing was necessary to hold his attention at times. John also helped set up the bait.

Theresa said her son is doing very well in school. He is now in mainstream science, agriculture, U.S. history, chorus and phy-ed programs. He requires the help of an aide in biology class when handling equipment including burners. A resource center is available for math and English assistance.

“He is a very good reader,” she said. “For other things it takes longer for him to process the information.”

John said the hunting experience has made him a better person.

“I think I have more confidence now. Getting in touch with nature like this is cool and awesome,” he said.