Critically-ill child completes ‘Dream Hunt’ event with Homer’s Robie Pruitt

Thomas Moslander has had two recent changes of heart. His bodily heart was changed when he received a brand new one during transplant surgery, a life-saving procedure for this 10-year-old boy with a critical illness. His spiritual heart was changed when he met Robie Pruitt, an avid hunter and archer from Homer.

Pruitt shares much of his time with special kids like Moslander.

Pruitt met Moslander in July at a special annual event for critically ill kids, and they reunited to complete the sixth annual “Dream Hunt” event in late October. The United Special Sportman’s Alliance (USSA) is a registered non-profit organization that grants outdoor wishes to critically ill children and holds events each year for hundreds of such kids who want to take part in hunting and fishing activities. The USSA pays all expenses for the participants, who come from several surrounding states to the company’s Wisconsin home base. In the past seven years, the organization has granted 4,988 wishes for children, Pruitt said.

“Safety and conservation management are among the teaching goals of those who help the kids learn during the three-day USSA summer retreat held in Central Wisconsin, at which Pruitt instructs archery. While working with Moslander, he discovered that the child did not seem to have the heart to shoot a deer with a bow. “He really loves animals and didn’t know much about what hunting and harvest are really about,” Pruitt said. After spending some time with Pruitt at the archery range, Moslander seemed to have another ‘change of heart and became excited about going on a hunting trip.

“This special boy was invited to attend the annual Sahara Woods Dream Hunt near Carrier Mills, a southern Illinois town. “I talked to him a couple of weeks before the hunt,” Pruitt said. “He was very excited and said he already had a place on the wall for his first deer mount.” The Sahara Woods Dream Hunt, in conjunction with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Bow Hunters Society and the town of Carrier Mills, allows special children from the USSA to harvest a deer with a gun or bow. Pruitt explained that since Moslander weighed in at only 49 pounds, and his recovery from surgery was an issue, that he would be shooting a deer with a PSE crossbow. “He can’t take the recoil from a gun; we’re going to try to get a deer in close enough to take it with the crossbow,” Pruitt said prior to the hunt. Pruitt would be Thomas’ guide and instructor for the hunt, where 11 other special children were paired with volunteer guides.

Hunting proved to be difficult for Moslander, Pruitt said. While the deer would come into view, they were well outside the range of a crossbow, which has an effective range of not much more than 20 yards. But Pruitt kept Moslander hopeful, and on the second evening he would get a chance at his first deer.

“It blew me away how calm he was; it was like he did it all his life, and when the deer came in he was very still,” Pruitt explained. Moslander took aim and downed the deer.

Pruitt said that Moslander did not want to leave the blind during the hunt, but after he shot the deer Moslander said he missed his mother and wanted to tell her about his adventure. “It tucks at your heart sometimes,” Pruitt said. “Thomas said to me in the blind that he didn’t care if he got a deer, but he knew he and his mom needed meat for the winter, so he wanted to get one for his mom.”

Pruitt left no question that he would give up all of his personal hunting time to be with these special kids. “You can’t describe the feeling. Bow hunting is my passion and my life, but I’d give it all up to do this,” he said.

Pruitt is a member of the Illinois Bow Hunter Society, whose members have been proactive in charity events like this one. Pruitt said that the organization’s membership has declined in recent years, but he hopes with the help of the USSA and other similar groups, and the special volunteers who participate, there is hope to pass on and rekindle some of the passion in hunting and game management. In the Sahara Woods of Illinois, a 10-year-old with a new heart for life also found a new heart for hunting, perhaps passing on inspiration to those who share in his special story.

Anyone interested in participating in a future USSA event should visit their website, www.childswish.com.