Dream hunt
Memories for a lifetime

BY WENDY SIGLE
LA View Staff Writer

IMLAY CITY—Last year’s Woods-N-Water News Outdoor Weekend brought together more than just sportsmen. As fate usually works its magic, an amazing adventure was started there with one announcement over the public address system.

Linda Braschayko and her son, John, of Mayfield Township, heard the call for kids with illnesses or disabilities to stop by the Benefit-4-Kids booth to learn about a free hunting package. John was recovering from surgery to relieve epilepsy. The procedure had left him paralyzed two years earlier and he had to learn to walk, talk, and function all over again after the operation. Linda and John decided to see what the Benefit-4-Kids booth had to offer.

At the booth, the Braschaykos spoke to founders Steve and April Pray, of Yale. After talking with young John and Linda, Steve Pray told the pair that John was exactly the type of child that the organization matches with the free hunts.

“We really try to put the word out to find kids who we can match up to an outfitter. I do a lot of internet research to find the right outfitters, too,” Pray said.

Benefit-4-Kids was started six years ago by the Prays in memory of their own daughter. Since that time, it has grown into a national effort.

“It started as a small archery shoot to raise money for a scholarship. We had a goal of $500 to $600. That first shoot, we ended up with $6300,” Steve Pray exclaimed.

He stated that Benefit-4-Kids is funded mostly through archery shoots and donations.

Within a few days of their meeting, Linda said she received a phone call from Pray. He connected them to Brigid O’Donohue from Wisconsin, who puts together “Dream Hunts”. According to Linda, O’Donohue was particularly interested in John because she had gone through the same surgery at a young age, and also experienced paralysis afterwards.

O’Donohue organized a deer-hunting expedition for John at Little Flat Creek Ranch in Purdy, Missouri.

According to Linda, John focused on the hunting trip. He practiced shooting with a bow and with a gun to strengthen and retrain his hand. He bowled, swam, and drove tractors to prepare for his first real hunting encounter.

On November 14, 2002, John arrived at Little Flat Creek Ranch with his parents, Linda and John Senior. Meeting them was ranch owner Bill Roller, who donated the hunt. Linda said Roller was a wonderful host who really added to their experience, giving them a tour and taking John out to the rifle range. Roller signed the practice target and gave it to John. Later, they were joined by O’Donohue, who planned on hunting with them.

Luck still on his side, John shot a ten-point buck the very first day at Little Flat Creek.

O’Donohue reported that John had spotted the buck after seeing three does bounding out of the woods. Earlier, Roller had told John that does were still in heat.

Roller used a series of grunt calls to slow the buck down and gave John time for a shot. With a single shot from a 788 Remington .243-caliber rifle, John dropped the buck.

The Braschayko family said they were grateful for the whole event. Linda claims the experience “brought John back to life”, explaining how depressed John had been. Though he was active with his five older sisters as well as with 4-H and bowling, Linda said John had a rough time before this trip. John had been diagnosed with epilepsy at age five, and had the surgery at age 10. Linda believes this single act of kindness and communion with nature inspired John. She said now her son knows that there are people who care deeply about him and other children who have been through debilitating times.

“When you can make that difference in these children’s lives, that’s what it’s all about,” Steve Pray said.

Though the Benefit-4-Kids booth is unavailable for this year’s Woods-N-Water News event, Pray welcomes families and outfitters who can donate their services to contact their organization. Contact them on their website at www.b4k.org or by telephone at (810) 387-0454.