众人皆有故事

HUNTING FOR BEAR

LOCAL DONATION MAKES WISH COME TRUE FOR ILL TEEN

By MELISSA RIGNEY BAXTER Special to The Freeman

It took Ron Fricke seven years to earn enough points for a bear hunting permit in Wisconsin, and then he gave it away. “I purchased it and then I got a letter from Bridget O’Donoghue asking me to donate it,” Fricke said.

He checked out the organization, the United Special Sportsman’s Alliance, and then called O’Donoghue. She asked him to donate his permit to the organization so a young person with an illness or disability would have the chance to go on a bear hunt.

“I said ‘You can have mine,’” Fricke, 61, said. “I shot a bear in Canada three or four years ago. Do I really need another bear?”

For Fricke, hunting is almost his retirement job. He has gotten at least one deer during deer season for the last 44 years, and by using agriculture tags and other special hunts, he’s gotten even more.

Because of Fricke’s donation, Ben Gerhardt, a young man with leukemia from Millport, Ala., had the chance to go on a bear hunt and shoot a 230-pound bear in northern Wisconsin.

Fricke said he had the chance to go along with Gerhardt and his father, but he thought it would be best not to go.

“I’m very emotional. If he got one, I would have had tears in my eyes,” Fricke said.

O’Donoghue founded the organization, based in Pittsville, six years ago, and said the nonprofit, all-volunteer group has filled 3,500 wishes of children with an illness, disability or a traumatic experience. Any outdoor experience, including hunting, fishing, golfing and even racing, is considered.

Although the recipients of the gifts are very grateful, O’Donoghue said the donors are the ones who are most affected. “It’s so overwhelming,” O’Donoghue said.

In 2006, 19 bear hunts were donated.

Gerhardt sent a thank you note, and a picture of himself, his father and the bear, to Fricke to thank him for the gift.

For his part, Fricke is passing along information about the organization to his other hunter friends — many of them involved with him in Heritage Outdoor Sports.

He’ll also apply each year for another bear hunt and pay the $3 application fee. When the number’s drawn again, he won’t use it. Self, he’ll donate it again so another person can see their own wish come true.

HOW WE FOUND FRICKE’S STORY

Freelance writer Melissa Rigney Baxter spoke with Fricke late last year while working on a story about the town of Lisbon for The Freeman. He mentioned his bear hunt donation, and she called to find out more. If you know of someone with a story to tell, send an e-mail to melissasuanne@yahoo.com.

FIND OUT MORE

The United Special Sportsman’s Alliance is a national, nonprofit organization based in Pittsville. To find out more about the organization, visit the Web site at www.childswish.com.