Gunshots at Carrier Mills: It’s a special hunt

BY ERIC FODOR
STAFF WRITER

People on the north end of the Carrier Mills area may have heard some shooting early this morning.

Sahara Woods was the site of a special hunt for kids with terminal illnesses and severe disabilities. The kids and their guides took to the woods just before 6 a.m. and will continue hunting until sunset.

Thirteen kids participated, all of whom had firearms training, hunter safety training and a special desire to get out in the woods and possibly get a chance at a deer.

There should be a good chance at the kids getting an opportunity to bag a deer or two — Sahara Woods is known locally as being filled with deer. In fact, the hunt will be good for the herd, according to Jim Williamson, the Saline County conservation officer. If a kid gets a deer, he will have the opportunity to go back to the woods and hunt for another one.

Kids have come from all over the country to participate in the hunt. In fact, only one kid is from Illinois, according to Jay Williams of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

This is the second such event in Saline County and the list of organizations who made the hunt possible is huge. The IDNR, Illinois Bowhunters Society and United Special Sportsmen Alliance are putting on the hunt. Strictly Outdoors provided some blaze-orange hats and Eldorado Locker is providing butchering services for free.

Brigid O’Donoghue, president of the USA, has been involved in making kids’ hunting wishes come true for four years.

“We’ve been up and going for four years now. We’ve done over 800 children and we plan to do 1,000 this year, so we are really rocking,” O’Donoghue said.

O’Donoghue travels the nation organizing hunts, promoting her organization, finding volunteer guides and finding children.

“I could be in Texas one day and Florida the next, so I fly and drive a lot,” she said.

Oddly enough, finding children who want to take part in the hunts is harder than finding volunteers. She cannot go to the schools to find kids — most are too sick to attend school. Hospitals and clinics aren’t really an option either — privacy rules make it hard for O’Donoghue to make contacts there. Instead, she has turned to what seems like an odd method of getting the word out.

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Hunter Tyler Halatek of Wisconsin and his guide, Damian Considine of Dixon, got their hunting permits from Dave Cassens of the department of Natural Resources during a meeting held at the Carrier Mills Municipal Building the night before the Sahara Woods hunt. Brigid O’Donoghue, president of United Special Sportsmen Alliance, is giving the hunters their blaze orange caps.