Hunt, from front page

A pleasant hunt in Kansas. And then some November, deer hunting, all mily together. Wesley included. About two years ago, I thought he was going to be able to shoot a gun or not. Ron said. “Now he’s just the boys. He’s going to be able to see everything. When I go and buy a license, I think that will be the last thing I like to do.”

Paul’s story is different. Until he could outdo his older brother in Alabama. They took turkeys and a whitetail deer, and John Paul once bagged a 10-pointer. Then in 2003, it all changed.

While playing football, John Paul got an injury that stole the use of his legs. As he lay in an Alabama hospital, one of his most agonizing thoughts was the thought of never going hunting again.

That was one of the things he said, “I’d never be able to do it.”

But on Sept. 10, 2003, by December of the same year his son was back in school. Sometime, somehow, over the next year, O’Donoghue learned Paul’s situation and found out that he always wanted to hunt a bear. O’Donoghue met the family early this year, and found a Shawano bear hunter willing to donate his coveted tags so John Paul could chase his dream.

Until June 29 was O’Donoghue to confirm the details and promise, and Tina said they did not know about it until then. But the day he was again released from the hospital after a major surgery, his son was in high school.

Sept. 4, the family loaded up north. An 18-hour drive, and Tina said they expected to stay there. But the day he was again released from the hospital after a major surgery, his son was in high school.

Wesley Johnson of Spencer harvested a black buck at a Texas ranch earlier this year. The opportunity for the dream hunt came through the United Special Sportsman Alliance.

The bear was not a large one, as bears go, but John Paul is still planning on which wall he’ll hang the rug mount (donated by Lakeside Taxidermy in Rock Dam). He took back with him to Pell City a story like none of his friends have heard before, and he’s able to see what he did it.

“It was like a dream of his to bear hunt,” his mother said.

John Paul said his experiences with deer and turkeys were not like the feeling of sitting 30 yards from a bait pile, waiting for prey that can be dangerous. That was the feeling he sought.

“It’s something that you know can, if it wants to, come after you,” he said.

In addition to the adrenaline surge of a bear hunt, John Paul and his parents also took home with them a feeling of appreciation for USSA and the local people who gave of their time and resources to help his cause.

“We didn’t know any of these people,” Tina said. “We’ve made lots of good friends. We’ve run into lots of good people. Everybody here in this little area has been so wonderful. Everybody here has been so great to us. The people have been amazing.”

Ron Johnson has words of his own to describe what USSA has done for his son. He calls O’Donoghue “an angel on earth” who has made life better for people who have had reason to be down.

USSA’s mission is just that, to give hope to children and others who need a good dose.

From its Web site: “USSA adventures give our youth something to look forward to, and help sustain them in their time of need. Families are whisked away from the mundane, man-made world of hospitals and high medical bills by giving them a place of peace to focus on the quality of life, family ties and the wonders of our natural world.”

Johnson is so supportive of USSA that he has been on its advisory council and now its board of directors. He has seen firsthand the organization’s impact on people much like one he knows quite well.

“I believe in this organization because I see what it has done for my son,” Johnson said. “Watching him and his eyes light up when he gets something, I get more enjoyment out of it than shooting it myself. That’s right there is something I’d never have been able to give him.”