Mark Golden
gets dream buck

By Richard Wulterken

Most hunters would consider themselves in good health and may take for granted the fact that good health and a pair of strong feet allow them to take part in hunting, fishing and trapping outings whenever they have spare time.

Not so for youngsters like Mark Golden, 16, of Fair Haven, Mich., a bright and happy boy who would live to go hunting every day. Young Golden is quite ill and that fact severely limits him in his quest to enjoy the outdoors.

Since he was a baby, Golden has struggled with problems with his stomach, esophagus and lungs. As a toddler, food he tried to swallow spilled out of a hole in his neck. He was finally able to eat normally as he grew older, but he had to sleep sitting up so food he had swallowed wouldn't come back, as his esophagus wouldn't close. As the years passed, he dreamed of being a deer hunter. But his lungs — undersized and vulnerable to pneumonia — rebel in the cold, dry air of autumn.

Recently, Golden's dream of going deer hunting came true when he was invited to hunt on Sept. 21 at Back Acres Ranch in Wild Rose, a white-tailed deer shooting preserve.

Through the efforts of Brigid O'Donoghue, president of the Bio-Tec Research, Inc., of Pittsville, and Dan Schuman, owner of Back Acres Ranch, Golden lived his dream on a cool, cloudy afternoon. Bio-Tec coordinates with other organizations like Benefit4Kids and Paralyzed Veterans of America when fulfilling a dream wish.

Golden and his mother, Denise, were supposed to arrive on Sept. 20 to get settled in and prepare for the next day's hunt, but severe storms delayed their arrival until the afternoon of Sept. 21, creating a "hurry-and-get-there-so-we-can-hunt" scenario. Once they arrived, though, everything fell into place.

Before the hunt, Golden received the firearm of his choice, a CVA muzzleloader, ported to reduce recoil. His frailty prevents him from being able to withstand even average recoil. He hadn't had a chance to sight it in before arriving, so after dinner, Golden aimed his modified muzzleloader at a target. One shot from the Bobcat was all it took to know the .50-caliber rifle hit dead center.

While Mark dressed and gathered gear, Denise readied still and video cameras. Bev Schuman fired up the camp truck to transport her husband and the Goldens to an elevated box stand with room enough for everyone. The stand overlooked a valley clearing within the preserve.

As Mark worked on loading his muzzleloader, the action began. Two bucks arrived, spurred on by the noise and then departure of the truck. As the bucks crossed slowly out front, Mark finished loading, out of sight.

Bev returned with batteries and the group settled in to wait for a buck to appear. Then a light rain began to fall. Tension mounted. Mark wondered whether his opportunity to shoot the buck of his dreams had faded with his missed opportunity earlier.

Then there was movement across the valley. A young buck angled toward them. Mark gripped his muzzleloader, but Schuman said the buck was too small for Golden to shoot. Mark relaxed and settled down again.

Other deer appeared, then disappeared as quickly as they caught scent. More time passed. Drizzle continued as clouds blew in, darkening the day.

Mark Golden didn't even have to ask Schuman about the biggest buck.

He positioned his stock against his shoulder. But the big buck stood behind brush in front of the stand. Mark gazed through the scope as Schuman whispered that he should wait.