THE HANDS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL HUNTING TRIP — It took a lot of hands to make the hunting trip for the terminally ill boys a success. Everyone in the photo played a role in making that success in one way or another. Evidence of the success is hanging in the background from the rafter in front of the cabin.
Special Kids hunt is a tremendous success for everyone involved

The weekend of October I turned out to be very special for two young hunters in the Northwoods. Adam Ducat, 13, from Two Rivers, WI, and Garrett Williamson, 12, from Trempealeau, had their dreams come true when they got to go on their first hunt, which included whitetail deer and black bear. But what makes this special is that both Garrett and Adam are terminally ill.

The event was organized by Warden Jeremy Peery, Tom Hutnik, Bill Rands, Rick Nash and Ben Wiles. The hunt took place on Rand’s property south of Radisson.

“Having the hunt on Bill’s Ranch is what made the hunt a success for these young guys,” Warden Peery explained. “Garrett is confined to a wheelchair and having an accessible cabin was key to making them feel at home.”

The hunt began on Friday, September 30, with the two hunters, along with Garrett’s dad, David, and Adam’s mentor, Mike Derpinghaus, who is also wheelchair confined due to losing both of his legs in an automobile accident.

The group met with Peery and DNR Warden Trainee Barry Fetting at the DNR Service Center. For the next two hours, the group learned about bear and deer hunting, hunting laws and a review of the firearm safety rules. Chris Cold gave an excellent presentation on bear habitat and biology that the young hunters continued to talk about all weekend long.

From there, the group traveled to Bill’s Ranch and unpacked their gear. Nick Nash helped the hunters zero in their rifles. After that, Tom Hutnik explained the bear hunting procedure and showed them bear hounds and other equipment.

Next the boys set up in blinds overlooking food plots to try to harvest a deer. Peery sat with Garrett and his father in a pop-up blind. Garrett had a rest built onto his wheelchair, which allows him to aim and fire his .243. While sitting in the blind, the group discussed the DNR’s Learn-To-Hunt program, which allowed the deer hunt to take place.

With only about five minutes left of hunting hours, a large bodied eight point non-typical buck emerged into view.

“When Garrett saw the deer, he began shaking and giggling so bad that his dad and I had to hold the chair to keep it still,” Peery said.

At the shot, the buck dropped in its tracks with a perfect placed shot. That is when the emotions took over with Garrett and Dave. This was Garrett’s first actual hunt and he was able to harvest a nice deer, despite being bound to his wheelchair. The deer ended up weighing 178 pounds field dressed.

Adam, who was hunting with Fetting, got a shot at a doe but missed. When Adam returned to the ranch house, you could already see a change in his personality. This change became more evident throughout the weekend as noticed by Derpinghaus.

“When we arrived, both young men did not have a lot of confidence, did not talk much and looked at the ground a lot,” he said. “After their hunts, they were both walking around with smiles on their faces, walking up to people and initiating conversation. You could see a visible change. It’s just amazing.”

On Saturday, Hutnik’s bear hunting group met at the ranch and began the hunt. After checking baits, a bear was started and the hunt was on. After about an hour chase, the dogs were picked up and started on another bait. This chase was on a better track and after about an hour chase, the bear was treed.

Garrett got put into Nash’s Argo, an all-terrain vehicle designed to go through swamps and difficult terrain. Garrett arrived at the tree and was able to make the shot once again. The bear ended up weighing 181 pounds field dressed.

Sunday dawned a beautiful day and as Ben Wiles was checking baits at the ranch, a nice sized bear crossed the field road. The crew turned their hounds loose and the chase was on.

This time Adam was there when the bear was treed. Trainee Fetting was with Adam at the tree.

“I could not have had anything more gratifying in my life than to stand next to a young man like Adam with my hand on his back while he took the shot,” Fetting said. “I could feel his heart pounding on my hand. He did a great job. He stayed calm and made a nice clean kill on the bear.”

Congratulations were given around by everyone for the success of the event. Not just for the hunt but for the change it had on young hunters and their families.

Adam’s mother later wrote, “Thanks to all that helped in the hunt as it changed Adam’s outlook on life in just one weekend.”

The United Special Sportsmen Alliance, a Christian Organization dedicated to providing hunting, fishing and other outdoor wishes for children with terminal and chronic illness was founded by Brian O’Donoghue after the Make A Wish Foundation stopped taking kids on hunts. Bridg approached K. Theide from the Wildlife Bureau in Madison with the idea and Theide worked with Warden Peery to organize the hunt.

However, the hunt would have happened had it not been for Warden Bill Rands taking the bull by the horns and having the event at his ranch. Ben Wiles, Rick Nash, and Tom Hutnik, alone with his crew spent several hours of planning and organizing, which, without their selflessness, contributed to the long memories for the hunters and their families.

Thanks to Ben Wiles for donating the food and thanks also to Nick and Jerry Wojcik for cooking breakfast each morning.

Special thanks to the Wisconsin Restoration Association and the Gunner’s Taxidermy for providing mounts of the animals and the Sauk County Hunters of Tomorrow with...
HUNTERS WITH THE WEEKEND HARVEST — From left to right are David Williamson, with his son, Garrett Williamson, Adam Ducat and Mike Derpinghaus. They shot two bear and one deer in the three day hunt.

Garney’s Meats for the processing of the game. But, most of all, thanks to Garrett and Adam for providing us all with memories that will last forever.