Young sportsmen enjoys special deer hunt

By Steve Rundlo

"I just wanted to shoot it," Austin said.

His father’s reaction?

"Dad just sat there with his mouth open," Austin said.

Austin shot the two deer with a 20-gauge shotgun (with scope) while McAdams steadied the barrel. Volunteers gutted and skinned the two deer.

"Everyone down there was as nice as they could be," Phil Peterson said. "It was just amazing how people treated everybody. They see everyone as God’s gift."

Phil Peterson first learned about USSA from a workplace friend at Fort McCoy. The friend put him in contact with Brigid O'Donoghue, USSA president and founder. Earlier this summer, O’Donoghue arranged for Austin to fish at the Saddle Mound cranberry marsh 15 miles east of Black River Falls.

Over 120 disabled children have had the opportunity to fish at the marsh, which is owned by the Normington family (Pete Normington is the President of Saddle Mound Cranberry and USSA Chairman of the Board). At Saddle Mound, Austin met tournament fisherman Perry Powell, and Powell traveled from his home in McKinney, Tex., to Illinois to surprise his new-found “fishing buddy.”

USSA is composed of volunteers who work with donors, businesses and landowners to grant “dream adventures” for children with special needs. The organization has funded 2,500 hunting and fishing outings since 2000.

Austin’s mother, Brandi Peterson, didn’t make the trip to Illinois but she met USSA volunteers at Saddle Mound. She said the staff treats every child as an individual.

"The children aren’t known by their diseases, they're known by their names," she said.

More information on USSA is available at childwish.com.

Eight-year-old Austin Peterson is still waiting for his “deerburgers.”

Other than that, his deer hunting trip to southern Illinois was everything a youngster could want.

Austin, along with the father, Phil Peterson, were the guests of the United Special Sportsmen Alliance, which grants wishes to disabled and seriously ill children (Austin suffers from a brain tumor).

The Petersons traveled to Illinois on the weekend of Oct. 25-27. Austin shot a 5-point buck and a doe, and he’s anxious for his post-harvest meal.

"Dad was supposed to make deerburgers," Austin said.

Phil Peterson said the deerburgers are on the way and that Austin’s buck will soon be mounted. Phil Peterson said USSA made the trip to Illinois as welcoming and convenient as possible. The Petersons were set up in a four-person hunting blind on state-owned land with hunting guide Alex McAdams.

"They had the blinds set up with easy access," Phil Peterson said. "We only had to walk 15 feet."

Austin shot the two deer within five minutes of each other. He passed up the first doe he spotted, but didn’t hesitate when the buck passed by.