

HUNTERS

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF SCI
CHAPTERS IN WISCONSIN AND ILLINOIS
JULY/AUGUST 2026

Michael White's Tale

- Members' Adventures
- Chapter News & Events
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HUNTERS

Official Magazine of SCI Chapters in Wisconsin and Illinois
July/August 2026

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SCI Region 16 Representative

Charmaine Wargolet

charmaw@ameritech.net

Region 16 Report

by Charmaine Wargolet,
Regional Representative

In May, four of us from Region 16, attended the National Board meeting in Washington D.C. Dean LePoidevin, Monte Whitaker, Dale Rimkus, and I participated in Lobby Day, committee meetings and the full board meeting.

Lobby Day is always an amazing experience! Everyone who participates for the first time is blown away by the experience and love it! This year we had a number of issues that we discussed with our elected representatives. We had appointments with the offices of Congressmen Glenn Grothman, Brian Stiehl, Tom Tiffany, and Senator Ron Johnson. We met with their staffers (the ones who really advise them on the issues) because Congress was not in session. The week had been switched with the one before because of King Charles' visit to the US. But our meetings were very productive! Following are the issues we spoke to them about while asking for their support.

HR 1897 - Looking for support when it reaches the House to modernize the Endangered Species Act and then support when it reaches the Senate. It will promote collaboration with landowners, conservationists, and the sporting community for the recovery of species. The bill also restores Congressional intent for importing foreign species. It is currently waiting House floor consideration.

HR 845 - The Pet & Livestock Protection Act requires the Secretary of the Interior to reissue regulations removing the gray wolf from the Endangered & Threatened Species lists. The bill has passed the house and is currently in Senate committee.

HR556 - Protecting Hunters and Anglers Act would prohibit the banning of lead ammunition on public lands without sufficient scientific justification. This bill passed the House in March and sits in Senate committee.

HR 6251 - The Marine Mammal Protection Act amendment would allow importation of polar bear trophies taken in approved guided



hunts in Canada before May 15TH, 2008, the date when the polar bear was listed as threatened under the ESA. Forty-one U.S. hunters lawfully hunted polar bear just prior to that date but with the close timing they were blocked from importing their trophies. We asked the Congressmen and Senator Johnson for support on this bill.

Support EAIJA reform - Reform of the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAIJA), which has allowed wealthy non-profits to collect attorney's fees for suing the federal government and obstructing habitat and wildlife management actions. Imagine that, the government gives them money to sue the government, what a joke (Sorry, personal comment there). Congressman Rulli has introduced a bill, the Stop Serial Litigation Act of 2026. There was a lot of interest by the Congressmen's offices and Patrick at Senator Johnson's office to support this upcoming bill.

HR281 - The Grizzly Bear State Management Act requires the Secretary of the Interior to reissue regulations removing the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem population of grizzly bears from the Endangered Species list. This bill is on the House calendar and awaiting consideration.

It was a great four days which I look forward to every year. Our Hunter Embassy, just two blocks from the Capitol is a beautiful historic building which is being put to amazing use, like educational luncheons for staffers to get more info on a bill, fundraisers for Congressmen and Senators, and a host of other events. It is SCI's greatest acquisition!

I know this was a bit long, but it gives you just a small idea of what our hard-working D.C. office does for us!

As always, shoot straight, be well, and God bless!

Illinois & Chicago Chapter Hosts First Hunters' Happy Hour

by Annette Jones, Secretary

The Illinois & Chicago Chapter hosted its inaugural Hunters' Happy Hour on Thursday, March 26, 2026, at Shoeless Joe's Ale House & Grille in Addison, Illinois. In 2025, we surveyed our members about their preferences for upcoming events. Many expressed interest in smaller-scale gatherings where they could socialize more closely with fellow chapter members. Inspired by this feedback, our chapter adopted the concept of Hunters' Happy Hour that was introduced at the Chapter Leadership Training last August at Legends Ranch in Bitely, Michigan.

Hunters' Happy Hour is designed as a casual event, bringing together outdoorsmen and women to connect with each other and the chapter. The aim is to create an inviting atmosphere where friends and family who share an interest in conservation, hunting, and the outdoors can enjoy an evening together.

Despite tornado and severe thunderstorm warnings on March 26, nothing deterred our members from attending. The evening offered a relaxed setting for conversation, food and drinks, camaraderie, door prizes, and storytelling. Members brought along friends and family, resulting in a few new memberships.

Feedback after the event was enthusiastic. Members appreciated the opportunity to reconnect in a smaller group, noting that larger events often

make it difficult to catch up with others. Several attendees thanked the Board of Directors for listening to member input and organizing an event that reflected their input. Members are looking

forward to our next Hunter's Happy Hour Wednesday, November 11, 2026, at Shoeless Joe's Ale House & Grille in Addison, Illinois.



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Badgerland Chapter Report

by Randy Mayes, President

Are you doing any bird hunting this fall? If so, I find one of the best ways to practice is doing a few rounds of sporting clays. Shooting regular, hand thrown clay pigeons or even shooting trap are still good for honing your skills but I think clays are about as close as you can get to hunting situations.

In a typical clays course, there is just about any angle of shot that you can imagine. When sitting in a duck marsh or pounding the brush for pheasants, you just never know where the bird will come from. Not only does it help hone your shooting skills for the upcoming seasons, but it's also just plain fun!

The Badgerland Chapter will hold it's annual "Shoot for Adventure" Saturday, August 1st. It will be at the Rio Conservation Club in Rio. This is NOT a competitive clays shoot. This is a fun shoot for ALL ages and abilities. We will have not only a very well laid out sporting clays course but some unique and fun "shooting games." I'm not sure just what games they have lined up for us this year but often we will have some such as "Poison Bird," "Running Rabbit," and "Long Bird,"

You will get tickets for the birds you break in your clays shooting as well as the shooting games. You can put those



tickets in buckets for a variety of raffles which will be drawn mid-afternoon. We will also be drawing our "Big Five" raffle that afternoon. Lunch will be available at the clubhouse. Come join us for a fun afternoon August 1st!

Illinois & Chicago Chapter Report

by Dale Rimkus, President

We're about halfway through 2026 and it's been a very good year for SCI and the Illinois & Chicago Chapter. We started the year with a great Region 16 meeting in January hosted by our wonderful Regional Representative Charmaine Wargolet. We always look forward to these very informative meetings when we get to share information and touch base with our colleagues in the other Region 16 chapters.

In February we went to another record-breaking SCI Convention in Nashville. It is an experience like no other to see so many exhibitors, hunters, conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts, but the best part is meeting new friends and reconnecting with old acquaintances in the world's best hunting and outdoors show.

One of the highlights is our annual Chapter Dinner where chapter donors and members get together for a memorable evening of warmth and camaraderie.

In March we held our first Hunters Happy Hour, a casual get-together where our members gather to share

stories, meet other members, enjoy food and drink, and maybe win a door prize.

Then in April we held our 54th annual fundraiser banquet. It was a red, white and blue event full of fun and celebration of our nation's 250th birthday! Our board of directors worked hard to put on our best banquet ever! All the attendees joined in the patriotic spirit of the evening, from the pledge of allegiance all the way through to the final raffle drawing.

In May our chapter representatives attended the SCI Board Meeting in Washington, DC. The highlight was Lobby Day, when we all went to Capitol Hill to meet with US Representatives and Senators. It is an honor and a profound duty for us to carry the message of all hunters to the offices of the elected officials who make our laws. We were all welcomed at the Armand and Mary Brachman Advocacy Center, better known by the name President Trump gave it, "The Hunters Embassy." All hunters and conservationists, not just SCI members, should know that we have this valuable resource, just two blocks from Capitol Hill, as the front line for educating and lobbying the



nation's leaders to protect the rights of hunters everywhere.

The rest of the year will be busy for our chapter, with more Hunters Happy Hours, our Fall Shoot and Family Event, our Annual Christmas Brunch, and more! So, if you aren't already, now is the time to get involved with your chapter. You'll be happy you did!

Sensory Trailer Parking Needed

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Northeast Wisconsin Chapter Report

by Kathryn Thede, President

As summer begins to wind down and we find fall quickly approaching, we are reminded of how quickly time passes. This past year I was able to be part of a Hunter's Safety class which certified about 45 new hunters into hopefully a lifetime of hunting adventures. There were also about 10 new bow hunters that became certified. To see the excitement on their faces, the careful eagerness as they show that they know the skills, and the relief that was sighed as their tests were completed and handed back showing they passed is something I am so grateful to be a part of on their journey.

I am looking forward to seeing pictures of their future harvests. I encouraged them to take and show me pictures if they see me out in the community. I have had several students approach me at school, where I work, to tell me that they can't wait to hunt. I got to see some pictures of pretty excited hunters with their turkeys! If you have the opportunity to mentor someone's

hunting career, do it! It is seriously one of the most rewarding, memorable experiences!

With the upcoming hunting seasons almost here, I hope you've done some scouting, your guns and bows are sighted in, your bear bait is getting hit (fingers crossed, I drew a tag this year), and that there is lots of memory available on your camera to capture all those special moments that are just waiting to happen. Remember sometimes the best memories happen not in the actual moment but the time leading up to and the events following.

Soon there will be some important elections in Wisconsin. Here is your friendly reminder to research the candidates, where they stand on the issues that matter most to you, and to remember that you not only have the right to vote, but the obligation. Many of the rights we have, and some we don't, are directly the cause or effect of votes that have been made. So please take the time, do the research, encourage those you know to do the



same, and get out there, make sure your voice is heard.

Keep your eyes open for the yellow postcard in the mail. We have some pretty amazing member meetings planned and would love to have you join us! This past fiscal year we helped fund some great projects. If you know of a worthy cause, please have them visit our website www.newisci.org and apply for project funding. Our website is also the best way to stay current with what our chapter is working on. As always, please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or concerns and I will do my best to help get answers or resolutions. Good luck when you hit the stand or blind and please share the pictures with me!

Wisconsin Chapter Report

by Dean LePoidevin, President

The photo here is from a recent trip to Spain in search of Roe Deer and Mouflon Ram. The hunt was obtained via live auction at our annual convention in 2025. After seeing the photo, my son replied it was "a little creepy how you made the Mouflon smile" for the photo. Kids.



Back in May I was fortunate to attend the annual SCI Lobby Day and Election at the national SCI board meeting in Washington DC. SCI WI regional representative Charmaine Wargolet, SCI WI president-elect Monte Whiteaker, and I joined chapter leaders and SCI committee members as we marched to the Hill in DC and engaged US senators and representatives in discussion on topics important to every conservationist.

As a member of the SCI Election Committee, I helped organize and execute the election of SCI president, vice president, directors at large, and regional representatives. The entire process, including hearing from each of the candidates, went remarkably well. Using a web-based voting app, the votes were quickly tabulated and reported to the SCI national board members in attendance and a few voting from home. It is very gratifying to be part of such an efficient process. Congratulations to all the winners, including our own Charmaine Wargolet who, along with her ongoing regional representative position, was elected to the SCI national audit committee.

I've often said that the hunt itself is only one part of the adventure, whether

close to home or halfway around the world. Just as memorable are the landscapes, the history, the cuisine, and the people that bring the culture to life. In Spain, my experience included attending a bullfight in Madrid during the annual San Isidro festival—an unforgettable glimpse into a tradition unlike anything I had seen before.

When you receive this issue, you should have plenty of time to register for the 37th Annual Sporting Clays event, held at Wern Valley Sportsmen's Club in Waukesha. Always a great time, as it includes shooting a round of clays, lunch, and awards to the top men's, women's, and youth shooters. There will also be raffle prizes in which you may



take part. Go to <https://sciwi.org/event/sporting-clays-outing-4/> for more details, to register, or to become an event or station sponsor.

A recent SCI WI member survey asked questions surrounding our monthly meeting and why members choose to attend. Given the choice between supporting the chapter, partaking in the raffle, visiting with fellow hunters, and a few other reasons, participants overwhelmingly chose the opportunity to visit with other members about hunting as their reason to attend. In past surveys, hearing the speaker and evening entertainment were the primary motivators. This time, sharing hunting experiences with other members rose to the top, which for this member is just one of the many reasons why joining SCI WI and attending one of the many member events makes it all a rewarding effort.

After two years as president of the SCI Wisconsin Chapter, it's time to



welcome incoming president Monte Whiteaker as the new chapter leader, who began his tenure July first. Monte brings many years of chapter leadership to the presidency, having served as president-elect for our chapter and having held several leadership positions with the Southeast WI Bowhunters Chapter. The Wisconsin Chapter is in very good hands as I'm sure he will quickly make his mark in the weeks and months to come. Welcome Monte!

Bear Attacks in Japan

by Conservation Frontlines

In 2025, Japan recorded its deadliest year on record for bear attacks, with 11 people killed and more than 100 injured. According to the Environment Ministry, this is the highest toll since data collection began in 2006.

Once secretive forest dwellers, Asiatic black and brown bears are now appearing in supermarkets, schoolyards, and city streets across northern and central Japan.

Japan's rural population is aging fast, and entire farming villages are vanishing. As fields go fallow and homes sit empty, the forest reclaims what people once maintained – and bears follow. Bears now move freely into areas where people used to keep them at bay.

In 1975 Japan issued more than 517,800 hunting licenses, but by 2020 the number had dropped to 218,500, with about 60% of license-holders aged 60 or over. Over this timeframe, Japan's bear populations have been climbing. The Asiatic black bear alone has risen from roughly 15,000 in 2012 to about 44,000 today.

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In Memoriam:

ALLEN ODIET

We recently learned the sad news of the passing of Allen Odiet, a great friend and member of the Illinois & Chicago Chapter. Allen was a life-long hunter with a great passion for wildlife



conservation and hunters' rights. For more than 40 years, Allen was a member of SCI, and a life member for 30 years. He served on the chapter Board of Directors for more than 29 years. He served as Chapter President three times and held the offices of Vice-President and Treasurer multiple times. Allen hunted countless times in the U.S., Canada, Argentina, and Africa. Allen always enjoyed golf in the summer, but when the air turned crisp with the hint of fall, Allen put his clubs away and prepared his rifles for the hunting season. He enjoyed everything about the outdoors, but especially the annual SCI Convention, the



chapter fundraiser banquets, and the many, many friends he made through SCI. The Illinois & Chicago Chapter was proud to honor Allen Odiet last year as a member of the inaugural class of inductees into our Chapter's Hall of Fame. Allen was not just a great friend; he was also an inspiration to everyone who came to know him. He will be missed.

Bison Genetics Remove Disease Barrier

by Conservation Frontlines

Bison are having a moment across the American West. From a wild bison crossing state lines from Utah into Colorado, to new legislation making the species fully protected within the state, public attention has returned to an animal once central to North American ecosystems. And science is reshaping what large-scale bison restoration can achieve.

At Colorado State University, reproductive and veterinary science is removing one of the longest-standing obstacles to bison conservation: brucellosis. The bacterial disease, historically associated with bison descended from Yellowstone National Park herds, has restricted where bison could be relocated due to concerns about livestock transmission. While actual transmission risk is low, regulatory limits have constrained restoration efforts for decades.

That barrier is now changing. CSU researchers successfully developed brucellosis-free bison by selectively managing reproductive material from Yellowstone-descended animals. The result is a herd that retains its wild

genetic lineage while meeting health standards required for relocation beyond tightly controlled zones. These disease-free bison are already being transferred to other states to support restoration projects and strengthen overall population resilience.

Ecological implications extend



beyond population numbers. Bison function as a keystone grassland species. Their grazing patterns, movement, and soil disturbance promote plant diversity, improve nutrient cycling, and create habitat structure that supports insects, birds, and small mammals. Removing disease constraints allows bison to resume these roles across restored prairie

landscapes rather than remaining isolated within a handful of protected areas.

Recent climate modeling suggests that much of the Northern Great Plains will face warmer temperatures, increased drought, and greater weather variability, trends that are expected to undermine the long-term ecological and economic viability of conventional agricultural systems. A study published in *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* found that these changes disproportionately affect communities whose livelihoods depend directly on marginal prairie lands, particularly Native American nations whose reservations often encompass large but environmentally constrained landscapes. In this context, bison restoration offers a functional alternative. As ecosystem engineers, bison shape plant communities, improve soil structure, and enhance landscape resilience to climate stress. Indigenous-led bison restoration initiatives are demonstrating how species recovery can support both ecological function and long-term land stewardship capacity, aligning conservation outcomes with the realities of a changing climate.



Tim Gonyer knows the joy of mentoring young ladies like his daughter Ella, 10, with her Barron County, Wisconsin whitetail.



Walker Bachmann, 13, of Genesee put meat on the family's table with his first turkey, a 22-pounder from his grandparents' Jefferson County land. A well-rounded student athlete, his activities include competing on the Lightning Shooting Sports Team. His mom, Jen, is WI SCI Office Manager. Walker's wild turkey had two beards, 10.5 inches and 8.5 inches.

Hunt Report:

Nebraska Turkey Hotspot

by Randy Mayes

My friend Todd and I do a lot of hunting together. He has probably taken more turkeys than anyone I know. I believe they have all been the Eastern variety. We have been talking about doing a hunt for Merriam's wild turkey for years.

A while back, he saw an episode of "Grace, Camo & Lace" on TV. They were bowhunting turkeys with Heritage Outfitters in Nebraska. That pretty much started the ball rolling. After a

few checks on references and a chat with the outfitter, we were booked!

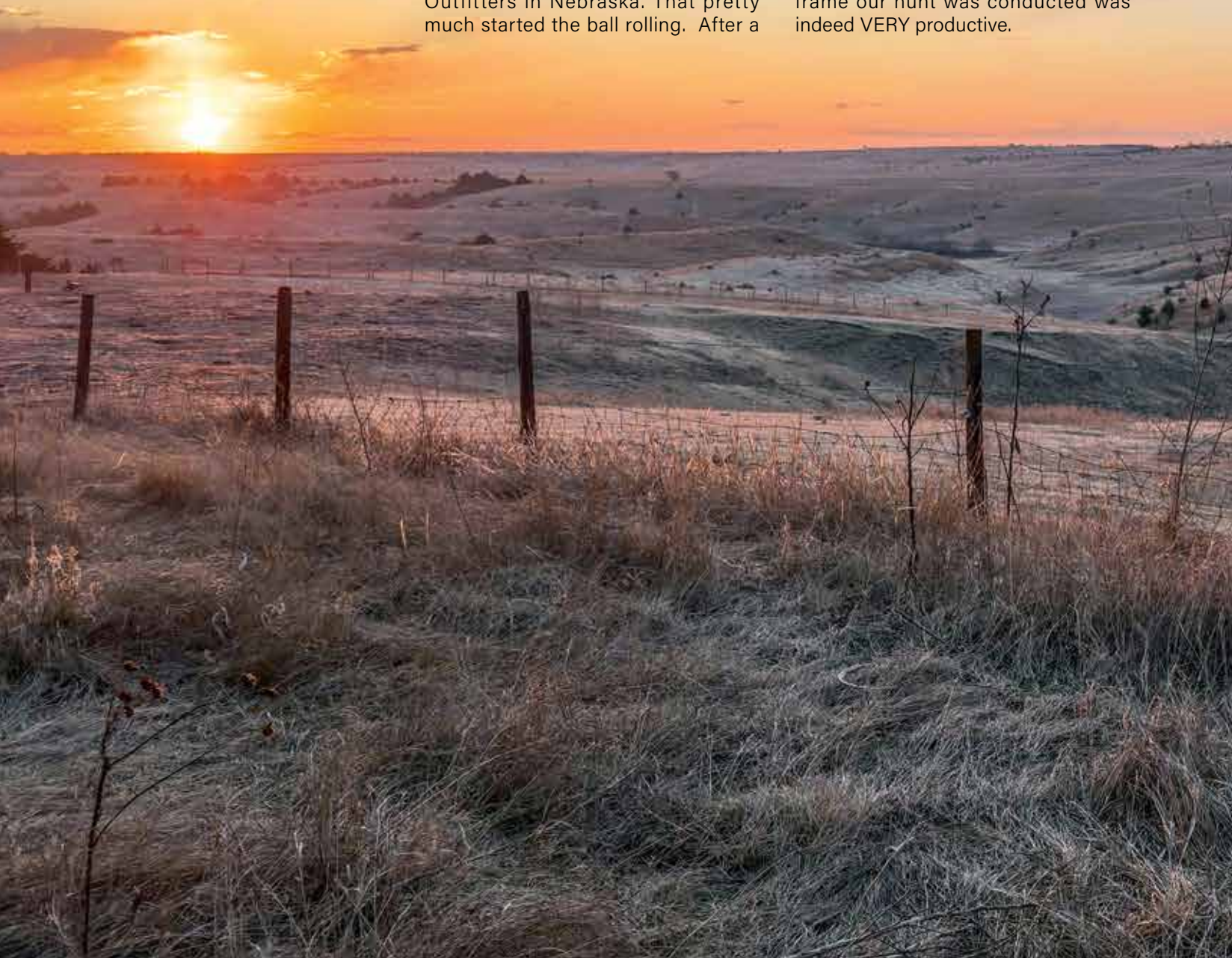
Our hunt took place May 1-3, 2026. The owner, Brady Thomas, said he liked hunting at this time as the birds have broken up into smaller groups and many of the hens have started nesting more, causing the toms to often be receptive to calling and decoying. I don't know what the earlier hunts are like, but I can certainly say that the time frame our hunt was conducted was indeed VERY productive.

There were five in our group from Wisconsin. If you have a group of about five or six, you are usually the only ones in camp. The hunt is typically two or three hunters per guide.

The first morning, Todd and I were hunting together in a blind. Brady dropped us off and then took Mike, one

of the other hunters in our group, to a different property and hunted with him. We got all set up in the dark. Not long after we got our decoys out and were all set in the blind, we heard our first gobble. It was REALLY close! Probably 50 yards or so. There were two toms and they gobbled quite a bit. Not long

after the start of shooting time, the two toms pitched down to about 45 yards away. They were well within shotgun range, but I only had a bow while Todd had a shotgun. My shot preference with turkeys is 25 yards or less as they have a fairly small kill zone and they are often moving.





Richard's 1st



Jeremy's 1st bird

Three hens then flew down and started drawing the toms away from us. A few purrs on my slate call changed their interest from the "real girls" to our "look-alikes." They turned our way and strutted in to about 20 yards. I was able to draw back and settle in on the closest bird. I got what appeared to be a pretty good shot and shortly thereafter Todd leveled the other tom. After the dust finally settled, Todd and I each had the first bird of our two-bird limit. Although there is a two-bird limit, you can only take one bird per day.

After texting Brady to let him know we were done for the day, he replied a short while later to let us know that Mike had filled his tag as well! Not long after we got our birds, we heard from the other guide that Jeremy (Todd's son) and Richard (Jeremy's Father-In Law) filled their tags too!

After taking some group photos and sharing stories, we were off for an absolutely delicious breakfast made by Jen, who is Heritage Outfitters' chef.

Everything Jen made was from scratch. We would have two big meals per day. A mid-morning breakfast and



I would say that 10 birds for 5 hunters in 3 days is pretty good! We actually had 9 of the 10 birds after the second morning!

I was happily surprised at how well the entire hunt went. Brady and Danny were awesome guides, and Jen was a GREAT cook! The guides were very knowledgeable AND personable! I would give all aspects of this hunt VERY high marks! Heritage Outfitters' web site is www.heritageoutfittersne.com.



Mike-left, Randy-middle, Todd-right — first birds

an early evening supper. My guess would be that most people who come to Heritage Outfitters don't weigh the same when they leave as when they came! I know I didn't!

Most of us spent the rest of the day fishing in a small, nearby lake catching some nice trout! This was an added bonus and a pleasant surprise!

After the second morning hunt, everyone had filled up on their second tag except me. I was the only bowhunter in our group, so I was a little "handicapped." My handicap had proven to be just that on a second

evening hunt in which I had TWO missed shots at a tom! I won't bore you with excuses. I should have connected but hey, "stuff" happens!

The next morning the birds didn't cooperate. After another wonderful breakfast, Brady dropped me off in a blind a little after noon. About an hour later, I had a tom that "read the script" and came strutting into my decoy. After a solid shot, I was texting Brady to come and pick me up as I was done!



Public Land



Supper



Jeremy -left and Richard- right 2nd birds



Cayden Splinter, Justin Wilson and Tim Pergande had DIY success on Nebraska public land.

Andryk Talks the Talk, Walks the Walk

by Mark LaBarbera

When it comes to mentoring new hunters, Tim Andryk knows how to talk turkey, and he walks the walk, or should we say, struts?

Like many SCI members who are excellent turkey hunters and also great mentors, Andryk simply enjoys helping new hunters of all ages discover the excitement of hunting wild turkeys in

Wisconsin. While some folks crow about the declining number of hunters, Andryk makes time to do his part to reverse or at least slow that trend. And while some hunters don't give a hoot because they see short-term benefits of less crowded fields and forests, Andryk gobbles up every opportunity to do what's best for the long term.

He did it again in May.

Just hours before needing to depart home to fulfill his volunteer duties as a delegate for the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, he squeezed in a few more hours mentoring a new turkey hunter. Here's a photo of Andryk, right, with his adult student Pat Godar, a graduate of a Learn to Hunt Turkeys program sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.



Humanitarian:

Serving Others

by Mark LaBarbera

When we pause to listen, we discover nuggets that glisten. I learned a few hidden gems when I listened closely to two key contributors to the success of Calin's Wish, the recent bear hunting adventure for cancer patient Calin Volsenek. Turns out, fulfilling Calin's Wish also had healing power for Troy Piotrowski and Joe McGrath.

Troy owns New Life Taxidermy, an appropriate name for a number of reasons. Yes, he breathes new life into his work. Dead animals become living memories. And when he delivered Calin's beautifully mounted bear in record turn-around time, Troy and his team stirred new life energy in Calin.

Amanda Bestul was a key to finishing the bear mount quickly so Calin could have extra time to enjoy the mount and relive the adventure that was only a wish a short eight or nine months earlier. Another key on the New Life team was Joe McGrath, whose story with Troy was one of those glistening nuggets. Together, these two gems have served others for decades. Their story together could have easily been lost

or overlooked in the shadows of spotlights focused on Calin's Wish. But, in fact, it was their humanitarian service to Calin that caught our interest and curiosity, which then uncovered this back story that might otherwise have been lost amidst their humility and focus on serving others.

It's a story about the love of the outdoors and two lives brought together through art, music, friendship and service.

Joseph (Joe) McGrath was born at the Great Lakes Naval Base, Lake County, Illinois. The son of an Air Force career Sergeant deployed in WWII to the European Theater and later to the Korean War, Joe was raised on a dairy farm near Chilton, Wisconsin. He received an ROTC commission at UW-Oshkosh as a 2nd Lieutenant in May 1978 and attended the Army Field

Artillery Officer Basic Course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. His initial active-duty assignment was with the 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. Joe served in the Army for 35 years and retired as a Lt. Colonel. He is a Grandson of the American

Revolution through three bloodlines with one ancestor being present at the Battle of Yorktown where General Cornwallis surrendered to General George Washington. His more recent Great (2nd) Grandfather served in the

1st WI Cavalry, Civil War and rode with the Regiment across Georgia in 1865 to capture Jefferson Davis.



To see him work humbly on Calin's black bear mount, you wouldn't know that Joe is highly decorated with the Bronze Star, Combat Action Badge, Meritorious Service and Army Commendation Medals in addition to many other medals and citations. He is recognized in the Fort McCoy Military Academy Hall of Fame, is honored as a Legion of Hoosier Heroes (IN) recipient from active duty with the 76th Infantry Brigade in Afghanistan, and his efforts as Chief Operations Officer for the Warrant Officer Candidate School. Joe received his Bachelor of Science in Geology at UW-Oshkosh and worked for Dow Chemical while serving in Reserve and National Guard assignments. Upon returning to Wisconsin in 1998 after 20 years of various assignments and command positions, Joe



left the Army Reserve to join the WI Army National Guard. It was there that Joe was activated and deployed several times to Nicaragua, Afghanistan, plus other middle eastern locations.

Joe and Troy Pietrowski became acquainted through the Wisconsin Taxidermy Association around 2005 to 2010. They were early artists struggling to better their art through the mentoring, instruction, and collaboration with fellow artists in this wonderful organization. Both had attended Rinehart Taxidermy Schools. They become great friends.

Troy was impressed by Joe's core values, his personality and their shared love of country and service. Troy had a reputation for dedicating time and service for fellow Americans and charity organizations. He is a staunch patriot who truly emulates the great American Spirit!

Troy and Joe then began working together in 2016 at the Taxidermy Store in Amherst. It was there that they began major and significant projects in the art of taxidermy including herds of buffalo, moose, exotics, and store circumference habitat compositions for Cabela's and Bass Pro Shops. They worked there under proprietors Martin and Lynn Bonach. They did reindeer pairs for



Santa displays for several Cabela's stores around the nation. Many other mounts were done for estates, museums, and commercial outlet giants over the next couple years. Some were even created for commercial advertising and cinema productions, including full-size buffalo, giraffe, double hump camel, moose, reindeer, and exotics.

After Troy moved to his own New Life Taxidermy business, he invited Joe to help breathe new life into Calin's 2025 Wisconsin black bear. Seeing Calin's eyes open wide and his smile stretch from ear to ear warmed everyone's soul

in early 2026 and reinforced the power of serving others.

It was less than two years earlier when Joe signed up for a Guitars for Veterans program designed to reduce or eliminate the lingering stress of combat experiences. He and at-risk veterans subject to high suicide rates sought relief in guitar lessons, fellowship, and support networks. Upon graduation, vets often perform at open mic events promoted to aid in continued meditation and advancement of the art.

No surprise, Troy Pietrowski stepped up to encourage Joe's participation. Troy was already a successful musician and performer, often helping at fund-raising events and other venues. With no pressure, but a lot of welcoming encouragement, Troy invited Joe to perform with him and his group on several occasions. Joe says he enjoys and improves his skills and relaxation due to these experiences.

And Joe has found comfort in the outdoors, including special turkey hunts with Troy. Their story of friendship, adventure, and service also serves as inspiration for others, including those of us who might have never discovered these gems if not for fulfilling Calin's Wish.

Why Pittman-Robertson Conservation Funding Works

by Conservation Frontlines

Wildlife conservation in North America doesn't succeed because of plans or promises. It works when funding is stable enough to support management year after year.

The Pittman-Robertson Act created one of the most durable conservation funding systems by tying wildlife management to a dedicated revenue source. Since 1937, sportsmen and sportswomen have funded this system through excise taxes on firearms and ammunition, with revenue directed to state wildlife agencies.

Unlike general budget appropriations, Pittman-Robertson funds are congressionally delegated by law. In plain terms, the money is legally set aside for wildlife conservation and cannot be redirected elsewhere. That protection keeps wildlife funding insulated from annual budget negotiations and political shifts.

Because the funding is predictable, states receive support each year through a formula tied to land area and participation in certified wildlife programs. This consistency allows agencies to plan multi-year projects instead of relying on short-term grants or uncertain funding cycles.

Many conservation organizations point to this stability as a key reason the system works. SCI has described the Pittman-Robertson Act as a foundational pillar of American conservation, noting that investments through the program sustain wetlands, wildlife, and long-term habitat conditions.

Those funds support population monitoring, habitat management, access improvements, and safety education. States are required to match federal dollars and report how funds are used, creating a built-in link between revenue, responsibility, and measurable outcomes.

Accountability is part of the structure, not an afterthought.

Effective wildlife conservation depends on stable, legally protected funding tied to clear responsibility. The Pittman-Robertson Act provides a working example of this structure, supporting long-term planning, consistent monitoring, and accountable management through a dedicated funding system established in law.



Photo courtesy Bob Haase

Dogs Over Drones

by Mark LaBarbera

After the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Sports Show, Southern Wisconsin's Scott Gagliano shared his experiences and strong opinions about helping hunters find lost deer after the shot.

He owns and operates Max's Deer Recovery & Drone Services from his home in Colgate. His business is named after his Labrador retriever, Max, who has earned more than a normal dog's share of Milk Bones for all of the "lost" whitetails he has recovered throughout years of service. You'll see Max and his master in action on this year's "Deer Hunt Wisconsin," the award-winning annual TV special hosted by SCI member Dan Small of Westby.

Gagliano smiled as he shared stories that have helped shape his opinions about dogs versus drones.

"Scott, this is Joe," the story began. "My son Owen just shot a deer, and we think he hit it a little bit back. We can't find it. I know you're busy at this time of year, but could you bring Max and help us find the kid's deer?"

Gagliano knew the family and had built two homes for them during his normal workdays as a builder.

"I think the son was nine or 10 at the time," Gagliano recalled. "We started tracking this thing and, you know, Max is young, about two years old, at this time. They had their whole family there; their four kids and mom and dad and my 19-year-old son was with me, and I'm, like, 'Well why don't you guys just stay back.'"

Gagliano learned early in his tracking career that it is best to remove all distractions so the dog can focus on trailing and finding the deer.



"After he's done his job then you can do all the hugs and kisses you want."

Gagliano said one of his rules to keep the dog focused is that no one can touch or even talk to the dog because "if it's listening, it's distracted, and not doing its job," so Max's owner tries to keep others at a respectable distance during recoveries. Even the master rarely talks as the dog works a scent. When he does talk, Gagliano says he purposely tries to speak softly while Max does his job.

"I told my son to stay far enough back with the group so he can just see me and move when I move. Max is on a 30-foot lead cord and doing good, you know. I'm trusting him and believing in his nose as he focuses on the deer's scent."

The underbrush was thick. About 450 yards or so into the trailing, Gagliano said, "Suddenly Max turned a corner in heavy cover. I couldn't see Max, but I noticed the leash just went completely limp. I know that 99% of the time that means he's standing on the deer. Maybe the other 1% of the time would be either there's blood on the ground or something where he stopped to sniff a little extra. Sometimes he does that, but those usually are like two seconds where he'll stop sniff, sniff, sniff, and then he'll go again.

Was this a 99-percenter?
"Sure enough," Gagliano smiled, "I walk up on Max and the dead deer. Owen and his parents, and my son, couldn't see us at that point but they said they could hear me heaping praise on my dog."

The group caught up and joined the chorus.

"Good dog!"
"That a boy!"
"Nice work, Max!"
Gagliano was moved by what he saw next.

"So anyways, you know, Max he gets all jacked up when he finds the



deer. He's all excited. He knows he does his job for me, but he also knows he's doing a job for the other people that are there. I got this on GoPro and you can just see Max get all excited again to show these people what he just did! That's just how Max operates. He's a pleaser. It doesn't matter if its men, kids or women, he wants to please. He can sense the excitement from the people. That's why he gets excited, because he can sense their excitement."

Even with all of the excitement of finding his deer, young Owen remembered the rules about touching the dog.

Gagliano teared up a little as he recalled, "The kid looked at Max and looked at me to ask, 'Can I give him a hug?' I was moved. That's pretty cool. Very nice. And I've had that happen again and again since that time. They want to pet Max and show their gratitude. It's a special part of helping kids and adults recover their deer."

Nobody asks to hug a drone.

Gagliano owns both but he overwhelmingly prefers using the dog.

"I got the drone because that's all people talked about," he said. "I know I lost business before getting the drone because people think it's better, but it's not. In my opinion, a good dog and handler on the ground add so much more to the overall experience."



He said he did 54 "tracks" last year and feels like he could have done 100.

"Having the drone opens more doors and gives me a chance to teach hunters about the value of tracking with the dog. Seeing the dog work adds to the experience, and they become believers. Gagliano said, "Sure, drones and dogs each have their pros and cons, but the only con I can think of for dogs is that people think you're leaving scent or moving other deer. I guarantee when the drone doesn't find your deer, you'll want to go in there with the dog, and he'll find it."

He doesn't oppose technology; he just prefers the natural abilities of dogs. As long as it's legal, he's fine with anything that helps prevent losing deer. But he does say, "Thinking technology is going to outwit the dog's nose is wrong. There's no way. Look at how technology has done against drug sniffing canines. Dogs can still smell the drugs in ways we don't understand. A good analogy I remember is that it's like when you walk into somebody's house and they're cooking pizza. We, as humans, smell pizza. A dog goes into the house and smells each and every thing on that pizza. It's like that with the dog being able to stay on the track of one deer's blood and not go off on some

other deer's scent trail. It just blows my mind."

He added that some people think drones can cover more types of terrain, but said, "There's absolutely no terrain that the dogs can't handle. So, in my opinion, there's no reason you have to use a drone."

Others may disagree about the value of drones versus dogs, especially when you add thermal imaging capabilities. Beneath Gagliano's arguments, what really comes through is his love for dogs and what they add to the overall experience.

And he said things have changed a little over the years as his dog got older. "When Max was young, we rarely talked and I spoke softly. We kept the talking to tracking-related stuff only. Once in a while now, I'll talk to him, but that's rare. If he's working, he's working, and you just let him do his job. Now he's older and now he knows what he's doing, and he doesn't care how many people are there, and he doesn't care if you're talking about your vacation from five years ago. He's almost at a point where he doesn't even listen to me anymore when he's focused on a scent. Sometimes it's like he almost phases me out as if to say, 'You know dad, I'm going to find this deer, so just shut up and let me do my job.'"

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SCI-Sponsored DHWTV Wins Top Honors

The "Deer Hunt Wisconsin 2025" TV special won "Award of Excellence" top honors in the Best of the Midwest Media Fest competition that includes hundreds of entries from nine states. Winning the equivalent of Gold or Silver medals every year or "Best of Show" has become as common place as DHWTV's long list of awards from the Outdoor Writers Association of America and the Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers annual competitions, also against the biggest names in outdoor television production."

"It's easy to take for granted but this is a great way for all of us to very affordably promote a positive image of hunters and a pro-hunting, pro-conservation message," said Charmaine Wargolet, Region 16 Representative for SCI, First for Hunters.

SCI Wisconsin and Badgerland Chapters have been strong supporters of the show, and Northeast Wisconsin SCI joined them in recent years. Sponsoring chapters can also link the show online via their websites and play it at fundraisers or other gatherings. Members of sponsoring chapters or employees of other sponsors again this year can share deer hunting photos and videos for DHWTV before August 31.



Dan Small and Mark LaBarbera were in northern Wisconsin hunting and fishing this spring, so they did not attend the Best of the Midwest awards ceremonies, but here's a photo from their younger years!

USA Ventures d/b/a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Sports Show renewed and collaborated on cross-promotions that reached out to avid hunters and anglers, plus special efforts to engage

women and youth. The sports show's Stephen Buzza has already taken action to create a Women's Advisory Council suggested by DHWTV Co-Executive Producer Mark LaBarbera. He and partner Dan Small are longtime SCI members nationally and locally, so they are familiar and easy to work with, hence Wargolet's note about being taking for granted. Small has been hosting and executive producing the show for nearly 40 years. In recent decades he has helped the Milwaukee Sports Show coordinate youth and family activities that include West Town Archery and Daniel Boone Conservation Club BB gun ranges, Trout Unlimited fly-tying, Wisconsin Hunter Education Instructors Association (WHEIA) shooting range, and other activities, plus SCI-supported Touch of the Wild sensory safari trailers owned and operated by the volunteer-based nonprofit Outdoor Heritage Education Center group. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources professionals add to the fun learning stations. The Milwaukee Sports Show also added OHEC's "Explore Bowfishing" initiative again this year with the Rough Fish Assassins' shooting trailer.

SCI chapters support many of those groups, separate from their ongoing DHWTV sponsorships, and OHEC is



Wearing their familiar Stormy Kromers, host and SCI member Dan Small and son Jon are two of the most trusted professionals in the outdoor community.

looking for sponsors of its "Explore Archery/Bowhunting/Bowfishing" program.

"We're proud to be SCI members and we appreciate the support from chapter leaders and fellow members," said Small.

Small and LaBarbera said they welcome additional sponsors to be part of this award-winning television production.

Other sponsors include WHEIA, Conservation First Bank (forward-thinking President Scott Freiburger is an avid hunter who also dedicates 3% of bank profits to conservation), Wisconsin Outdoor News, Vortex, Wildlife Research Center, Stormy Kromer, Serpent Arms, Wild Eagle Lodge, and Mayville Engineering Co.

For 2025's show LaBarbera and Small welcomed Alex Weber of First Weber Realtors, an expert in hunting and recreation properties, and a fellow outdoorsman, who has already shared insider tips for members through SCI HUNTERS magazine.

Another new sponsor, Swift Lift, is familiar now to SCI members. The innovative product came to SCI's attention at the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation auction in Washington, DC. Rudi Roeslein and his son Jason, along with Mike Umbdenstock of Roeslein & Associates are avid outdoorsmen and humanitarians. Their main business is engineering, procurement, and construction, including working with the world's largest brewers and can companies, but they are also big into renewables and conservation. And yet they found time to support one employee's design for the Swift Lift and turn it into a source of revenue for that employee's family to cover medical bills. Great product for lifting game into your UTV or vehicle, and a great cause.

As this magazine was going to press, Small said that there are other potential sponsors about to decide on DHWTV 2026, including products that he and LaBarbera discovered at various sports shows where they were volunteering at chapter or OHEC booths. Hjort Blinds is a great example, LaBarbera said, describing how founder TJ Anderson builds these metal blinds and stands to outperform the competition and overcome common problems encountered



Dan Small used his Wisconsin-based Serpent Arm's air shotgun again to fill his 2026 last period turkey tag.

by SCI members during gun and bow seasons in Wisconsin and Illinois.

"We were introduced to Hjort Blinds by Mike Fuge who bought quite a few of them for veteran and other hunts on his Central Wisconsin property," said LaBarbera, adding, "But what impressed us beyond the long-lasting quality was TJ's ability to take an idea or suggestion and, with entrepreneurial speed, build it. A good example is the new comfortable and portable wheelchair adaptable Hjort blind. OHEC is buying one to loan to mobility challenged hunters thanks to Rick Rollo's Big AI's Fund team through SCI Wisconsin Chapter and Pete Papageorge's fellow board members at Pheasants Forever Southeastern Wisconsin Chapter."

Sponsor's names, websites, and logos are featured in DHWTV promo-

tions. SCI members can see their chapters in the credits on public television airings and their commercials in the DHWTV airings on FanDuel Sports North in five states and FanDuel Sports Wisconsin. Previously, those popular networks were known as Fox Sports and then Bally Sports. Same great viewership; different name.

This year's show will air multiple times leading up to the November firearms deer season.

It features a wonderful mix of tips, facts, deer forecast, new rules, CWD update, and heart-warming stories that support youth, our outdoor heritage, and family traditions, while showcasing the hunter's positive role in conservation.

LaBarbera said you can direct questions to MLaBarbera57@icloud.com.

ILLINOIS & CHICAGO CELEBRATES 250TH

by Dale Rimkus

The Illinois & Chicago Chapter held its 54th Annual Fundraiser Banquet in April and the theme was "America Celebrating 250 Years." It was a truly memorable evening and a great success! There was an outstanding array of 37 Live Auction items and over 80 Silent Auction items. There were 28 fine guns to be won on raffles.

The attendees had fun with games like Stick-the-Pig, Plinko, and 100 Squares. The tables were adorned with red, white and blue bouquets, which all went home with happy winners. It was a star-spangled evening as we celebrated 250 years of American independence and honored the proud legacy of hunting and those who continue to uphold it. Hunting is a

tradition rooted in respect - for the land, for wildlife, and for the freedoms we cherish as Americans. We thank all the donors, sponsors, volunteers, board of directors and attendees who support the SCI mission to protect the freedom to hunt and promote wildlife conservation worldwide.



Safari Club International
Illinois & Chicago Chapter
54th Annual Fundraiser & Banquet

AMERICA CELEBRATING 250 YEARS
SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL
ILLINOIS & CHICAGO CHAPTER



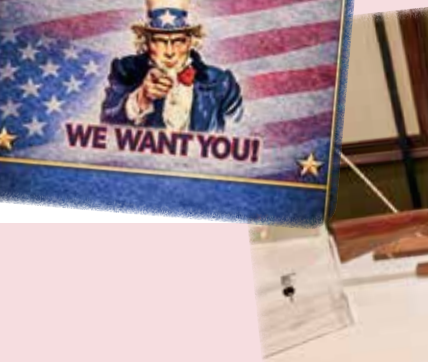
Are you a member yet?

Today you can join SCI and our Chapter for only \$35 for one year!

Safari Club International	\$35.00
Illinois & Chicago Chapter	50
Total	\$35.00

Join Now!

WE WANT YOU!



Badgerland's Sensory Safari

by Mark LaBarbera

SCI Badgerland Chapter volunteers debuted the newly remodeled Sensory Safari at the Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo in Poynette at the DNR's MacKenzie Environmental Center where more students visited the trailer than any other venue during the year.

Members Mark and Karen Peters have stepped up to help Steve Cripps, Scott McConnell, John Martinson, Paul Baker, Dale Hudack and other chapter volunteers who have built, transported and hosted the chapter's Sensory Safari for years. Vice President Joe Koback added his years of Sensory Safari education experience gained from years of overseeing the former SCI Central Wisconsin Chapter's trailer. He also

hauled the heavy trailer with his personal truck, a key factor in getting the SCI Badgerland education unit to where students and teachers could enjoy it. As you can see from the photos here, the trailer was a popular attraction for students.

Karen said, "It was a fun event, and the kids seemed to enjoy it and the trailer. The elephant skull was a huge hit and sparked lots of conversation. Not unexpectedly, the furs on the table were super popular. This was the place to be!"

She shared a special shout out to her fellow members: "John for tirelessly chatting up the furs and keeping track of the furs on the table. Paul for tirelessly stationing himself inside the trailer chatting up the kids, monitoring for antler theft, and being our 'fact checker' (no fake news allowed at this event). Just in

case you did not know tigers kill between 50-80 people per year in India, and 418 people were killed between 2020 and 2025. Scott for being the safety officer (tennis ball on elk) and accessibility officer (moving the elephant skull 90 degrees to allow for wheelchair access). Steve for the duct tape and for making some really great suggestions for more improvements/repairs. Great to have that 'institutional memory' and critical eye!"

She also recognized her husband Mark for being the liaison with the DNR and Wisconsin Trappers Assoc. for additional fur acquisitions.

Almost everything went well, she said, except for the Wednesday night unexplained gusts of wind that took out the canopies.



OHEC Donates Mounts
 SCI Badgerland Chapter's Dale Hudack and his new puppy picked up a beautiful life-size Rocky Mountain Goat and wild turkey from the Outdoor Heritage Education Center for the Chapter's Sensory Safari trailer.



MOHEE Connects Kids with Nature



Growing 352% from the first Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo in 2014, this May's free MOHEE youth events in Milwaukee and Poynette reached 5,013 students, parent chaperons, and teachers. From 2025's two events, the attendance grew about 18% overall. Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson attended MOHEE at Havenwoods State Forest and shared his enthusiasm for it in the new video showcasing the event and its sponsors and partners.

Busloads of mostly 4th-7th grade students were treated to nature-based educational activities where they tried first-hand to call wildlife, cast, shoot bows and BB guns, tie flies, work with hunting dogs, identify animal tracks and scat, plus learn about bat species, turtles, forestry, aquatic species, fish cleaning, bowfishing, firefighting, and more.

Friends of Poynette Game Farm had live pheasant chicks alongside Pheasants Forever representatives sharing key messages about habitat and conservation.

"Everyone had fun and learned a lot again this year," said Ruth Ann Lee, Executive Director of the Wisconsin-based charitable nonprofit Outdoor Heritage Education Center (www.OHECyes.org) which owns and operates MOHEE. With critical support from dozens of sponsors and busloads of students from 61 schools plus home-schoolers, there's no bigger free outdoor skills field trip in the country that we could find."

The first MOHEE (pronounced "MO'-hee") in 2014 hosted 1,420 at the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources' MacKenzie Center in Poynette and was two days, according to OHEC Founder & Chief Volunteer Mark LaBarbera. He

said OHEC has continued to offer transportation stipends, but he has seen an increase in bus driver shortages, which can cause last minute cancellations.

OHEC added the Milwaukee event in 2023 at the DNR's Havenwoods State Forest.

With two venues, plus the growth in attendance and inflation, Lee said OHEC has covered rising costs for transportation and more by adding sponsors and partners, most recently Pheasants Forever, including its SE Wisconsin and Columbia/Marquette Chapters, but also through the increased generosity of long time sponsors.

Founding Sponsors who continue to provide major funding include Friends of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, National Wild Turkey Federation, Dane County Conservation League, Safari Club International's Badgerland, Wisconsin, and NE WI Chapters.



Ongoing funding from the Wisconsin Division of Izaak Walton League of America, Wisc. Trappers Assoc., Wings Over Wisconsin's Beaver Dam, Black River Falls, Coulee Region, Denmark, Fox River, Kettle Moraine, Northeast, Ozaukee, and TriCounty Chapters, plus Wisc. Bowhunters Assoc., Woodman's Market, Friends of MacKenzie, and Friends of Poynette Game Farm. In recent years, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Rio Conservation Club, and Blackhawk Bowhunters have joined Ducks Unlimited, Manitowoc Co. Fish & Game, Field & Stream Sportsmen's Club, Pumpkin Center Sportsmen's Club, Wisconsin Hunter's Education Instructors Association, NRA Foundation's Friends of NRA, Dodge Co. Sporting Conservation Alliance, and

Sally Schoenike in providing funding for the event.

DNR leadership attended both events, continuing the agency's legacy of supporting environmental education and helping partners recruit, retain, and reactivate license buyers and other outdoor participants, including future conservation leaders and stewards of healthy natural resources.

OHEC E.D. Ruth Ann Lee praised DNR staff who work year-round at the MOHEE venues, Havenwoods State Forest in Milwaukee and MacKenzie Center, as well as the DNR fish, wildlife, parks, forestry, law enforcement, and natural heritage conservation professionals who helped introduce MOHEE students, parents, and educators to life-long outdoor activities. They and

volunteers from other sporting conservation groups not only create awareness, interest, and opportunities to try these activities, but they also share information about where to go for on-going mentored experiences, safety classes, and "learn to" events.

Teachers, school administrators, and others who would like to participate in the May 2027 events can email RuthAnn@OHECyes.org now as she is already working on them. Meanwhile, enjoy the MOHEE Poynette photos on pages 28-29 and the MOHEE Milwaukee images on these pages, plus the special photo essay on pg 26-27 featuring SCI Badgerland Chapter's recently remodeled Sensory Safari that debuted at MacKenzie Center.



Wildlife Photography



by Rick Sasek

Like many, my love for hunting started at an early age. I voraciously consumed every Outdoor Life magazine I could get my hands on, and the famous writer, outdoorsman, and hunter Jack O'Connor was my hero. I was 13 years old and all I wanted to do was hunt Dall sheep, just like Jack.

As time moved on, I graduated from high school, went to college and became a pharmacist. I didn't have the funds to sheep hunt or any other type of big game, but I did have enough money to buy a camera. Not a very good camera, but it was MY camera. I eventually met my wife, Suzanne, who was a flight attendant, which gave me the opportunity to travel very economically and through all my reading, I was able to find an area just across the Nevada border near Boulder Dam,

where the desert bighorn sheep came down to the Colorado River to drink in the summer. That was my first introduction to real wildlife photography, and it was an exhilarating experience to be within 30 yards of these magnificent sheep.

I then became aware of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, known then as FNAWS. And every year, they had a photo contest. I started entering my desert bighorn photos. One year I even took third place and another year, an honorable mention that stoked the photography fires even more.

Every year, I made it a point to attend the FNAWS convention and at one convention, I met a husband and wife team that did backpack hunts in Alaska. I talked to them every year over a three-year period and asked them if

they ever had a last-minute cancellation hunt that I could afford, would they please let me know, and in 1986 it happened.

I was going on a Dall sheep hunt backpack style in the rugged and steep Talkeetna Mountains of Alaska. I foolishly took all the camera gear I owned, including a video camera to record my hunt. I was going to record my hunt just like Jack O'Connor.

After taking a float plane to a remote drainage of the Talkeetna mountains and only five hours of hiking, my photographic dreams were smashed as I ended up burying all of my cameras and tripods and film because it was way too heavy to carry.

Nine days later, after climbing straight up and straight down for 5 to 6 hours every day, and I know every sheep hunter out there can relate, we



had still not seen a single sheep. I was crestfallen. It was day nine and we had to head back to be picked up by the float plane the next morning.

We arrived at our rendezvous point early and my guide told me that before I had arrived, they had spotted two sheep up on the ridge with a spotting scope. Did I have enough left to make one more climb? I said yes, I had come too far and given too much of myself to abandon my dream.

We climbed for over two hours, almost reaching the top, when we were enveloped by fog. We continued to climb slowly, moving to the top of the ridge and all of a sudden, a barn-like smell came from below us, but we could not even see 20 yards. It was getting dark, and time to head down to meet the plane, when all of a sudden, a slight opening appeared in the grayness. Over 300 yards away lay three magnificent Dall sheep rams. I quickly lay down, took a firm rest and fired and incredibly MISSED.

They were farther than we thought.

I was panic-stricken. After nine days of exhaustive climbing, tasteless backpack meals, eating only blueberries for breakfast, overcoming painful blisters on my feet, I had missed my one and only opportunity to complete a dream that was over 20 years in the making. My guide grabbed my shoulder and told me to settle down. I did so and I took a deep breath and slowly pulled the trigger.



ANOTHER MISS! I was beyond consoling.

Down in the valley, the sheep, startled by the noise but not knowing where the loud sounds were coming from, slowly began climbing the far hill. My guide told me in a calm voice that the biggest ram will stop and turn and look one more time, be ready and aim just over his head. He stopped, I fired and...he dropped.

I couldn't believe it. I cried and cried and cried. I was so exhausted. I was overwhelmed. I had finally accomplished my dream that I've had since I was 13 years old.

Flashback to today I continue to hunt and travel and photograph. I took a bighorn in Idaho, a stone sheep in British Columbia, and I went to Africa many times, where my photographic juices really began to flow.

My last hunt was 2015 in Spain, where I took an SCI top 20 Gredos Ibex. I harvested my Ibex the first day and was afforded three full days of photographing the beautiful Gredos Ibex in the snow of the Gredos Mountains. And for some reason, I actually enjoyed the photography more than the actual hunt. My reincarnation as a photographer was born. However, I was never able to get the quality of photograph that I needed to compete in the wildlife photo contests.

Enter into my life, Jeff Engel, world-renowned wildlife photographer, sportsman and TV host of the award-winning show, "Engel's Outdoor Experience." He is a national celebrity who give seminars at major sports shows. I was awe-struck with his photography. Every time I took a photo, I wanted it to look like his, but it never ever did. Eventually, Jeff moved on from hosting a TV show to becoming a full-time nature and wildlife photographer. I continued to photograph because I could no longer afford to hunt. I then became enamored with birds- in- flight photography, spending hundreds and hundreds of dollars on cameras and lenses, but I still couldn't get that quality photograph that I yearned for. I watched YouTube videos over and over. I desperately wanted to produce Jeff Engel-quality photographs. My equipment was holding me back.



Finally, in the spring of 2023, I was able to purchase a Nikon Z8 with a Nikkor 180 to 600 mm 5.6 to 6.3 lens, a few months before an African photo safari I had started planning in 2020 but not able to complete because of Covid.

Just before leaving on that trip, Jeff's and my path randomly crossed and I found out he lived only 10 minutes from me. He said he'd like to see my photos safari I had started planning in 2020 when I get back. Upon returning, I showed him what I had done with my new camera. He was duly impressed



Sasek captured both bird and bee.



Nature Re-Centers Cancer Nurse

by Mark LaBarbera

Danielle Olson happily provides care for her three boys and dozens of cancer patients day after day, year after year. To recharge her batteries after long hours of caring for others, the 33-year-old Registered Nurse finds comfort in nature.

"The woods are where I go to re-center, find peace, and spend time with God," she said.

Her husband Reggie is also a hunter who admires his wife's love of hunting and compassion for others. Danielle became a hunter long before becoming an RN who specializes in radiation oncology at the Eau Claire Cancer Center, part of Marshfield Medical Center.

"My dad, Dan, instilled in me a love and passion for the outdoors at a young age," she said. "Whether we were hunting turkey, deer, bear, or small game, fishing, or simply camping, we did it all together. He has taught me so much over the years, and we continue to learn together. I will always say that all of my success in hunting started with my dad. The countless hours he dedicated to putting me in the perfect spot throughout our adventures have been a true labor of love, and I will forever be grateful. I hope to instill that same

passion for the outdoors in my three young boys."

As she basked in the afterglow of her 2026



Danielle Olson's 24-pound gobbler had 1.25-inch spurs and 11.5-inch main beard plus a four-inch second beard. Interestingly, this is her sixth double-bearded tom!

Wisconsin hunting success, Danielle added, "My husband is also a big reason I've continued to hunt as our family has grown. I'm grateful to have a spouse who not only supports my love for the outdoors but encourages me to take that time for myself."

She savors and celebrates every second.

Take for example her May wild turkey hunt in northwestern Wisconsin.

"It was the most fun hunt my dad and I have ever been on together," she said. "My bird was one of four toms my dad called to, and they answered nearly every call my dad threw at them. I got to hear and watch all four of them strut, closing the distance of about 200 yards for nearly 45 minutes. One of my best adventures!"

Danielle's wide smile added to her story, "As the toms approached I waited until I had one tom at approximately 25 yards; that's about as close as I figured they would get."

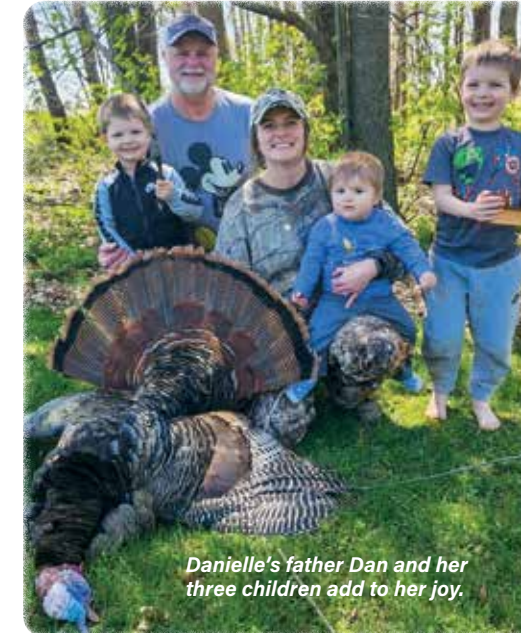
She was focused on the moment and her role in nature, temporarily relieved of her care-giver duties, instead centered on what she needed to do.

"Once I dialed in on one bird, it was game over," she said. "When I shot, my bird dropped dead. The other birds flew and then continued gobbling! I jumped up, ran into the field, fist pumped into the air and, when I turned around to look at my dad, he was standing at the wood line with his fists in the air."

Together they measured and took photos of Danielle's 24-pound gobbler with 1.25-inch spurs and 11.5-inch main beard plus a four-inch second beard. Interestingly, this is her sixth double-bearded tom!

"We end every hunt with a big hug and a 'Thank you, Jesus,' she said, adding, "I love that I get to celebrate my successful harvests with the people I love most."

Father, daughter, and double-bearded gobbler were joined by her three young boys for more photos. It was the perfect prescription for re-centering the balance of Danielle's work and home life.



Danielle's father Dan and her three children add to her joy.

and offered to show me where wood ducks congregate in the fall and owls in the winter and pileated woodpeckers in the spring.

Since meeting Jeff, I have met other photographers with the same passion, and I have literally become REBORN since that day. Jeff and I reconnected almost 3 years ago. We have become fast friends and have become part of a group of four avid photographers. Every waking minute when I'm not working to pay for new camera gear, I'm either photographing or editing. I take literally hundreds and hundreds of photographs almost every day. Under Jeff's tutelage, I've gotten better and better. I can't wait to get up in the morning and put that camera in my hands and then load those

photos into my Mac-Book at night and edit. I feel this is what I was born to do. I have become more aware of everything in nature, and I've been introduced to numerous species of birds that I never even knew existed.

I hope to continue to produce high-quality wildlife shots every minute of every day to my last breath and I deeply thank my friend Jeff Engel for helping me reach this moment in my life.

Michael White's Tale

by Mark LaBarbera

As the father of a 1.5-year-old, Michael White doesn't have a lot of free time. He's a full-time senior accountant for Johnson Block in Mineral Point, and he volunteers for causes that are near and dear to him, including serving as membership coordinator for the Southwestern Wisconsin Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America and Vice President for the local NWTF (Tri-State Gobblers) chapter.

One thing he always finds time for is hunting, especially for deer with gun or bow.

He grew up in a hunting family. Back in 2022, Michael, along with his father and brother got the opportunity to purchase a 40-acre wooded piece of ground in Lafayette County, Wisconsin. An area of the state where wooded ground is hard to come by! Over the past several years the family has worked hard to transform the property by adding food and additional cover.



As time devoted for family and work grew, Michael learned to hunt smarter and more efficiently while still savoring every minute afield. Like many SCI members, he knows how important it is to not waste any opportunity during the season.

On the Sunday evening of opening weekend, he found himself in his gun deer stand with an unfilled buck tag.

"Not long before dark," Michael said, "this nice buck came into the food plot chasing 4 does."

It was a buck on his hit list that he had gotten on

trail cameras for the first time just a few days before rifle season. The buck's rack was distinctive with bladed G2s and a darker frame.

"He was pretty ruttied up," said Michael, "but stood behind an old cottonwood tree for what seemed like an hour as I waited for him to move. He was focused on the does that had begun to feed into the brassica plot."

About 10 minutes before the end of shooting hours, worry crept in. Michael wasn't sure if daylight would end before he got a shot.

"Then, suddenly, everything happened fast. I almost didn't even have time to react," Michael explained. "It just happened so quickly. The does moved. He moved. As soon as he stepped out and let me see his front quarter, I shot. He dropped on the spot and required zero tracking. I made sure to put my gun back on safe and hung it up on my hanger for a minute to allow myself to calm down a bit."

Michael then sent the patented "BBD" text to his brother and dad. Shortly after dark the recovery party showed up with the UTV and a couple of adult beverages to celebrate the big buck down!



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