

Deer – and a gobbler – turn out for Wheelin' event

By Tom Cross

Contributing Writer

West Union, Ohio — The Adams County Wheelin' Sportsmen deer hunt, held Oct. 10-11, drew 21 participants from all over Ohio and across state lines as far away as Delaware.

In all, nine deer, including one 10-pointer, and a gobbler, were taken in what usually proves to be the hunt of a lifetime for many of the disabled hunters and those volunteers involved with the event.

Organized by the Adams County Longbeards Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation and McCoy Lumber Co., the annual hunt is now in its fourth year.

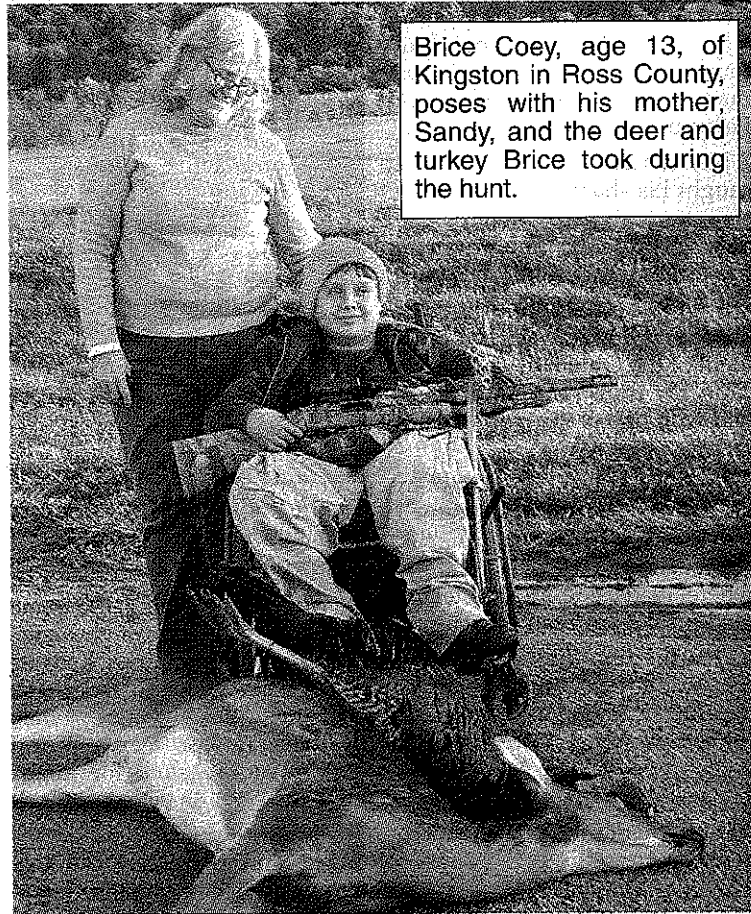
"It's a great event, but it's always a lot of work, but well worth it," said chapter president Kevin Willett. "It creates lasting friendships and great memories for the folks involved."

Due to the special needs of the participating hunters, more than 60 guides and volunteers are needed to take part in the annual hunt, according to Willett.

"There is a lot of pre-hunt planning for every hunt and each participant has special needs that the chapter and volunteers take care of," said Willett.

Volunteers and guides come from all over the state and various NWTF chapters to help with the hunt. McCoy Lumber, a local company out of Peebles, provides over 4,000 acres for the hunt.

"In all, we have eight different properties with blinds and ground stands ready for the special needs of the hunters," said Chad McCoy, who's family has participated and provided hunting properties for



Brice Coey, age 13, of Kingston in Ross County, poses with his mother, Sandy, and the deer and turkey Brice took during the hunt.

the event since it began four years ago. "We want these hunters to have the safest, most enjoyable and productive hunt of their lives while they're hunting on the McCoy properties."

The participating hunters, all wheelchair dependants, have a variety of stories that touch the heart on the circumstances they find themselves in.

Brice Coey, a 13-year-old from Ross County, suffers from spin bifida, a birth defect. Brice is a seventh grade student from Zane Trace Junior High. This was Brice's third year with the Adams County

Wheelin' hunt and this year he managed to bag a doe and his first gobbler the same evening! His guide, Steve Huecker, from Shelby County, assisted Brice on his hunt.

"This was my first time guiding on this hunt and the hunting experience with Brice really touched me," said Huecker. "I was glad to be a part of it."

Brice's mom, Sandy Curtis, said Brice has wanted to hunt the last 5-6 years.

"Thanks to the McCoy's, this event is the only time Brice gets to hunt," said Sandy.

Since Brice is unable to hold a firearm to his shoulder, a special collapsible "tripod" was designed and built by Joe Sawmiller, chairman of the NWTF Wheelin' Sportsman Committee, which attaches to the wheelchair, allowing Brice to hold steady his shotgun.

Matt Stiet, 24, from Amelia, was stung by a freshwater jellyfish while swimming at the age of 16 and suffered severe allergic reaction causing a stroke in his spinal cord, paralyzing him from the neck down. Though Matt has regained most of his upper body functions, below the waist he is immobile. He has been a regular participant in this annual hunt where he managed to bag his first buck.

Frank Sears, 62, is a Vietnam Veteran with the 82nd Airborne where he was injured in a parachute training exercise in 1967 after completing his combat tour. This was Sears' third Wheelin' Hunt in Adams County and a successful one.

Larry Shipman, of Cincinnati, who was injured in a car wreck and cannot walk, bagged the

biggest buck of the hunt, a 175-pound field dressed 10-pointer he took early in the morning the first day of the hunt.

The disabled hunters are transported to their blinds with ATVs and Gators, and then set up in their wheelchairs with a guide staying with them the entire day, assisting whenever needed. Harvested deer are field dressed by the guides and then transported to a local processor for cooling and butchering.

The entire hunt requires a lot of manpower, time and effort on the part of the guides and volunteers.

Hunters wishing to participate in next year's Adams County Wheelin' Hunt should contact Adams County Longbeards president Kevin Willett at 937-544-2721.

"It's a very humbling experience," said Willett, "one the chapter looks forward to continuing for years to come."

These special season deer hunts are permitted by permission from the chief of the DNR Division of Wildlife and participating in the event is the wildlife officer of that county.