

Outdoorsman finds many heros at special hunt

Heros. What a concept.

The embodiment of everything great and good about the world and the people in it. All of us had heroes as we grew up.

Doctors, cowboys, Superman, Batman, mom, dad, a big brother or sister, a granddad or grandma.

These were people who filled our eyes, minds and imaginations with all that was right in the world. As long as we had our heroes we had nothing to fear. Evil and bad things would always lose against good and just heroes.

My dad is my hero. He was not a hunter or a fisherman, but he let me be. He was not an athlete but he let me be. He was always there with the right words or advice to gently maneuver me through the difficult highways of adolescence.

I had other heroes as I grew older. All had some special characteristic that taught me a little more about the good in the world. I met some more heroes just this past week.

I was invited to the Great Southern Outdoors lodge in Bullock County run by Rex Pritchett and Wayne Green. Rex and Wayne have made their long time dream a reality with the opening of this lodge. They have also become heroes. Rex said they



File photo

A number of disabled hunters crowd around to tell stories before venturing out on their special hunt at Sedgefield Plantation in December.

had a special event going on and that I should come have a look. I had no idea how special it was to be.

Rex and Wayne had set aside a day for kids and sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities. On this day the entire staff of the lodge was dedicated to making the dreams of these people come true. Some of them had never been to the woods because of their disability and the lack of a facility to accommodate their special needs.

Some were there because they had just recently chosen to try it.

When I arrived at the lodge the place was already teeming with people happily chatting about

their day in the woods.

There was a thin young man about 8-years-old with a huge grin on his face.

He looked like he might just pop open any minute. He had taken his first deer that day.

There was another young man about 16-years-old with no left hand. Yet another of the same age with a pronounced limp and a cane. Two young ladies about 10 or 11 were excitedly telling of their adventures of the day. A beautiful young lady sitting in her wheelchair in camouflage clothing was surrounded by friends and new acquaintances.

Even with all the ruck-

us, it was impossible not to notice the bear-sized man with the perpetual smile on his face. We were introduced and my hand was immediately engulfed, swallowed in the vise grip of his handshakes. He was in a wheelchair. His name is Kirk Thomas. He is a hero.

Several years ago, as Kirk was just walking through the woods, a tree fell on him. The resulting paralysis left him in a wheelchair for life. But no moping about and self pity for this man. He set about finding ways to get back to the outdoors he loved so well. With the help of friends he was soon able to hunt and fish again.

COMMENTARY

It was not enough. He wanted more.

He wanted to give others with disabilities the same opportunities. He founded Wheelin' Sportsmen. With chapters in nearly every state in the southeast and a recent merger with the National Wild Turkey Federation, Wheelin' Sportsmen is the largest organization in the world for outdoorsmen with disabilities.

This organization and the people that fuel it are creating unbelievable opportunities to do really good things for many people. Disabled or not, every one comes out a winner. Everyone comes out a hero.

As I listened to Kirk speak that evening, I was as deeply moved as I have ever been in my life. I wanted to do more, to help more. He showed me how.

During his talk Kirk said, "It's not like I don't have any legs. I have legs, they just don't work."

Legs? You betcha.

This hero has thousands.

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