

# A hunt to remember

## Hunters with disabilities enjoy time in the woods



Jerry Davis photos

**TAKING AIM:** Jim Tarlano of La Crescent, Minn., checks his shooting lane from his deer stand on the Tom Pralle farm near Holmen.



Davis / Outdoors writer

**H**OLMEN, Wis. — Some of us think nothing of hopping out of a vehicle, grabbing a gun and climbing into a tree stand. We may even complain about having to walk up a difficult hill to get to our deer stand.

The 16 assistants who helped nine hunters with disabilities enjoy a day or two in the deer woods last weekend are much less likely to complain about that steep hill the next time they hunt or hike. We are more likely to count our blessings that we are able to walk just about anywhere we want to when we hunt.

Once the persistent hunters rode a John Deere gator to their deer stands on Tom Pralle's farm, they were just as capable of seeing, hearing and shooting a deer as you or me.

This hunt was also special because Dennis Fater, Physical Therapy professor at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, talked several of his students into assisting the hunters. Some students recruited their friends — Rebecca Kocian and Brian Quarne — from other departments to help with the hunt.

"I think these blaze orange vests and caps will become standard equipment for future physical therapy students, too," said Fater, who has helped area hunters with disabilities find or make the equipment they need.

Some students came to help because hunting is a family tradition. Others had never seen a farm, a cow or a person dressed in blaze orange. Some — like Rick Schneveis and Mike Daniels — even left with a new-found knowledge: driving a John Deere gator up and down Pralle's steep hills.

"My grandfather used to hunt a lot before his stroke," said UW-L physical therapy student Lisa Stapelmann, who could put a positive spin and smile on just about

any situation — except finding deer ticks on her clothing.

"They're all over my pants," she yelled as we walked through the woods attempting to drive deer to Duane Klawitter and William Reed.

"This is my therapy," said Schneveis, a UW-L physical therapy student who never misses a deer season himself. "Enjoy the woods," he told Stapelmann.

There was no doubt that all the special hunters appreciated the help, particularly the fact that Pralle allowed deer hunters to mingle with beef cattle, ride his John Deere gator and eat lunch in his hunting trailer.

"I just can't thank Tom enough for allowing us to hunt," said Richard Elsinger, Jr., who returned for a second year.

"He even let me use his personal deer stand," said Virgil Haldorson, who shot a deer Saturday morning. "We (Glenn Wood, his assistant) pulled the deer away from the stand to field dress it so as not to mess up the stand for later in the year."

Other hunters were content to see wild turkeys, ruffed grouse, rabbits and squirrels, and enjoy Bernie Mickschl's homemade chili at lunch Saturday.

"I don't know which one I like better, said Dale Newman. "I'll have to try them both again and then I'll let you know."

Several hunters spent the entire day, from about 6:45 a.m. to 6:45 p.m., on their stands, waiting for a deer to walk past. Others thought the late afternoon was the best time to catch a deer wandering out into Pralle's alfalfa fields and started their hunts after lunch.

"I'm glad to see more girls getting involved in the hunt," said Nicole Pralle, Tom Pralle's daughter who attends Holmen High School and hunts turkeys and deer with her father. "Maybe next time we'll even have a woman hunter, not just assistants."

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### CHOW TIME:

William Reed, left, of Kenosha, Wis., enjoys a cup of chili.

**BELOW:** Mike Derpinghaus, left, and Duane Klawitter, right, have lunch with their hunting assistants.

### THE CAST

The second annual special deer hunt for hunters with disabilities was held Friday and Saturday on the Tom Pralle farm, northeast of Holmen, Wis.

**SPONSORS:** La Crosse Tribune, Tom Pralle, Bernie Mickschl's Strut Zone Guide Service, Holmen, Wis.

**FOOD DONATIONS:** Hardee's-Northside, Todd Williamson, Mgr.; Hardee's-Onalaska, Ed Eisermann, Mgr.; Skogen's-Holmen, Linda Kulas, Mgr.

**HUNTERS:** Duane Klawitter and Dale Newman of La Crosse; Mike Derpinghaus of Holmen; Rich Branhagen, Virgil Haldorson and Max Seelig of Onalaska; Richard Elsinger, Jr., Woodland, Wis.; William Reed, Kenosha, Wis. and Jim Tarlano, La Crescent, Minn..

**ASSISTANTS:** Tim Plunkett, Dennis Fater, Greg Thompson, Glenn Wood, Cassidy Coggin, Rick Schneveis, Nicole Pralle, David Forer, Bernie Mickschl, Nicole Wittlinger, Rebecca Kocian, Brian Quarne, Mike Daniels, Tom Pralle, Lisa Stapelmann, Megan Wissestad, Jerry Davis.

