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COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS



COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS PHOTOS BY RON KUENSTLER

Helen Christnovich demonstrates for Sue Tingle how she fired her shotgun while turkey hunting April 9 during a National Wild Turkey Federations and Wheelin' Sportsmen event in Merton.

Talking Turkey

Senior's shot at hunting is all gravy

By Debra Jensen-De Hart
Staff Writer

Helen Christnovich hasn't been one to back down from a challenge during her lifetime.

She's also a great outdoor advocate.

So it may come as little surprise that she participated in the spring turkey hunt sponsored by

the Wheelin' Sportsmen/National Wild Turkey Federation on April 9 in fields of Waukesha and Washington counties.

Never mind the Franklin resident is 86 years young.

No newcomer to the sport of hunting, Helen grew up in northern Wisconsin where hunting



Helen Christnovich relaxes after a turkey hunt April 9 in Merton.

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Turkey

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was sometimes necessary to put food on the table.

And when she married Jack Christnovich, her love of the outdoors and hunting activities continued.

"I married a hunter," she said.

As a young wife and mother, she learned how to fend for herself.

"We lived in a cabin with no electricity, no water and I had two little babies and a husband out looking for work," she recalled.

Jack later found work at Ladish Co. in Cudahy and the growing family moved. Later, in 1951, they settled in Franklin, where Helen still resides.

"I had lots of fun. I fired a shot, but I missed."

Helen Christnovich Jack died a few years ago at the age of 88, but he kept hunting almost to the end.

"Seven years ago, we went turkey hunting. I was with him, but I was his eyes and ears, I didn't hunt," she said.

Family photos show Jack with a walker, in the outdoors, determined not to give up the love of hunting, supported in his efforts by his family.

Her son Tony, along with some friends, took the notion a step further and formed the North American Squirrel Association in Trempealeau County, where the elderly or physically challenged who want to hunt or fish can get assistance, access to a pontoon boat and "buddies" who help arrange hunting trips for them.

Love of nature

For Helen, it's not just about the sport.

"I just love the woods. Early in the morning, when you sit there quietly, the world is waking up. You hear a bird, you hear something scratching — a deer runs by," she said.

She and Jack raised six children and over the years acquired grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Helen also grew a garden every year, and still does. Early seedlings already were sprouting

in small pots near a pantry window on this day, destined for transplant in the loam of her yard.

She is generous with the fruits of her labor and for those who are lucky, she may even offer a jar of her tasty homemade salsa with fresh tomatoes and peppers she harvested herself.

But more than that, the octogenarian is about pluck.

"She's everybody's inspiration. She's got more energy and get up and go than people a lot younger," Tony said.

Through his associations with groups who are geared to help physically challenged people and the elderly continue hunting or fishing, Tony was contacted by a representative of the Wheelin' Sportsman NWTA and asked if his mother might be interested in the seasonal turkey hunt.

But when he asked her about going on the April 9 excursion, which was especially geared for elderly and women who use wheelchairs, she didn't take him seriously.

"I started to laugh. Then he explained to me that I would be in a little camouflage tent with a mentor."

She thought about it and decided she'd give it a try.

While Helen is not in a wheelchair, she does use a cane.

Thrill of the hunt

So, with the help of her family, when the day of the hunt came, she was ready. Out in the blind by 5 a.m., shotgun on tripod and ready to go, she waited for that special turkey.

"I had lots of fun," she said after the hunt was over. "I fired a shot, but I missed," she said good naturedly.

She waited until the turkey strutted in front of her but in all the excitement, she aimed the gun and somehow her shirt collar came up obstructing her vision a little, she recalled.

But that's the stuff of which hunting stories are made and the reason her sons will tease her, all in fun.

Regardless, "We had a lot of laughs telling our stories," she said of the women who gathered at the Valley Rod and Gun Club in the town of Merton for a lunch break.

And because she was willing to take a chance, Helen had another opportunity to do something she loves, to sit in the woods, watch and listen for the world to wake up.