

Beatrice Daily Sun

PF chapter keeping traditions alive

By Jane White/Daily Sun sports editor
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One day recently, Ryan Timmerman went on an "adventure" with his five-year-old son, Tucker.

Father and son set off for a walk across a field in tall grass with their black lab.

Walking up a hill, Timmerman pointed out a set of deer tracks to his son.

"Wow," Tucker said.

Entranced with the signs of the deer, Tucker missed the lab going "birdie" and a gamebird taking flight.

For the moment, Tucker was more interested in finding additional deer tracks.

As the pheasant flew away, the two continued their walk with father pointing out more signs of wildlife activity to his son.

Finally, they came upon a flat spot in the grass.

Timmerman tells Tucker it's a deer bed, something hard for the youngster to fathom. After all, there was no mattress or covers, not even a pillow. Why would a deer want to sleep on hard ground like that?

After a few questions and answers, the two continue their walk until the grass gets taller than the five-year-old.

"Dad, what am I going to do, I can't see anything?," Tucker said.

Timmerman boosts his son onto his shoulders and they continue their walk.

The father and son adventure concluded with a deer darting across the field away from them.

It's not the first time the two have gone for a similar walk and Timmerman wants to make sure it isn't the last.

He also wants to make sure other families can enjoy the outdoors like his does.

Timmerman is president of the Southeast Nebraska Pheasants Forever Chapter, a group which works to provide habitat for upland gamebirds and other wildlife.

And the local group is making its mark when it comes to that goal.

The Gage County-based organization was named as the 2009 Outstanding Chapter in Conservation Excellence Award winner by Nebraska Pheasants Forever.

Earlier in the year, the chapter surpassed the \$250,000 mark in contributions to local habitat and conservation projects.

"That's getting money back into the ground," Timmerman said. "It's money put back into the habitat to help the wildlife."

Timmerman said the quarter-million mark is not something a chapter the size of the Southeast Nebraska group accomplishes in a short time.

"This was accomplished through the accumulated efforts of many volunteers through the years," Timmerman said.

Each event sponsored by the chapter takes a lot of time and effort by volunteers, Timmerman said.

Timmerman said the award is a tribute to past and present committee members, banquet chairmen, habitat coordinators and chapter officers.

When it comes to habitat, the Southeast Nebraska Chapter provides seed for use in food plots, breeding grounds and general gamebird habitat.

"Whether it's food plots or just putting grass on the ground," Timmerman said, "we will get involved."

Timmerman said the chapter also helps provide funds for trees and shrubs, which are part of the wildlife habitat.

The seed can be used by farmers on Conservation Reserve Program acres.

Ten percent of an individual's total CRP acres can be set aside as wildlife habitat, Timmerman said.

"Part of what Pheasants Forever wants to do is help improve that property and make it more useful to the wildlife."

The chapter also has a drill available to rent to those wishing to plant habitat plots.

"We can also be a good resource for people wanting to plant habitat areas," Timmerman said. "We have people who can answer their questions or they can use the (Pheasants Forever) Web site."

While the chapter works to maintain a strong habitat for the birds, members are also concerned about the future of hunting in southeast Nebraska.

That has led the chapter to get involved with a number of youth activities.

For each of the last six years, the group has had up to 11 youth participate in the mentor hunt.

This year, eight young hunters and their mentors took to the field Oct. 17.

Last year, 11 youth participated. In 2007, eight took part, while in 2006 there were 11, 2005 nine and 2004 11.

The number of youth participating is determined by the number of mentors available, Timmerman said.

In order to participate in the youth mentor hunt, youth must be 12-15 years of age and have completed the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Hunter Safety Course. Girls, as well as boys, are welcome to participate, Timmerman said.

The actual pheasant hunt is just part of the day's activities, which also include sessions on topics like hunting safety, hunting ethics and bird cleaning. The youth also participate in other shooting activities, as well as an archery station.

By holding the youth mentor hunt, Timmerman said the chapter is trying to keep hunting traditions alive.

Many families were part of hunting traditions in the past, Timmerman said, but some have gone away from the tradition.

"We're hoping to help restart that tradition again," Timmerman said. "We just want to get kids outside."

"It a goal of ours to get kids about in the outdoors and enjoying it."

Other than the youth mentor hunt, the local chapter has also helped support activities of the high school trap team. It has worked with youth activities in partnership with the Big Indian Archers and the Patch N' Powder Gang.

"We want to give back to the community," Timmerman said. "We have a continuous partnership with the community as it helps support our fundraising efforts."

"The community's generosity plays a big part in what we are able to do."

Each year, the Southeast Nebraska Chapter holds two major fundraisers.

The group held their 19th annual banquet last spring.

It was the first time the group held a spring event, Timmerman said, as previous banquets were all held the night before the opening day of the pheasant hunting season.

The other fundraiser, which has become popular, Timmerman said, is a golf tournament, which is held in late July.

Timmerman said one nice thing about Pheasants Forever is that local chapters have "100 percent control" of where the money they raise goes.

"That's the unique thing about Pheasants Forever," Timmerman said. "Lately, we've been doing a lot of re-investing it into the community."

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