



## **Hunting season brings opportunity to appreciate nature, help others**

By STAN PASCOO

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If someone was to ask me how my hunting season was this year I would tell them it was the best one I have ever had, whether it was small or big game season last fall or this spring's turkey season. When asked what I harvested during those seasons my response would be that I did not get anything.

When I give a hunter safety class or even when I speak of "the hunt" to non-hunters, I explain that it is the total experience and not just the harvesting of the game that is important. The camaraderie one shares with friends and family, or the enjoyment of being part of the outdoors or any of the multitudes of other reasons is why one partakes in the "hunt."

My hunts this year were full of remembrances and very satisfying experiences and none of them involved my taking of any game. While turkey hunting this past fall I had three deer walk within inches of me, one of which was a four-point buck that literally walked over my outstretched legs and never realized that I was there. I had a barred owl fly onto a branch not 10 feet from me and another time an Eastern screech owl land into the hollow of a tree very close to me. Twice, coyotes came within several feet of us.

While scouting Sterling Forest State Park in March on two different occasions I happened upon a bear in the hollow of a large tree. On both occasions I was no more than 10 feet from the tree and the bear, when it decided to vacate the area.

There are three things however that make this past season stand out more than any of my previous seasons. The first is that I can now say that The Venison Donation Coalition is now officially a part of New York City and Rockland County. The Venison Donation Coalition brings hunters, food banks and processors together so that harvested venison can be distributed to the needy throughout New York state. As of this year over 500,000 pounds have been distributed since the inception of this program in New York.

The next thing that made this a memorable season involves a young Rockland resident named Chris Reinhardt. Chris took his hunter safety class two years ago. This past Mother's Day Chris harvested his first game, a wild turkey, with the help of his neighbor, Mike Sosser. Even though I was not able to be with them on this hunt, I think that I experienced almost as much enjoyment as they did.

Mike and I have been taking Chris hunting for the past year. This may not be unusual except for the fact that due to the leukemia that Chris acquired when he was 9 years old, he has been confined to a wheelchair. Within this past year we successfully held a fundraiser and with the generous help of people throughout the Hudson Valley we were able to present to Chris a new wheelchair suitable to the outdoor environment. We even had enough funds left over to present to him his own hunting rifle during the Christmas season.

Finally, in May I had the honor and privilege of hunting with a young man named Jeremy Feldbusch and his father, Brace. Although we hardly heard any birds let alone saw any, I will never forget this hunt. In the last several years Jeremy and his father have hunted all over the United States. Jeremy has been able to harvest game from squirrels to several deer. On a hunt in South Carolina Jeremy was able to harvest a 200-pound wild pig with a spear.

This may not be so extraordinary to anyone (especially non-hunters) except for the fact that Jeremy is the national spokesman for the Wounded Warrior Project. He has spoken in front of Congress, the U.N. and other venues. There has even been a movie made about his life after his return home, "Home Front." Jeremy was wounded in Iraq in 2003 where he was an Army Ranger. He was permanently blinded and suffered traumatic brain injury due to a piece of shrapnel entering his skull. To be with Jeremy is to be with someone who should be an inspiration to everyone. He has met the challenges of his disability with the same determination that made him first in his Ranger class.

To Chris, Jeremy and Brace, I want to thank you for a very, very successful season.

The writer is president of United Sportsmen Association of Rockland and Rockland representative to the New York State Fish Advisory Board.

**Find out more**

For more information on the Wounded Warrior Project, visit their Web site, [woundedwarriorproject.com](http://woundedwarriorproject.com)  
For more information on the Venison Donation Coalition, go to [venisondonation.com](http://venisondonation.com).