

QDMA Branches Give Back

QDMA's Heartland Branch Hosts Hunt to Honor Wounded Warrior

“The opportunity to give back to those that go unnoticed on a daily basis” is what inspired QDMA's Heartland Branch in Omaha, Nebraska to organize a deer hunt for a deserving member of the U.S. Armed Forces.

US Army Staff Sgt. Jesse Hernandez's life changed on January 20, 2007, when Iraqi commando insurgents attacked the Joint Provincial Headquarters in Karbala, Iraq, where he was stationed. Since the day that Hernandez bravely fought to defend his fellow soldiers and their post, he has undergone thirteen surgeries to repair the damage done by a grenade blast to the stomach that lodged shrapnel in his spine and shattered bones in his arm.

The first of December last year was a day that Jesse Hernandez had been looking forward to since receiving word in early 2009 that he had been selected to participate in a premier hunt in Kansas. That morning, Sean Wuller, Vice President of the Heartland Branch and co-owner of Big & J Industries LLC, picked Jesse up at his Missouri home, and the two set out to sight in Jesse's rifle at the nearby base. After firing three rounds at a homemade target and being dead on, Jesse and Sean headed west to Uniontown Kansas.

Upon arrival, they were greeted by Wes and Rachelle Atkinson, Scott Engstrom, and Budd and Brenda Prudhomme. The Atkinsons who donated the hunt through Atkinson Expeditions, showed Jesse trail camera photos of the trophy deer they had selected for him, and the Prudhommies familiarized Jesse with Jacob's Den, their facility that would accommodate the team for three nights. The hosts also presented Hernandez with an array of hunting gear and valuable mementos donated by the Heartland Branch and a number of generous donors.

Five o'clock a.m. brought chilly winds and light snow, but Jesse, Wes Atkinson, and Danny Dodge, cameraman from “Living the Wildlife” on the Pursuit Channel, set out to bring home Jesse's deer. Two days and fifty deer sightings later, at 4:15 p.m. Jesse took his deer with his father's .243 from a ground blind positioned on a bluff.

Once back at camp, Jesse and the other guys had some fun with the group that was eagerly awaiting their return. By contriving a story that the plumbing was malfunctioning in the cabin, they sent the on-lookers scrambling right over Jesse's deer, which had been placed in the doorway.

A bond had been formed between the team that joined forces to organize the hunt and Jesse Hernandez, the grateful recipient. The appreciation was mutual: the Heartland Branch and other generous organizers wanted to express their appreciation to Jesse for his sacrifice, and they found Jesse continually thanking them for the opportunity they had provided.

In its first event as a chartered QDMA Branch, the Heartland Branch raised \$2,800 to host what was



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at the time just a dream. With the participation of the deserving Jesse Hernandez, the dream came to fruition and was more rewarding than they could have foreseen. Jesse's story and the life that he leads have motivated the Heartland Branch to continue giving back as Jesse does each day.

Despite having to relearn basic movements, Jesse now inspires other soldiers as a drill sergeant. He trains new recruits to follow in his steps and sacrifice for our country. But Jesse keeps his personal story quiet until his recruits reach graduation. At that point, he unveils the reason for his "anything is possible" motto. It is this attitude and his bravery that earned him a Medal of Valor, as well as a place in the hearts of the Heartland Branch.



Thanks to the following donors for the success of the event:

- ◆ The Heartland Branch, including President Marty Edwards, Vice President Sean Wuller, and numerous Branch members who had the vision to set such a lofty goal during the very first event that the Branch hosted.
- ◆ Big & J Industries, LLC; Jeff Simpson of "Heartland Bowhunter;" Paul Sawyer of Whitetail Properties; and Rick and Julie Kreuter of "Beyond the Hunt" who donated all of the gear that Hernandez needed for the hunt, as well as mementos that will forever remind him of the experience.
- ◆ The Kansas Department of Wildlife who donated Jesse's hunting licenses.
- ◆ Wes & Rachelle Atkinson for donating this amazing hunt that Jesse will remember for a lifetime.
- ◆ Budd & Brenda Prudhomme for providing the wonderful accommodations throughout the week.
- ◆ Cally Morris of Hazel Creek Taxidermy for enabling Jesse to enjoy his trophy for years to come.

