

2ND ANNUAL!

Elgin County hosts Youth Hunting Day



On Saturday, December 2, 2006, the Elgin Stewardship Council hosted Elgin County's Second Annual Youth Hunting Day. The event was held at the Fingal Wildlife Management Area where the stewardship council has a partnership agreement with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Aylmer District to co-manage this Crown land property.

In total, 35 youth participated from communities across Elgin County and south Middlesex. All youth hunters were successful graduates of the Ontario Hunter Education Safety Program and enrolled in the Hunter Apprenticeship Safety Program.

The purpose of this event was to: expose area youth in the Hunter Apprenticeship Safety Program to a quality pheasant hunting experience in a controlled and safe environment; promote hunting safety, ethics and the social/camaraderie aspects of this outdoor recreational activity; educate youth about wildlife management, stewardship and good relations between hunters and landowners; and increase awareness of the benefits of a trained hunting dog in enhancing the hunting experience.

The participants were divided into morning and afternoon groups. Each group received an orientation session from a conservation officer and firearms instructor on hunting laws and safety, shot at clay pigeons, learned how to field dress a pheasant and tried a sample of cooked pheasant with a lunch provided. The Canadian Raptor Conservancy was also on

hand during the lunch period to do a presentation on hunting pheasants with a red-tailed hawk.

According to one of the mentors, "it was an amazing experience to hunt with such a well-trained dog and to share this with my daughter as a new hunter. It will stay with me forever."



Community sponsorship for this event was provided by the Order of Good Cheer, Hamilton, Ward and Cathers Insurance Services Limited, Goble's Firearms, Ducks Unlimited Aylmer Chapter, Dan Higgs Excavating Ltd, Yarmouth Metal Fabricators Limited, Dowler-Karn Limited, St. Thomas Gun Club, Huron Tractor, Warren Wolfenden-CIBC Wood Gundy, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ontario Federation of

Anglers and Hunters. Volunteer help was also provided on the day of the event from the Middlesex Hunter Retriever Club, East Elgin Secondary School ELP, Uplands Pheasantry, Gerry Richer, Ranger Bay Company, St. John's Ambulance, and a number of outdoor enthusiasts from the area.

"Our goal was to improve the event from last year including an increase in community support and involvement" said Russ Wiltsie, chairperson for the Elgin Stewardship Council. "We were able to achieve this and more. I couldn't be more proud of all the help we had and how well the event was run, and also a big thanks to Mark Emery, Stewardship Coordinator, for all of his hard work promoting and organizing the event."

Elgin hosts fifth annual

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Youth Hunting Day

**by Mark Emery
Elgin Stewardship
Council**

Forty-eight youth from across Elgin and the bordering counties participated in the fifth annual Youth Hunting Day at Fingal Wildlife Management Area, Nov. 28.

The temperature was cool, but with sunny skies and a light breeze, the conditions were ideal for pheasant hunting. The day included an afternoon visit by Donna Cansfield, the provincial minister of natural resources.

She told the 170 persons attending, "Hunting plays an important part in sustaining the province's natural resources.

"It also plays a role in helping our youth learn about our natural environment. That is why an event like today's is so valuable."

Elgin Stewardship Council started the event in 2005.

The purpose is to help youth between 12 and 15 years of age develop into safe and responsible hunters, while also learning about the province's natural resources.

Since then, more than 200 youth enrolled in the Hunter Apprenticeship Safety Program have taken part.

Gerry Richer, a certified hunter-safety education instructor started the day's activities with a hunter safety "refresher" course.

That was followed by Ministry of Natural Resources conservation officers Dave Beavers

and Duncan Hall who explained why game laws were important and their role in managing the province's natural resources.

The apprentices then worked on shooting accuracy at a portable trap range set up by the St. Thomas Gun Club.

An adjoining station gave the apprentices an opportunity to test distance-judging abilities using life-sized displays including white-tailed deer, black bear, wild turkey, coyote and Canada geese.

Organizer Warren Reinke said, "Knowing how far a game species is away from you and the range of the ammunition you are using is an important part of hunting and we wanted to reinforce this as part of a practical field exercise."

Participants with the best scores for both the trap shooting and distance judging were awarded prizes donated by the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

The pheasant hunt was conducted on nearby agricultural fields where apprentices worked with mentors.

Some were met by conservation officers who conducted simulated enforcement checks.

They hunted the fields with a dog handler and flushing dogs from the area retriever clubs.

For some it was their first attempt at harvesting game since getting their apprenticeship card.

A field marshal followed the groups from behind to ensure safety.

Before starting the hunt, the field marshals reminded the mentors and apprentices of the safety rules, the habitat in which they would be hunting and how

they might expect the birds to behave with the weather conditions.

Dog handlers also explained safe firearm handling around the dogs and what to look for in their behaviour when they are on a bird.

All apprentices had a chance to shoot at a pheasant, with at least half of them harvesting one to bring home.

One of the mentors said the event "was a great experience hunting with my daughter now that she has an apprentice card.

"The fact I was able to be with her on her first hunt and to see her harvest a pheasant will be something we never forget."

A barbeque lunch was supplied and prepared by Rick Bishop and helpers from Yarmouth Metal.

It included cooked pheasant prepared by the Elgin Stewardship Council.

An MNR canine unit conservation officer demonstrated use of a dog in enforcement situations, including detection in which it found hidden shell casings and walleye fillets.

Kit Brown, of the stewardship council said, "In looking back over the last five years, we are very pleased with what we have accomplished with the youth hunting day.

"It has always been about the kids and the reason why our supporters want to come back year after year to help.

"As hunters, we have a responsibility to preserve our hunting heritage for future generations to enjoy and one of the best ways to do this, is developing the passion for hunting in our youth."

Sports

Young hunters give it their best shot at Hullett

Cheryl Heath

Clinton News-Record

Thirty young hunters are learning about the thrill of the hunt.

Thanks to volunteer hunters, the Ontario Federation of Hunters and Anglers, the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Friends of Hullett, youngsters, from across Southwestern Ontario, were given a half-day's worth of training, Nov. 29, at the Hullett Conservation Area.

Event volunteer Ken Maronets reports the second-annual Youth Involvement in Hunting Event featured everything "from A to Z" about hunting, right down to recipes for properly cooking a freshly killed pheasant.

Maronets notes to enroll for the free event, youth had to possess their firearms training and hunter-education courses. Next up was partnering with a mentor, of which there were dozens from the area, to go out on the pheasant hunt.

Other important parts of the experience, says Maronets, include learning the ethics of hunting as well as the importance of employing firearms-safety techniques.

He says that though some may think the combination of youth and gun safety is an oxymoron, the reality is the event features a structured hunt under the watchful eyes of an experienced adult hunter, as well as the assistance of trained dogs.

In all, 15 young hunters, who had to be at least 12 years of age, partici-

pated in the morning and 15 took part in the afternoon sessions. The young hunters included a few participants from the first-annual event, as well as a few female hunters.

"It's really about passing on the legacy," says Maronets, noting a vast number of adult volunteers stepped forward to ensure the day's activities were educational and instructional.

The schedule of events itself featured everything from a seminar on land-owner relations to a firearms-safety refresher to trap shooting, field dressing and safe handling of birds.

"We're trying to advance kids to a higher level of ethics and sportsmanship," he says. "You don't always have to go hunting to get something."

Maronets notes the community supports the hunt as dozens of sponsors, including businesses, stepped forward to pick up the cost for the session, which featured the presence of St. John Ambulance in the event of an emergency.

"Some sponsors hunted in their youth and this is their way of giving back to the community," says Maronets, noting cash and prizes were up for grabs, and the Ministry of Natural Resources had a trailer on site to highlight examples of illegal and unethical hunting.

Maronets says the hope is that today's young hunters will choose to also give back and become mentors once they reach the sportsman stage.

"It's sort of a dynamic process," he says.

Chad Gorel, a 14-year-old Nile-area

resident, proved to be three-times lucky for the second-year in a row.

"I got three pheasants last year and three pheasants this year," he says, noting he gave away all three of this year's catch to fellow hunters that did not fare as well.

Chad's interest in hunting was sparked by his father, Paul, who has been a long-time hunter. His grandfather also enjoyed hunting.

One of the best parts of the hunt, says Chad, is bringing home food for his family to enjoy.

Chad, who is a Grade 9 student at St. Anne's Catholic Secondary School in Clinton, also enjoys deer and bow hunting.

"The freedom of it," notes Chad is a big part of the joy of the sport.



Young hunters were learning about the hunt at Hullett Conservation Area, Nov. 29. Top row, from left: Sue Rueger, John Kalka, Melissa Kramp, Shawn Kramp, Alex Kramp. Back row, from left Tom Heer, Charley Kramp and Fred Posthumus. Below: Alex Kramp shows he's got the hang of it.

