

Hunt of honor

Longtime friends host hunt for Chicago, FD firefighters



-Submitted photo

Chicago fireman Steve Wabi participated in a first-responder Honor Hunt over the weekend in Webster County. Organized by Jim Kersten, of Fort Dodge, and his former college roommate Doug Aller, of Chicago, several Chicago and Fort Dodge firemen were invited to spend the weekend pheasant hunting in Webster County.

A group of first responders from the Chicago area visited Webster County over the weekend to experience pheasant hunting in central Iowa.

The second annual Honor Hunt was organized by Jim Kersten, Iowa Central vice president of external relations and government affairs, and his longtime friend and former college roommate Doug Aller, of Chicago. Aller invited five firefighters and two police officers from the Chicago metro area for the hunt.

Fort Dodge Fire Department firemen Lt. Eric Conell, Capt. Jason Vandt, Ben Williams and Bryce Hamilton were also invited to participate.

The idea to host a weekend of hunting for first responders came after Kersten and Aller saw the social unrest and riots in major cities across the United States in the summer of 2020.

“(Aller) and I thought, ‘We’ve got to show appreciation for first responders, and it just kind of went from there,’” Kersten said. *“And last year, it was a big success, and this year was even better. They really appreciated it.”*



-Submitted photo

Firefighters from Chicago and Fort Dodge participated in a pheasant hunt over the weekend around Webster County. According to organizer Doug Aller, of Chicago, about 45 pheasants were shot by the group over Saturday and Sunday.

Last November, Kersten and Aller hosted two firefighters from Chicago for a hunting weekend with a couple of local firemen. This year, they were excited to see it expand to more participants.

The groups got together Friday night, Conell said.

“We just got to know how they operate their stations and we were able to tell our own stories,” he said.

On Saturday and Sunday, the groups split up and went hunting in various areas of Webster County and into Hamilton and Calhoun counties.

Local landowners allowed the groups to hunt on their land, including Richard and Joan Stark, Gus and Nancy Macke, Bruce and Deb Becker and Norm Lundquist.



-Submitted photo

A group of firefighters and police officers from Chicago visited Webster County over the weekend for a first-responder Honor Hunt organized by Jim Kersten, of Fort Dodge, and his former college roommate, Doug Aller. This was the second year of the Honor Hunt.

Aller estimated the groups shot about 45 pheasants over the two days of hunting.

Local members of Pheasants Forever, including Jerry Beck, volunteered as hunting guides for the groups.

“The guys from Chicago probably don’t see a lot of ground and land like what we’ve got,” Beck said. “They definitely do hunt, but they’ve never seen it quite like what we’ve got in our area as far as habitat.”

Though the weekend was successful in terms of pheasant hunting, it was also successful in fostering friendships and camaraderie among the firefighters, Aller said.

“It was a great experience for everybody,” he said.

Conell was grateful to Kersten, Aller and the other organizers for putting this hunt together.

“It’s just a great opportunity,” he said. *“We’re honored to be invited to take part in it and it’s very generous for those guys to take a whole weekend of their time to take us around some unique properties that we wouldn’t otherwise be able to.”*

Aller and Kersten both said they hope the Honor Hunt becomes an annual tradition in the area.