

Experiencing Iowa hunting

Chicago Fire Dept. father/son duo comes to area in search of pheasants



-Submitted photo

Jason Powell, left, a paramedic with the Chicago Fire Department, and his father, retired Chicago firefighter Jack Powell, display some of the pheasants they bagged during a weekend hunt in the Fort Dodge area. They were invited to the area to hunt in a gesture intended to thank them for their service. A couple of Fort Dodge firefighters joined the hunt on Sunday. The outing was organized by Jim Kersten, of Fort Dodge, and his former college roommate, Doug Aller, of Chicago. Such hunts may become an annual event.

During a weekend of hunting in which the amount of laughing and good-natured teasing likely exceeded the amount of shooting, a father and son with deep connections to the Chicago Fire Department were introduced to the people and the landscape of Webster County.

“I feel like the guest of honor here,” said Jason Powell, a paramedic.

His father, retired firefighter Jack Powell, wanted to thank everybody who made the pheasant hunting trip possible.

“This is our thank you for all that the firefighters and first responders do for the rest of us,” Jerry Beck, the treasurer and banquet chairman of the Webster County Chapter of Pheasants Forever, immediately replied.

The Powells were guests on what may have been the first of many pheasant hunts intended to honor and thank firefighters.

The idea of the trip originated with Jim Kersten, of Fort Dodge, and his former college roommate, Doug Aller, of Chicago. Aller, an Iowa native who has been a hunter for most of his life, manages investments for the union that represents Chicago firefighters.

Aller had been part of a No Child Left Indoors program that Pheasants Forever had conducted for the children of Chicago firefighters and police officers.

“I’d seen all of these kids spend too much time watching video games, violent video games,” he said.

He and Kersten began developing a plan to bring some of the firefighters and their children to Iowa for pheasant hunting. When the COVID-19 pandemic interfered, the two pushed ahead with plans for a smaller hunt that would serve as a token of appreciation for the service and sacrifices of firefighters.

When he retired after 22 years of service, Jack Powell was a member of Engine Co. 45, working out of a firehouse on South Cottage Grove Avenue that was the last in the city at that time. He said he was *“nice and*

comfortable on the couch” when he was invited to join the hunt. He hadn’t been pheasant hunting in years.

“I said ‘yeah, why not,’” he recalled.

Decades ago, he had hunted pheasants in Iowa, near Clinton. He had not been hunting in northern Iowa.

“I enjoyed it,” he said. *“This is nice.”*

Jason Powell, who is assigned to Ambulance 69, said he got a last-minute invitation to the hunt from a union steward. He has hunted for years, but never in Iowa.

“We had a great day,” he said Saturday evening. *“We don’t get this chance to hunt in northern Illinois.”*

He said that except for the Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois, there isn’t much public land open to hunting in that state, and there is very little private land available.

Jason Powell was impressed with the Fort Dodge community.

“Beautiful town, nice people,” he said.

The hunting party included Matt Garner, the president of the local Pheasants Forever chapter; chapter members Greg Davis and Bruce Walker; Tom Beneke; the Powells; Beck; Kersten and Aller on Saturday. Two Fort Dodge firefighters – Capt. Jason Vandt and Firefighter Mike Wiltzius — joined the group on Sunday. The hunters had about six dogs with them.

The hunt took place on lands owned by Richard Stark, of Woolstock; Bob Van Diest, of Webster City; and Gus Macke, of Lake City. The areas where they hunted were southeast of Clare, south of Woolstock, north of Duncombe and near Vincent.

On Saturday, the party bagged about 10 birds. Jason Powell got three of

In contrast, Jack Powell said he didn't fire a shot all day on Saturday.

On Sunday, the group got another 10 pheasants.

Aller was accompanied by his Labrador retriever.

"He flushed a lot of birds," Aller said.

He joked that if he knew how to shoot, he could have got his limit of pheasants.

Aller's commentary on his marksmanship was far from the only wisecrack during the outing.

"It's the camaraderie that makes the sport what it is," he said.

Newsletter

Today's breaking news and more in your inbox

I'm interested in (please check all that apply)

Daily Newsletter Breaking News

SUBSCRIBE