

Spreading the joys of nature, its bounty

Young hunters, many on their first excursion, benefit from program

By Dave Stephens

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PIERCEVILLE — Marching through the prairie grass on a rolling piece of ground just east of Garden City, 15-year-old Preston Rhodes wasn't prepared for what happened next.

"Kakwaak" squawked the ring-neck pheasant as it launched heavenward out of the grass just five feet in front of him. Startled, Rhodes raised his shotgun, but it was too late — the bird had cleared the horizon.

"That one kind of scared me," Rhodes said after the hunt, "it just popped out of nowhere."

But for Rhodes, of Mulvane, and most of the 20 other youths gathered at Beaver's Game Farm, a few missed birds and some jittery nerves weren't a big deal — many of the kids present had never been pheasant hunting before.

On March 24, Tallgrass Outfitters of Kansas City invited kids from across Kansas involved with the Pass It On program to the one-day Mitch Telinde Memorial Hunt — a day dedicated to teaching kids to love the outdoors and hunting.

Tim Telinde, who operates Tallgrass Outfitters, started the hunt last year in honor of his son Mitch, who died in an automobile accident in January 2006.

"My son loved to hunt and I'm glad to pass this on," Telinde told the group of kids — many involved in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program — adult sponsors and volunteer guides.

Jesus Castillo, 13, took to the field with his Big Brother, Ed Milneo, and after failing to draw a bead on a bird, suddenly found himself in a perfect situation — one of the dogs of guide Curtis Peterson was trailing a ring-neck right in front of him.

The bird flushed up and Jesus fired — dropping the bird from the sky and spreading a big smile across his face.

"I thought the 12 gauge was going to have a lot of kick, and knock me



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Mike Christensen, the director of Pass It On — Outdoor Mentors looks on as two of the 20 kids gathered for the Mitch Telinde Memorial Hunt walk through the field hoping to kick up a pheasant.

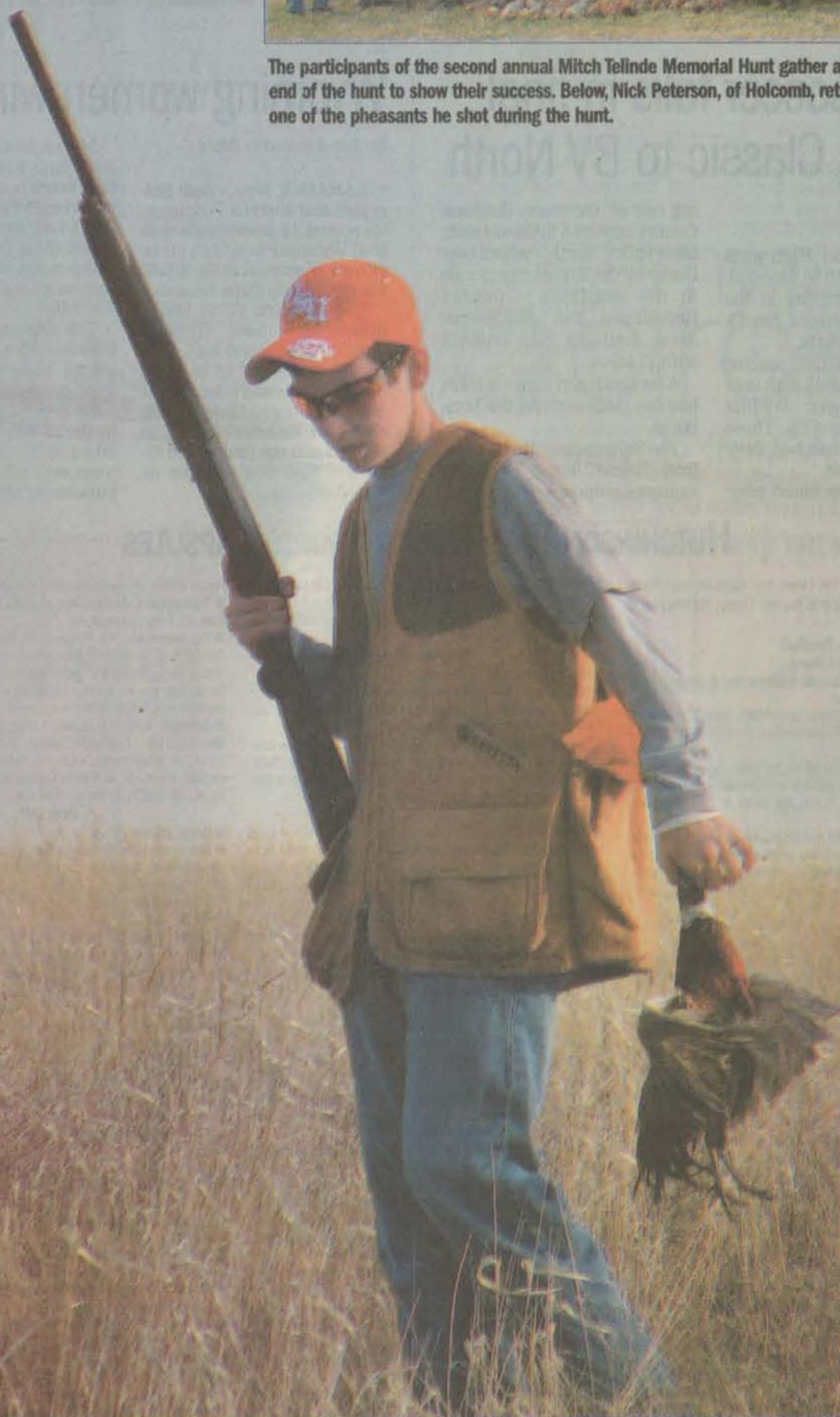


A pheasant is flushed out of the grass in front of Jesus Castillo, 13, of Wichita, who was on his first pheasant hunting trip.



The participants of the second annual Mitch Telinde Memorial Hunt gather at the end of the hunt to show their success. Below, Nick Peterson, of Holcomb, retrieves one of the pheasants he shot during the hunt.

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Hunt

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down," Castillo, of Wichita, said. "But I didn't feel a thing."

For Castillo, the day ended with one bird in possession; for Rhodes, the day ended with none – but for both boys, and the other kids who spent the morning hunting pheasants, the day was marked a success.

"My mom didn't believe that I could actually shoot a gun or go hunting," Rhodes said. "I guess I proved her wrong."

And for Mike Christiansen, the director of Pass It On-Outdoors

Mentors Inc., the chance to introduce a group of kids to the joys of hunting is what the day was all about.

Christiansen, who previously worked with Big Brothers Big Sisters in Sedgwick County, said the idea to start an outdoor mentoring program came from reading the profiles of the kids waiting to be matched with a Big – many of the kids expressed an interest in doing things outdoors, like hunting and fishing.

Combined with an effort started in 1999 by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to get

more young people interested in the outdoors, Pass It On-Outdoor Mentors has become a national organization with nine states.

"You see so many of these kids who are in situations where they never get to go outside to play, let alone to somewhere where they can go hunting," Christiansen said. "That's why so many kids today are out of shape, they never get out and get exercise."

But taking a child on his first hunt is all that the outdoor mentors do, Christiansen said. Some of the Big/Little pairs have gone

to Quivira to see the flocks of migrating birds; others attended a session with a professional rod maker.

"It's really about making a connection with the child by teaching them to love nature," Christiansen said.

And for the kids, the ones who spent the morning pursuing pheasants across the rolling prairie hills, it's about creating an experience they'll remember their entire lives.

"I got a bird with my first and only shot," Castillo said. "That's not a bad way to start."