

Pass It On: Youth learn hunting from mentors

BY MARK ENGLAND

Frederick Pratt didn't fire a shot on his first deer hunt and got most of his exercise chasing an armadillo. But the measure of the fledgling Pass It On — Outdoor Mentoring program for youth like Frederick, 15, of Irving is more than the outcome of a hunt.

"Among other things, there's just the psychological calming affect that nature has on children," said Bill Flynt, director of the program for the Big Brothers Big Sisters of North Texas. "If they're sitting in front of the TV or playing video games, their minds are constantly stimulated. They don't have time to think and daydream. This promotes better physical health as well. This is an opportunity to get our children outdoors."

As far as raising a new generation of hunters, Flynt said the program targets more than just the kids.

"It's also an opportunity for their big brothers and big sisters, who are still relatively young, to experience something they may have missed growing up," said Flynt, a certified hunting instructor.

The Pass It On program started in 1999. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks wanted to boost the plummeting sales of hunting and fishing licenses. Figuring mentoring would play a crucial role in recruiting young hunters, state offi-

cial persuaded Big Brothers Big Sisters of Sedgwick, Kan., to adopt the program.

Pass It On has been in Texas for a little more than a year.

Frederick and his big brother, Shane Uys, 37, of Irving are among its first participants. Before last November, neither had been on a hunt. The action in Ranger was admittedly tame. They mostly saw does, Uys said. Frederick fell asleep his first time in a deer stand.

"After that I got used to it," he said. "It was fun, but, yeah, I would have at least like to have gotten a shot off."

The genesis for the hunt was a skeet shoot arranged by Pass It On. Uys, a systems administrator, said Frederick's shooting impressed a lot of people — including Jeff Morton, who owns Rock Creek Range in Joshua.

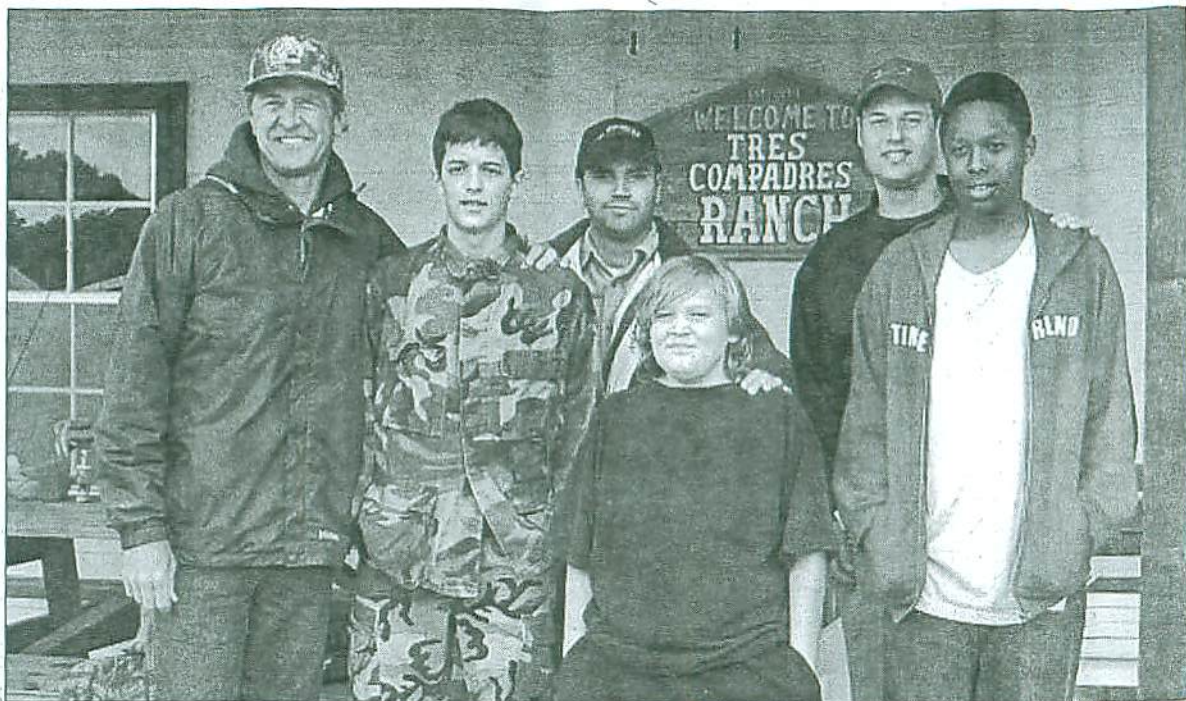
"He's got a real steady hand," Uys said. "Jeff Morton said Frederick was a real good marksman. You could tell he was kind of happy to hear it. I think he learned something about himself. It gave him some confidence."

Frederick thought he might be good at shooting.

"I had practiced with pellet guns, and I'm real calm," he said. "I don't have to try real hard to be calm."

He wasn't alone in learning something about himself at a range.

Rita Johnson and her little sister, Stormie, 13, who lives in Garland,



ON THE HUNT: Participants in the Pass It On program at Big Brothers Big Sisters are, from left, Larry Lehrmann, Terry Rosser, Even Gonzalez, Jerry Gribble, Shane Uys and Frederick Pratt.

attended a Pass It On event at the Elm Fork Shooting Range hosted by the Dallas Divas.

One shared look and they knew, "This is it," she said.

"We had been looking for something to focus on during our time together," Johnson said. "This was something we could do on a regular basis that we would both like besides shopping. Not that we don't

still like to shop."

Johnson said she saw Stormie's confidence improve along with her shooting eye — doing something "that made her the envy of her brothers."

"As I see her doing better, we talk about actually getting our own guns and our own vests," Johnson said. "I do see at least one hunting trip in our future. This has really brought

us together in a common interest."

Frederick plans to go hunting again. He's developed a taste for game.

"I liked the food a lot, the quail and duck we had," he said. "That was really good."

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say, "OK, we need to see you do something like alternate your (livestock) grazing program, implement a burning program for prairies restoration, or try some

The program also encourages property owners to plant deep-rooted shrubs or vines for the herd's alternative food sources. Wolf explained that while deer prefer the succulent forbs, the "woody plant community" hangs tough in a drought.

"It's something that can get them through in a pinch," he said.

Delta County farm is Level 3; to that end, he has been creating browse by planting soybeans, clover and wheat.

He said the improved groceries, plus some voluntary buck harvest restrictions, have transformed his East Texas farm, which was once overrun with does, spikes and a few scrawny fork-horns.

happen has panned out."

"We're seeing better weight and body mass and bigger racks. But we're still holding back on shooting them. We're waiting to see those antlers get way outside the ears."

"It doesn't come free," Favre said, "but I'm trying to expose my children to the outdoors. Between that and

Wolf said anyone interested in the program must first consult his or her local state biologists. If you don't know who that is, he said, call the local game warden or go to TPW's Web site at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/habitats/. More information about the MLDP program is at