

## ON THE

# HUNT



## New nonprofit looks to give wounded veterans opportunity to feel like themselves again

By **ANDREW KRULL**  
*editor.sdt@gmail.com*

### AN EVENT

last month that provided veterans blinded while in service an opportunity to hunt with guides has sprouted a new local non-profit organization to provide such opportunities on a regular basis.

"When Lonnie (Bedwell) got a hold of me, I just kind of ran with it," said Heroes New Hope Foundation President Scott Goodman. "For me, it

was a little token from me to give something back to these guys that gave so much."

The initial turkey hunt occurred between May 10-12, with five veterans blinded from injuries sustained in Iraq or Afghanistan participating. The Sullivan Elks Club hosted a dinner for the veterans, their guides and volunteers on the evening of May 12.

"There were about 40 people there," Sullivan Elks veterans officer Lenny Barish said of the dinner.

Heroes New Hope Foundation was not established for the initial hunt, and Barish thanked the Blind Endeavors Foundation, a national non-profit organization, for sponsoring the initial event. The Sullivan Elks spon-

Contributed photo  
Veterans blinded during combat in recent wars, guides and volunteers posed for a photo after the veterans arrived for three days of turkey hunting last month. Pictured are, from left, Darrell Goodman, Blaine Bolyard, Jon Kilpatrick, Russ Nelson, Henry Bobe, William Murphy, Eric Marts, Brandon Riser, Scott Goodman, Lonnie Bedwell, Dave Bedwell, Melissa Day, Daniel Wallace, Tim Hornik, Chuck Dishon, Tom Lake, Ray Secrest, Alex Grable and Kyle Loden.

sored two veterans at a cost of \$1,300 each, while the Indiana Elks Association helped fund two others. Funding for the fifth participant came from various local businesses and groups.

Dugger's Bedwell came up with the idea after speaking with two blind veterans in Florida.

**See HUNT  
on Page 9**



Continued from  
Page One

Bedwell, a Navy veteran himself, was blinded in a hunting accident after his service was completed.

"I'm just amazed," Bedwell said of how the event and foundation came to fruition. "How this started was I was speaking with Aaron Hale. He lost his eyesight in Afghanistan from an IED blast, and, due to his injuries, he developed spinal meningitis and started to lose his hearing.

"I was down in Florida ... he just made mention that he would like to go hunting again," he noted. "I said 'I'll see if I can make that happen.'"

Bedwell received similar sentiments of wanting to be able to do the things he used to do before his blindness from Steve Baskis, the founder of the Blind Endeavors Foundation, which sponsored the initial event despite his not taking part in it.

"I thank Blind Endeavors for hosting the inaugural event before we got our own nonprofit established," Bedwell said.

"Like they said, it made them realize they can do something," he continued. "It's proof that you can do what you used to do ... you just have to find a different way to do it."

Bedwell noted one individual asked him, "What can I do with my boy?" in relation to past activities he enjoyed with his child.

"This is just one aspect of it," Bedwell said, noting one participant told him the experience "just rejuvenated me and showed me a different way."

Participant Eric Marts, who came the farthest for May's hunt from Moorhead, Minn., noted the family feeling and camaraderie between participants was unique.

"You're not in a hospital setting," he said. "You're just out on the front deck with some friends."

The participants stayed at Goodman's house during the hunt after other options proved impractical.

"They were able to visit in the evening," Goodman said. "It was a blessing the way it worked out. They were able to eat together, congregate together."

"After the hunt is over, you're just talking, and that's where the answers come," Marts said. "There are so many things that go beyond just being wounded (including strains on your old relationships since your injuries). Just being able to bounce things off each other was fantastic.

"We were all in the same boat," he continued. "Of course, we shared the experience of being wounded in combat and going through the stages of 'What can I do now?' ... We all know that things aren't going to be the same, but we can find different ways to do things."

Marts also noted the "community sup-

port" made the experience unique.

"It just had a totally different feel to it," he said. "It was like you were hunting before with your family. ... Whether it was ladies from the church bringing around the most fantastic food or the fish fry."

Marts said the hunting experience was also different than some programs out there.

"One of the things that is unique is the use of the iScope," he noted. "You feel more a part of it."

A guide standing behind the hunter would use an iPhone adapted to the scope of the rifle to see where the hunter was aiming. Goodman noted that the guide then would place his finger on a hunter's back of the neck and "go up, down, whichever way you would want them to move the gun to lock on the crosshairs of the turkey."

Marts noted shooting ranges where they would just put him in front of a target and tell him when to shoot. That's not the experience he felt during the May hunt.

"You know you're on the crosshairs of the turkey," he said. "It just makes you feel more apart of it."

Bedwell said the Heroes New Hope Foundation hopes to have two more events this year, with fishing and deer hunting tentatively scheduled for September and November, respectively.

"It's not always going to be for blind veterans," he added. "It will be disabled veterans, children of veterans. That's what we are hoping to do going forward."

Goodman noted the organization is now recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. HNHF is in the process of putting up a website, where those interested in donating or volunteering can do so.

Along with the Elks, other organizations and individuals donating to the first hunt included Sullivan Walmart, Henry Bobe's Trattoria Italiano, Peabody Energy, Save-A-Lot, Gander Mountain, Operating Engineers Local 841, Dr. Gregg Smith, and Shelburn American Legion Post 197 and its Sons of the American Legion. About 25 individuals also donated time as volunteers either as guides or in other aspects.

"I can't thank everybody enough," Bedwell said. "Other organizations have started donating to the organization for future events."

Marts noted he hopes to participate in some of those events.

"I hope to come back, actually to be not so much a participant, but like a peer mentor," he said. "To let them know that, no matter what their circumstances are, that they can accomplish something.

"I have been in the same boat and can help you through it too," Marts continued, saying the initial hunt will stay with him for some time. "I think I made some lifelong friends there."