NAGA Member of the Year
Vern Beavers
NAGA Treasurer

Plus GETTING STARTED
• From Scratch
• By Buying Out
• Growing Up in the Business
• Through Education
with a tomato red nose and wind burned cheeks to match, I trudge along with my Dad and three older brothers as we walk in a line over stiff milo stalks that sting like crazy when they catch you straight in the shin. Our English Setter Yoda is hundreds of yards ahead of us tuning out my Dad’s calls to come back and has only one thing on her mind which is chasing birds well out of shooting range. It’s the middle of pheasant and quail season in Northwest Kansas and the weather is bone chilling to a thin and bony 7-year-old like myself. I’m almost certain that my thin young fingers are frozen to my Red Rider BB gun due to bad circulation and lack of proper gloves to match the weather conditions. My brothers are constantly nagging at me to keep up with the line but my legs can only go so fast at a comfortable pace where I don’t get winded. In the back of my head I know that my chances of actually killing a bird are virtually zero unless I could miraculously shoot one in the eye. You would think all this would make me want to never hunt again in my life; however the opposite was true. I loved it all!

Experiences like this built my love for the outdoors stronger and stronger as I was growing up. From fishing with my brothers at the family farm pond, bagging a Tom on my first turkey hunt with my oldest brother, or knocking down my first rooster with a single shot .410, I realized that the outdoors is where I wanted to spend my life. In school, while growing up I was constantly asked, “What do you want to do when you grow up?” I always would give the same monotonous answers of being a veterinarian, a firefighter or farmer like my Dad, but what I really wanted to say was that I just wanted to hunt when I grew up.

As I went through school I continued to love the outdoors, by hunting and fishing, and by exploring the natural wonders of the outdoors. For my eighth grade graduation I received a Remington 870 from my parents I still use today as my go-to shotgun. Once high school came it actually was time to begin thinking about what I wanted to do for a career. I couldn’t be cooped up in an office all day. I had to be outdoors a majority of the time, serve others and allow them to experience the great opportunities and services that the outdoors can offer. I needed a job where I could do what I love even if it meant that I wouldn’t always be paid the best. Life is too short to be doing something you don’t love for a living so I wanted to make the time that I do have count.

The summer after my freshman year I began working for a local farmer named Larry who was just starting
to get into raising game birds and guiding hunts. He was already known in the area for raising pure bred pointing Labradors. My older brother owns one of Larry's labs, one of the best dogs that I have ever hunted behind. The first job that I did for Larry was help build a new flight pen. I was so intrigued by how it was built and what it was used for. I had no idea you could raise birds and then release them to be hunted. I wanted to learn more and do whatever I could to be more involved. Soon I was doing routine maintenance on these flight pens and helping care for the birds in them.

Little did I know that this would be the start to my desire to run my own upland bird hunting operation someday in the future.

I started looking at different college majors in Kansas such as Wildlife Biology or Parks and Management but none fulfilled the love I had for the outdoors and hunting combined. Midway through my junior year of high school one of my brothers mentioned a new program that he had heard had started at Kansas State University called Wildlife and Outdoor Enterprise Management. I told him I would look it up and see what it all entailed. Jackpot! This major built specifically for students wanting to go into the hunting or fishing industry was tailored perfectly to what I wanted to do with my life. Those little thoughts of hunting for a living could come true!

This selective program only admits forty students a year to allow for smaller and more hands on classes. I applied and haven’t looked back since being admitted into the program’s third class of students. I am currently a sophomore at Kansas State University and try to make it to the field or water to hunt and fish whenever I can. So far this program has been all that I dreamed it would be and more, involving trips to the Whittington center in New Mexico, Midway USA in Missouri, Flint Oak hunting resort in Southeast Kansas, and meeting leaders in the hunting industry such as Larry Potterfield. I plan to serve my internship in South Dakota with a lodge that mainly does upland bird hunts. I would also like to learn more about training bird dogs since they can be such a vital tool to your success in the field and I love watching a good dog work thick cover. My long term goal is to return to my hometown and start my own hunting lodge, join in with Larry and his operation to raise Labradors and provide guided upland bird hunting.

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Children are crucial to the outdoors and hunting and we need to involve them in the outdoors to keep hunting and other outdoor activities thriving. I know that I will share the outdoors and hunting with my children every chance that I get. I wouldn’t be where I am today without my Dad getting me started in the outdoors and hunting and Larry helping spark my interest. I can’t wait to be the one whom kids remember as getting them started in the outdoors. What satisfaction it will be! ★

“Wouldn’t it be awesome if I could hunt for a living?”

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continued from page 13 during a round of sporting clays. I’d bet he has been to deer camp and listened to the stories told around the fire about the one that got away. I strongly suspect he respects and appreciates his right to go afield with a dog and put a few birds in his game bag. Yeah, I’d like to think Joey has introduced someone else to the shooting sports, because he knows it’s something special, even worth dancing about. ★

Classifieds

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