

Trish like a
GIRL

My experience at
 Liver Fest at the
 Muutka Lodge



By Beckie Gaskill
 OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Every once in a while I am charged with writing a story I am not fully sure I can do justice. This, the story of the Muutka Lodge near Rhinelander, is one of those stories. I was invited out to the lodge for Liver Fest for the second time this year, but it was the first year I was able to make it. Not only do I love liver, but the story behind Bob Turk's camp, and the stories it could tell, drew me to the event.

Turk said the whole thing started with cooking chickens during the hunting season. Back in the day, he had a bus that served as his hunting camp. Hunters and friends brought chickens to the affair and food and fun abounded, by all accounts. In 1990, Turk bought the hunting camp which is now the Muutka Lodge, near Rhinelander. In fact, it is very near where my Dad and I used to hunt growing up.

I went to school with Turk's daughter, Ann (Turk) Kipper. We were in band together and several other classes. His son Craig I have known for years as well. Long time readers of the *Times* may recognize Craig's name, as he penned this column well before I came to land here.

Pulling up to the Muutka Lodge, it is a deer camp like many others. A fire pit outside, with several people enjoying the warmth of the fire after a long day in the woods. Warm and inviting lights from inside the camp welcome hunters after a long day.

Inside, posters covering the ceiling would rival any teen boy's bedroom back in the 80s. The table in the camp is adorned with old photos, old back tags (including Craig's first), and other memorabilia from over the years, all part of the table permanently, thanks to what looked like an epoxy coating.

One of the things that really stood out as far as furnishings was the stove. I have cooked on lesser equipment back in my restaurant days! When you put a professional-type cook with professional-type equipment together, you just have to know you are in for a treat.

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DEAN HALL/LAKELAND TIMES

**Study looks
 to determine role
 of dispersing young
 deer in spread of CWD**

By Beckie Gaskill
 OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

By the age of one, young deer are forced from their home range by their mother, to make room for another fawn to be born. As deer disperse, they may carry with them a disease such as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) to a place where the disease did not previously exist. A newly released study by D. Marie Gilbertson looked closer at that dispersal, who was dispersing, when, and to where.

Dispersal, she said, occurs "when an individual shifts their home range to a new, non-overlapping territory." This is a permanent move for a young deer. Her study found dispersal most common among juvenile bucks, or buck born the previous year. Sixty-five percent of juvenile bucks in the study dispersed. For all other groups, the dispersal rate was much lower, from 2-13% in her study in Southwestern Wisconsin. Other studies, she said, had found much higher rates of dispersal for females, however.

"We don't know why there was such a difference in female dispersal rates between our study and some other research studies," she said. "We know that male and female deer likely have different reasons for dispersing. Females seem to prioritize access to resources and habitats like good forest cover for raising their young, while males seem to disperse because either their mom kicks them out or because they're trying to gain access to mates."

Gilbertson's study found females dispersing only in the spring. Males, however, dispersed in both spring and fall. The female spring dispersement, she said, aligns with the theory that females disperse in search of resources. In spring, dispersing males are likely sent out by their mothers, while in fall, disper-

sal is most likely related to the rut and gaining access to mates.

The typical range for dispersal was only an average of 3.6 miles. This differed between males and females and between spring and fall dispersers. Females tended to disperse an average of 3.1 miles. Males were close to this number in the fall, she said, but had longer dispersal ranges in spring, with an average distance of 7.2 miles.

"Other studies have seen that same pattern, where males go shorter distances in the fall," she said. "The thinking is that the distance males need to go in the fall to improve their access to mates isn't very long in contrast to spring dispersals when mom has kicked them out, and they need to find a new range."

There were a few exceptions to the short-distance dispersers, Gilbertson said. A total of five deer observed by the research team traveled more than twice the average distance, with one female dispersing over 42 miles in 11 days. While long-distance dispersals such as this are not common, they are of interest to researchers, Gilbertson said, due to their potential to move CWD to new areas of the state.

Gilbertson's study also looked more closely at reasons for dispersal. Her research team found, in more agricultural areas in spring, juvenile male deer were more likely to disperse in. These dispersers, on average, also dispersed further.

In forest habitats, she said, juvenile bucks were less likely to disperse in the spring. No matter the season, those bucks with more forest cover in their natal range dispersed relatively shorter distances.

The researchers also looked at other potential drivers. Those included body weight, or ease of travel across the landscape. None of those proved to be significant

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**2022 preliminary
 opening
 weekend deer
 registration
 numbers released**

By Beckie Gaskill
 OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Preliminary registration and license sales numbers were released by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) last Tuesday. Those numbers indicate a decrease in the number of hunters taking part in the nine-day gun deer season for 2022 over 2021. As of midnight on Sunday, Nov. 20, 2022, sales for all seasons (gun, bow and crossbow) and including sports and patrons licenses sat at just over 779,000. Just under 421,500 of those were for the nine-day gun hunt only. Year-to-date sales were reported by the department to be down by 2% from the same time last year. Conservation patron licenses were up by 2.2%. Online license sales accounted for 62% of all licenses sold. Final license sales numbers will be available in January, according to a recent DNR press release.

Registrations

Opening weekend saw a 14% increase in buck harvest over 2021, but was only 2% above the five-year average. A total of 55,503 bucks were registered statewide on opening weekend.

In the Northern Forest Zone, during the opening weekend of the gun hunt, 19,116 deer were registered. Of those 13,009 of those were bucks. This is a 4.6% increase in harvest over the five-year average and 15.4% over the harvest in 2021.

In 2022, Vilas County saw 451 antlered deer harvested and 240 antlerless deer for a total of 691. This brought this year's harvest to 15.9% over that of last year and 10.1% over the five-year average.

Oneida County hunters were able to harvest 939 deer over the opening weekend. Almost 650 of those were antlered deer. While this harvest was up 10.2% over the 2021 opening weekend, it represented a

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Above the stove still hangs the old gas lights that were original with the hunting camp, not replaced by generator-powered incandescents.

“We first started out in buses,” Turk told me. “We used to have a chicken feed with a couple of deer parties. They would come to our bus. One year we would pay for everything and they next year they would pay for everything. And I would always cook everything.”

That went on for a number of years before Turk purchased what is not the Muutka Lodge, the home of Liver Fest and a wealth of stories and memories over the 30-plus years.

“When we bought this hunting camp in 1990, we switched over to cooking deer liver,” he said. “And that went on for a long time until CWD showed up, so I went to beef liver.”

Each year Turk hosts 30-40 people, with 35 at this year’s event. The camaraderie in the group permeated the room. I could feel the friendship and the entire camp had such a welcoming overall feeling. It is hard to describe. We did not have a hunting camp when I was a kid, but as an adult I have



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOGRAPH

Muutka Lodge is the home to Liver Fest, an annual celebration of hunting, friendship and camaraderie that has been going on since 1990.

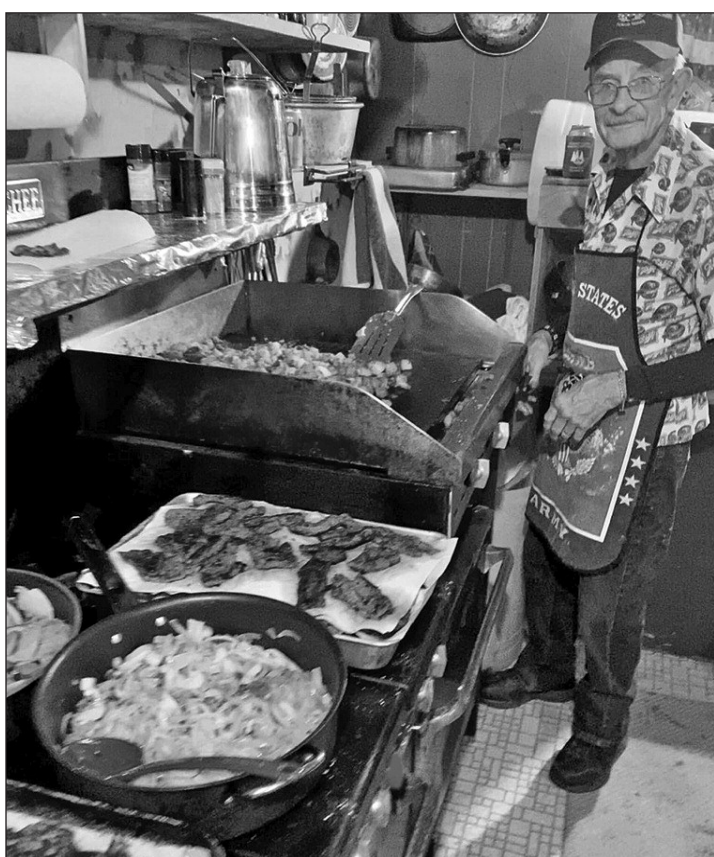
hunted with groups that would meet up afterwards at one hunter’s house or another. But to say the feeling at Muutka Lodge was special would be an understatement - Turk happily working away at the stove, enjoying a beer and chatting with each hunter who came near. He and Ann cooked together, with the father in charge of the liver and ham, and the daughter in charge of the potatoes. The sparkle in both of their eyes showed there was certainly something special about this event.

Turk said each year he goes through 10 pounds of liver, five pounds of ham, 20 pounds of potatoes, five pounds of onions and five pounds of bacon. With all of



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOGRAPH

I was lucky enough to grab a quick interview with Bob Turk at this year’s Liver Fest to talk about the event and Muutka Lodge itself. His daughter and my friend, Ann, was stealthy enough to grab a photo, one I will always treasure.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOGRAPH

Bob Turk is in his element in the kitchen. He cooks liver, onions, bacon, ham and potatoes for his guests at Liver Fest at the Muutka Lodge each year.



BECKIE GASKILL/LAKELAND TIMES

Liver Fest is an annual event at Bob Turk’s Muutka Lodge, attended by 30-40 people each year.

this food, as well as all of the food brought by others, no one goes away hungry. Turk said about half of the people who attend enjoy liver, hence the ham as an addition to the meal.

“There’s also a lot of people that don’t like liver, but they have tried mine and they come back for it every year just for it.”

I have to agree with them. While I have always liked liver, even when I was a young child, Turk’s is likely some of the best I have ever tasted. I do not know if he uses a special seasoning, if it is something about the camp, or just the feeling you get when you walk through the door — but there is something special about that liver, and, truly, about the whole experience at Muutka Lodge.

Ann had been involved with the LiverFest festivities since the beginning. She has been hunting for five years. When her mom, Bob’s wife, passed away five years ago, she decided to take to the woods with her dad. Prior to that, she spent deer season attending the many “Hunter’s Widows” events that happen across the Northwoods, spending time with her Mom.

Sadly, Ann’s mom passed

away shortly after deer season in 2017. When the next fall rolled around, Ann felt saddened by that time of year and the things she would miss with her Mom. It was then she decided to take to the woods, sitting with her Dad.

Bob convinced his daughter to get a license. She said she would have been happy simply sitting in the blind with him. She was not sure if she could kill a deer. Fast forward five years to this year’s hunt and Ann is the only one in the blind carrying a gun. Bob sits with her, coaching her and giving advice. Now she is after her first deer. But Liver Fest has been an ongoing tradition for her as long as her Dad has been involved in it.

“I think there’s events like this at every hunting camp, right?” She said. “And this is just Muutka’s Lodge’s version of it. And what a wonderful thing to do, especially the day before thanksgiving, to spend time together and have the camaraderie and be thankful for everything we have.”

Ann said the thing she enjoys most is seeing how happy her Dad is putting on Liver Fest each year. He loves to cook and he loves his friend, she said. This

event is certainly an incredible mix of both of those things. He cooked in the military, Ann said, and still loved to cook today.

What does Muutka mean?

Muutka means “bend,” or “curve” in Finnish. A muutka is when a person has a blanket over them and they lift their feet so the blanket curls, or curves, under their feet to keep them warm and cozy.

Muutka Lodge is warm and cozy with a wood fire and great food, prepared by Turk himself. Family, friends, and plenty of story telling abound at the lodge.

Ann’s great uncle Oiva’s hunting shack was also called Muutka, so it was decided to adopt that name for this lodge as well - a fitting tribute, and a name that fits this camp like no other would.

Turk said his favorite part about Liver Fest is seeing all of his friends and sharing stories with them.

“Some of them only see each other once a year, and that’s here,” he said. “These are all personal friends of mine from the military and close friends. And I invite them every year and most of the same ones come every year.”

Some hunters and friends had been coming for years and others, such as Pat Maass, are newer to Liver Fest. He was invited out by a mutual friend two years ago and said he will definitely keep coming back. But no matter who you might talk to at the Muutka Lodge, it is Turk himself who keeps everyone coming back year after year. Quick with a smile and eyes that twinkle like Santa Claus himself, Turk is the center of all that is Muutka Lodge.

Beckie Gaskill may be reached at bgaskill@lakelandtimes.com or outdoors@lakelandtimes.com.



BECKIE GASKILL/LAKELAND TIMES

Craig Turk and Ann (Turk) Kipper, two of Bob Turk’s children, have been friends of mine for many years. Both have been involved with Liver Fest at the Muutka Lodge since its inception.



BECKIE GASKILL/LAKELAND TIMES

Pulling up to the Muutka Lodge near Rhinelander, the first thing to welcome visitors is a warm fire, surrounded by jovial hunters and veterans.