

Pheasants Forever celebrates 30th anniversary

By Dana Paxton

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Pheasants Forever celebrated its 30th anniversary on Aug. 5. It all started in 1982 when Dennis Anderson of Saint Paul, Minn., a columnist, an avid hunter and conservationist, helped to form Pheasants Forever. Since then, the nation-wide organization has had steady growth and even spread into Canada.

The mission of Pheasants Forever is dedicated to the conservation of pheasants, quail and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public awareness, education and land management policies and programs. The members that make up the organization are a diversified group of hunters, non-hunters, farmers, ranchers, landowners, conservation enthusiasts and wildlife officials. This group of people want to make a difference for wildlife by creating habitat, restoring the wetlands and by protecting our natural prairies.

By April 15, 1983 there were 800 supporters at the first banquet. The program was and still is being operated under a unique grassroots system of fund-raising and project development that allows members to see the direct results of their contributions. The organization empowers chapters with the responsibility to determine how 100 percent of their locally raised conservation funds are spent.

By 1985 the organization had grown to 12 chapters with 1,000 members. At this time the federal Conservation Reserve Program was established and Pheasants Forever was very instrumental in the creation of this program. The program sets aside land and pays landowners to keep their most en-

vironmentally sensitive lands out of agriculture production. These lands improve pheasant populations, but also help improve water quality, the prevention of soil erosion and the creation of critical habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

In 1986, the headquarters were moved to White Bear Minn. and by 1987, membership had grown to over 25,000. By 1990, there were over 50,000 registered members.

In 2003, the first-ever National Pheasant Fest took place and drew 12,500 attendees. This was held in Bloomington, Minn. to celebrate 20 years. Also during this time, the organization began to employ Farm Bill Biologists, who educate farmers and landowners about the benefits of conservation programs as well as assist them after the programs have been implemented. Another highlight of 2003 was when Pheasants Forever launched its Build a Wildlife Area program as another way to care for wildlife habitat and create land for public hunting and outdoor recreation opportunities.

In 2005, a new organization was founded and called Quail Forever, dedicated to the protection and enhancement of quail, pheasants and other upland wildlife through habitat, public awareness, education and advocacy for land management practices. It is based on the same grassroots system as Pheasants Forever.

By 2008 the organization's projects benefitted more than 5 million acres of wildlife habitat across the United States and they have designed the State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement Program, which allows states to cater conservation practices to species in

greatest conservation need. This year marked the 25th anniversary of Pheasants Forever and was celebrated in Saint Paul, Minn. with 30,000 people in attendance at the National Pheasant Fest.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the organization that just keeps growing and implementing conservation and habitat practices so desperately needed by our wildlife.

The organization is currently led by the second President and CEO Howard K. Vincent, who took office in 2000, succeeding Jeff Finden. The Vice President of Government Affairs Dave Nomsen. There are currently over 125,000 members in over 600 chapters.

The organization has three main areas they work on: habitat projects, conservation education and legislative action.

The habitat projects include nesting cover, brood-rearing habitat, winter cover habitat, food plots, wetland restoration, habitat maintenance and land acquisition. To meet the requirements for the education part of their work, the groups sponsor youth hunts, landowner conservation workshops, Farm Bill forums, Leopold Education Project workshops or youth conservation activity days, to name a few.

The third area is legislative action work with elected officials and natural resource agency professionals to affect conservation policies. They meet with law makers, attend landowner conservation workshops, help with the funding of Farm Bill biologists, as well as participation in state wildlife planning committees.

Each chapter is required to hold at least one event a year where membership dues are paid. At this



Jeremiah Stark of Norton shows off a plaque to be auctioned off at last year's Longspur Chapter Pheasants Forever Banquet at the Norton Eagles Lodge.

—Telegram photo by Carleen Bell

event, there are raffles, live and silent auctions and games. Wildlife art, shotguns, and hunting gear are some of the featured items to be won. Other events include wild game feeds, golf tournaments, dog training field days, mentor hunts and shooting events.

The work of a chapter is about conservation and it is never ending. Since 1982, wildlife habitat projects have benefited more than 5.3 million acres across the continent and have participated in over 1,000 different land acquisitions totaling over 135,000 acres. All of this acquired land is open to public hunting.

Kansas has 40 chapters. The Pheasants Forever Longspur Chapter of Norton began in 1992 by a group of sportsmen interest-

ed in preserving the habitat and hunting heritage around Norton. Their goal was to support and enhance the wildlife habitat in the Norton area and promote youth hunting and outdoor activities. They will hold their annual membership drive banquet on Nov. 9 at the Norton Eagles Lodge.

Membership dues are \$35 and includes a journal which publishes five times a year, a window decal, membership card, the chance to meet other outdoor enthusiasts, local chapter access and the peace of mind that you are making a difference on the ground for wildlife and to future generations. If you are interested in joining or just looking for information go to www.pheasantsforever.org

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