

## Safari Wish Hunt 2021

by Ed H. Edwards, SCI Lansing Chapter Member, avid hunter, and fisherman

Fostering Hope through Outdoor Adventures for life-challenged youth ...

Stay on him! Stay on him! Hunter, who was also the "hunter", did his best to move the Guardian System joystick and hold the screen's cross hairs on the chosen buck. Craig Mortz continued with calm direction and words of encouragement. I focused my bino's to best see the results if a shot was taken and felt my nerves form a slip knot in my gut.

Every year Safari Club International Lansing Area Chapter sponsors at least one life-challenged youth in partnership with the Foundation for Hope Outdoor Adventures at Cedar Hollow Lodge near Grayling, Michigan for a long weekend hunt.



The Foundation was initially established by Tony Semple, a former nine-year NFL veteran offensive guard for the Detroit Lions, and his great friend and business owner, Craig Mortz. Its mission is carried out with the help of many who selflessly serve this organization for the betterment of others.

Tony and Craig's love for the outdoors led them to provide this experience through the Foundation to young people who may not ever experience the combination of excitement and peace hunting provides to one's soul.

The news media nowadays seems to focus on negatively and past and present NFL players are no exception with the only thing newsworthy outside of the sports page is if they have been charged or found guilty of a misdemeanor or worse. If you think negatively of NFL players, I'm not going to try to change your mind but my time spent with Tony was a great experience with one of the kindest men I have ever spent time with.

Tony, Craig, and the other Foundation board members, including Ryan Gati, Mike Ruhlig, and Richard Buckley, all work hard to make sure everyone has a good time. Dan and Char Catlin of The Wildlife Gallery perform their taxidermy magic to help preserve each Safari Wish Hunter's wish hunt memories.

In addition to Michigan residents, many out-of-state guests come in from other Foundation referrals. The 2021 hunt had folks from Wisconsin, Indiana, and Pennsylvania which makes for interesting sports rival discussions during meals. My reply to the Bears, Packers, and Steelers fans is "the Detroit Lions have never lost a Super Bowl!"

I was once again honored to be part of this great organization's event. Now back to the hunt ...

The weather was beautiful, deer were on the move, and all hunters except us were successful the first evening or following morning. Several sits without seeing a shooter did not discourage Hunter. As long as he was seeing deer, warm, and had a few gummy bears he was in a happy place!



### Safari Wish Hunt 2021 (continued)

The evening of day two we were in the right blind at the right time. Deer were coming and going from the food plot we were watching, including the one Craig wanted Hunter to take. The only problem was the chosen buck would not settle down and constantly chased does and sparred with other bucks leaving no chance of a shot.

The third time the buck returned was the charm! Broadside and away from other deer, all he needed to do was standstill. Hunter was quiet, calm, and did his best to track the buck and follow directions. Craig, Hunter's dad Derrick, and yours truly had our bino's up most of the time. I'm able to remain calm on the outside but my nerves really work me over when in an observing role! The buck and in my mind the whole world stopped as Hunter lined up the cross hairs and pushed the fire button as soon as Craig whispered shoot! The boom of the .270 broke the silence and Hunter had a buck of a lifetime!



All in all, quite a trip! That evening before falling asleep I did a lot of soul searching about why I enjoy hunting. The joy I get seeing the excitement and innocence of a wheelchair-bound twelve-year-old boy that struggles with pain every day is humbling beyond words. The time I was able to spend with Hunter was an honor and privilege.

