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With the Dick Ellis Experts

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Remembering Dan

Sporting clays event helps shatter fundraising goal

By Dick Ellis



Dan Ross, always with a smile and seen here with his shooter's protective glasses on before competition, was a talented shooter and generous young man who touched the whole community. The 'Share the Field' sporting clays event at Wern Valley Sportsmen's Club in Waukesha County was held in his memory July 11. (Photo courtesy of the Ross Family)

With the last words of his young life on an August evening in 2008, Dan Ross asked his mother not to wake him the next morning. The sporting clays season at Wern Valley Sportsmen's Club in Waukesha had concluded, a banquet was scheduled for the following evening, and the 16-year old would not be expected to report early to work.

Dan was comfortable and talented with a shotgun himself, and had gone to state competition twice as a member of the Junior Team for Wern Valley, winning a Division 1st place once. He also shot in the Winter Sporting Clays League at the McMiller Sportsman's Club with his parents and other team members. As a member of the Wern Valley's Bird Crew, he raised pheasants from chicks, many of which were sold to farms for release in the fields of South Dakota and captured and released adult birds on site as needed at the facility when the hunters came.

Dan never woke. His parents, Lynn and Charlie Ross of Genesee, found their son in bed,

his life ended by a cause that would not reveal itself easily despite any pain or grief suffered by a mom and dad and sisters who really needed to just know why.

Medical evaluation seeking a cause of death that included toxology level and brain aneurism reports and tests of heart, liver and other too-common causes of premature mortality came back normal.

"No, my 16 year old son is gone," Lynn Ross responded. "He ran up the stairs a healthy boy. That's not normal."

Eventually, a tryptase blood test delivered conclu-

sive evidence that Dan had died from an "anaphylactic reaction to an unknown allergen", or allergic reaction to something he had eaten. According to Lynn



Ben Curtis of Ottawa and John Smart of Genesee participated in the Share the Field sporting clays event at the Wern Valley Sportsmen's Club in memory of Dan Ross. The event put a long-time effort to raise \$450,000 for an athletic field to be used by the Kettle Moraine School District and surrounding communities over the top.



Marv Scherr of Waukesha, like so many other shooters participating in the Share the Field sporting clays event at the Wern Valley Sportsmen's Club in July, let his shotgun and his generosity remember the life of 16 year old Dan Ross.

Ross, a tryptase reference level is typically 11.4. With an allergic reaction, the histamine level measured by the Tryptase test might elevate into the 20s. Dan's tryptase level was over 200.

"Dan died in his sleep," Lynn said. "I asked the Doctor what would have happened if he would have had the reaction at the table when we were there with him. He said, 'your husband would have called 911, you would have administered CPR and Dan still would have been gone in seconds'."

In the few seconds it took for loving parents to check on a son, a family's life was shattered forever. Instead of enjoying an evening at the place where Dan had spent much of his life, at the Wern Valley sporting clays banquet a hat was passed and shooters raised \$1,000 in memory of a gener-

ous young boy who everyone liked and who, his mother said, had never had a bad day.

"Dan touched the community," Lynn said. "This kid never had a bad day in his life. He smiled from the day he was born, and literally he had a smile on his face when he died. My father died in his sleep five weeks before at age 78. Now I think Dad had to go to receive Dan."

In passing Dan would continue to touch the community through the courage of a family that had seen firsthand the extraordinary generosity that their son carried in his heart. Two years ago, Dan's help had been solicited from a Kettle Moraine School District coach when the State Trap Shoot held at the Waukesha Gun Club needed more personnel (to be paid at an hourly rate) to help coordinate events. Revenue raised at the shoot would be donated to the District's Share the Field Project.

The project is an ongoing collective fund-raising effort to purchase at a cost of \$425,000 a synthetic athletic field to be used by multiple sports and activities by Kettle Moraine and surrounding communities. The existing natural surface was used by the KM football team only. By the third game each year large sections of the field were reduced to dirt, and a great potential resource was limited in use. If a synthetic field could be installed, lacrosse, field hockey, soccer, marching bands and many other users could all utilize the resource.

Although still not old enough to drive, the then-15 year old had saved his money

and had purchased a 1991 Camaro in need of work. Dan worked at the state trap shoot for four days, earning a paycheck of almost \$500.00. "He asked us if we would be disappointed if he donated the money to 'Share the Field,'" his mother said. "Any parent would be proud of that decision. That's what we live for. At 15, he was living to buy car parts, but he wanted to give away the money."

In making service preparations for their son, the funeral director asked Lynn and Charlie Ross if they would like to set up a memorial to Dan. Although that issue hadn't been discussed at home, in unison, they answered, "Share the Field."

After dismissing the possibility of an August date too close to the day a year before when the Ross family had said goodbye to their son, the "Share the Field" Memorial Shoot for Dan Ross was held on July 11, 2009. "Dan passed in August," said Lynn. "How do you set up a memorial almost a year after he died? I

couldn't do it. I need August to myself."

So very fittingly, it was the memorial shoot that put the long-time quest to raise the funds necessary to buy and install what to many would be a literal field of dreams virtually within reach. With a goal of \$5000, the shoot raised \$7200 and placed the ultimate target just \$12,000 away. Even now, Dan continues to give back to the community while a family learns to let go.

"When Dan died with a smile on his face, the Pastor asked 'wouldn't you have a smile on your face if the Good Lord came to get you?'" Lynn said. "If I had to give up being a mother, at least I gave it up to God. I can't compete with God. We're blessed. We got to be Dan's parents for almost 17 years." *OWO*

Any Wisconsin resident wishing to donate in Dan's memory can make checks out to "Share the Field (memo: Dan Ross) and send to: Share the Field Project. 349 Oak Crest Drive. Wales, WI 53183. Attention: Mike Fink. For more information, connect with www.sharethefield.org.



Another shooter walking the sporting clays round of stations at the Wern Valley Sportsmen's Club takes aim during the Dan Ross Memorial July 11.