

Sports

# Healing in nature

## Upsala VB sweeps the Thunder

Marine finds solace from PTSD through Disabled Veterans Hunt

By ZACH HACKER  
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A few days in the great outdoors were just what the doctor ordered for Robert Barton.

At 71, Barton is a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. who served in the Vietnam War. He is one of 48 people who served their country who took part in the Minnesota Veterans Outdoors annual Disabled Veteran Deer Hunt at Camp Ripley, Tuesday through Thursday.

The hunt brings disabled and recently deployed veterans together from across the state to participate in a camaraderie building experience. That purpose is not lost on Barton, a resident of Ely, who is now retired after 32 years working at a power plant.

“The deer aren’t moving, but it isn’t really about the hunting,” Barton said. “If you get a deer, that’s wonderful. But, if you don’t get one, it’s still wonderful.”

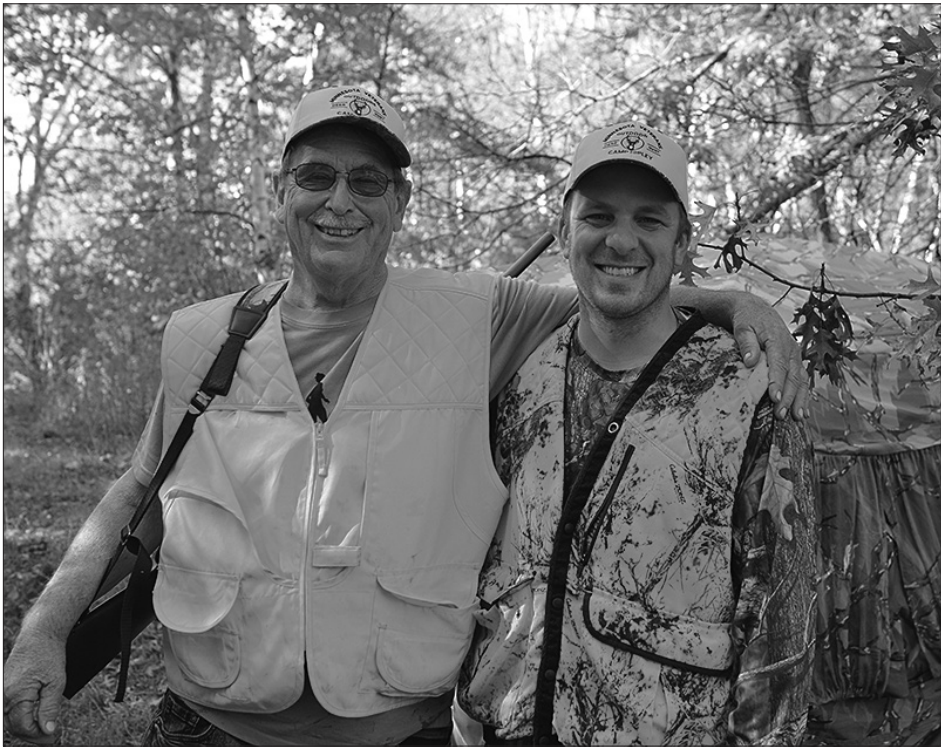
Like many veterans, Barton suffers from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He said it was a “big step” for him six or seven years ago when he decided to get involved with the Minnesota Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

He signed up for a fishing trip, not really knowing what to expect. It turned out to be a life-altering experience.

“It’s a healthy opportunity that you can really enjoy if you show up with a positive attitude,” Barton said. “It has a lot of value for your mental health. You feel that you have somebody that you can talk to; that you can relate to. You talk about what it took to get you to feel comfortable getting help. That’s a huge step. It’s a great fellowship experience with people who have walked in the same boots as you.”

During this particular trip, Barton is not only getting to spend time with fellow veterans, it is also a bonding experience with his “favorite” son-in-law, Nathan Mielke, who grew up in Little Falls. The veterans need to have a partner on the trip with them, and he said Mielke, 35, was “always bugging him” to go.

He had been on three



Robert Barton, left, and his son-in-law, Nathan Mielke, stop for a photo in the woods at Camp Ripley, Tuesday. They participated in the Disabled Veteran Deer Hunt on the installation, as Barton is a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. who served in the Vietnam War.

fishing trips with the DAV before, but this was his first time on the hunting trip. He was glad Mielke talked him into it.

“We’re bonding,” he said.

During his time in the service, Barton was with the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines infantry division. He said he saw a lot of “bad things,” some of which he remembered and some that he struggled to remember what happened. He said he thought, in a sense, his mind was safeguarding him throughout his life.

“My survival from PTSD was, I was a workaholic,” Barton said. “I could have made a great alcoholic or drug addict, but for me, I made everything in my life about work. The bad thing is, I brought my wife and my children down the same path.”

He admitted that getting help was difficult for him, but after he finally took that first step, he wished he would have done it much sooner. It’s an experience he said he has shared with many of the fellow veterans he has met through his involvement with the DAV.

The hunt was made possible through a partnership between the American Legion, DAV, Minnesota Elks Veterans Service, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Minnesota Veterans 4 Veterans Trust Fund, Military Order of the Purple Heart and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). All of the organizations, he said, have done a great job in helping him feel welcome, and that has played no small part in his improved mental health.

“That first time was a bit



Robert Barton, 71, Ely, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. who served in Vietnam, steps out of his blind to survey the landscape at Camp Ripley, Tuesday, during the Disabled Veteran Deer Hunt.

intimidating,” he said. “But the people involved are so good, and they’re so nice. The people involved with the organizations that put these things on take such good care of you.”

He came into the hunt not knowing what to expect, but said the “great bunch” of guys he was spending his time with have made it a wonderful experience. The accommodations have also been top-notch, something he credited to the local service clubs helping with the event.

“The local American Legion and VFW clubs, they’re taking care of all of our meals and all of that,” he said. “They have done a bang-up, bang-up job. I know they’ve put a lot of

hard work into this.” In the end, he said he definitely plans to take part in another hunt. He admitted that he doesn’t take hunting as seriously as he used to, but added that anybody who was there solely to get a deer was in the wrong place.

Instead it’s all about creating a shared experience with those who understand what he’s been through. Those are the type of opportunities in which he wants to continue to engage.

“I finally got to the point where I wanted to seek help and get help,” Barton said. “You learn to like yourself again. I’m at a place now where I really like myself.”

By JIMMY DEROGATIS  
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Upsala volleyball came out victorious Oct. 5, with a straight-set sweeping win against the Long Prairie Grey Eagle Thunder.

The Cardinals blew out the Thunder and won the three sets handily by a final score of 25-17, 25-22, 15-5.

Maddi Koetter led the way with 11 kills, Taylor Soltis took care of business with seven kills and the crowd favorite Abigail Klein along with teammate Emily Blonigen each had four kills apiece.

At the conclusion of this game, Rachel Ainali has only nine sets to go to get to the 1,000 set assists mark accolade.

The girls rode the back of Katie Jensen the libero, who provides the energy and spark for this team. Jensen is excellent at defending the tough, hard hit spikes and does so to set up an awaiting teammate.

Jensen and the Upsala Cardinals were in total command of the game and seemed to be set on cruise control from the very start.

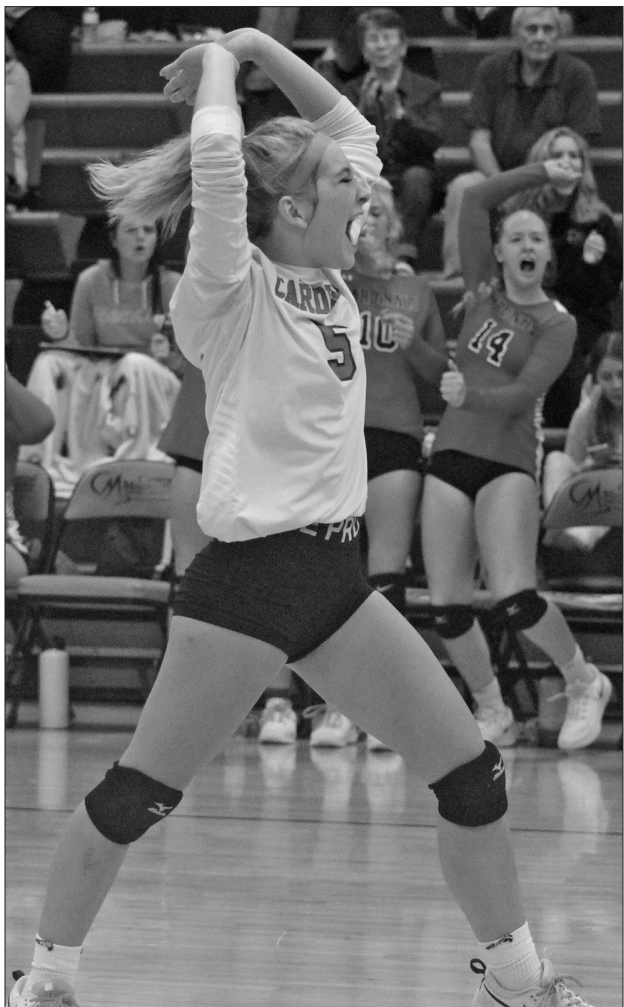
Students from Upsala High School came out to support their Cardinals in Long Prairie with cheers and loud chants of “we want Abby,” “we want Abby” in reference to Abigail Klein.

The students were buzzing with excitement from start to finish as they cheered to see their favorite player back in the game.

The students in the stands wore pink T-shirts along with the lady Cardinals team on the court who sported light pink socks and dark pink shoe laces to support Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

The students would put up “the U” sign in homage to their team loyalty of the Cardinals made famous by the Miami Hurricanes.

Upsala will be back in action Tuesday, Oct. 12 at Roy-alton, starting at 7:20 p.m.



10/10/2021-Upsala Vball Jensen Staff photo by Jimmy Derogatis  
L Katie Jensen throws her hands up with exhilaration as she celebrates with her teammates after an intense rally.



Submitted photo  
**LF Lions sponsor Hospital Advocates event**  
The Little Falls Lions Club is a gold sponsor for the St. Gabriel's Hospital Advocates upcoming event, Oct. 22. The Advocates will be hosting a dance featuring The Whitesidewalls. For ticket information call (320) 630-4921. Pictured are Diane Tamm, left, Advocate treasurer and Steve Hortness, co-president of the Little Falls Lions.

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