

## Mentored hunts

Although it's still cold and deer season is barely over, many of you already are daydreaming of spring turkey season. Or maybe you're longing for warm summer days at your favorite fishing hole. Either way, during this break in outdoor activities, what better time is there to get a jumpstart on planning your chapter's 2009 Wheelin' Sportsmen event?

If you're like me, one of the biggest challenges you face as an event coordinator is finding balance between involving new participants and loyalty to current members. We'd like all of our regular event-going friends to hunt,

>> **Get new participants involved with your events while reenergizing current members.**


but we still need first-time participants. Just as our existing members form the backbone of the program, bringing new

people into the Wheelin' Sportsmen family helps us grow and ensure a brighter future for the program.

Last November, we found a way to make everyone happy during the Wild Turkey Center Ultimate Team-Up held at the NWTF's national headquarters. We invited 15 veterans of our Wheelin' Sportsmen events to hunt with and guide 15 soldiers with disabilities from Ft. Gordon's Army Medical Hold Unit in Augusta, Ga.

Of the Wounded Warriors who attended, some were hunters before their injuries and some were new to the activity. None of them had hunted since becoming disabled, but they all were eager to live life to its fullest, even with a newly acquired disability.

Who better to teach them than our current members? Our longtime Wheelin' members shared hunting tips, adaptive equipment designs and general life lessons with the soldiers — all based on their own experiences.

The soldiers weren't the only people to benefit from this unique format. All of the members who served as guides had a wonderful time and reported their passion for the program was rekindled. 

**Pairing new Wheelin' Sportsmen participants with veteran program members inspires the new members and gives fresh perspectives to the longtimers.**



### Event Planning Tips

- Invite current members to serve as mentors.
- Find new participants: Contact the recreation and activity specialists at your closest military base, Veterans Health Administration hospital, rehabilitation center or Disabled American Veterans chapter.
- Keep in mind that you will have twice the people with disabilities to accommodate. On the Wheelin' Sportsmen Web site, you'll find blueprints for wheelchair-accessible blinds — large enough for two wheelchairs — along with a database of other adaptive equipment. Go to [www.wheelinsportsmen.org](http://www.wheelinsportsmen.org).