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## **Wish-granting group a raging success**

By Darren Marcy/Outdoor editor

HARBORCREEK, Pa. Nearly four years ago, Tina Pattison's stepson died. But with his death, she found her mission in life.

In April 1998, Matthew Pattison was 18 years old and dying from Hodgkin's Disease. A life-long hunter and outdoor enthusiast, he wanted to hunt a moose before he died.

His dream was turned down by a national wish-granting group and the Pattisons didn't have the money to fund a trip on their own.

The story of Matthew's parents, with the cooperation of sporting groups and a small Canadian town, have become something of a legend in the hunting community.

Dozens of people worked together to send Matthew on his hunt where he killed a 56-inch bull in October 1998.

He died the following April.

But from his death, a groundswell of support for the Pattisons turned into Hunt of a Lifetime. The nonprofit, all volunteer organization run by Tina Pattison was launched from the Pattison's family computer in their dining room.

Today, the organization is still based in the Pattison dining room but the results are overwhelming.

As of today, 61 seriously ill children have been sent on hunts and fishing trips all over North America.

Some come home with trophies, but all come home with a smile on their face.

Like Luke Swanson, 16, of Oregon who wanted to hunt elk in New Mexico.

Swanson has Ewing Sarcoma and has already lost his left foot to the disease.

The youngster just finished an elk hunt in southwest New Mexico where he bagged a 4x5 bull. That memory will be with the young man and his family and likely be the only bright spot. After returning from the hunt, Swanson found the cancer had spread to his lungs and he's now back in the hospital.

Other youths have also hunted in New Mexico, usually on private ranches with guides.

Pattison said guides Justin Mahoney and Mike McWhorter have been outstanding,



donating their services any time she calls, and most hunts are provided at cost, which Hunt of a Lifetime picks up.

Swanson was one of five youths who went on hunts in late December on a ranch near Reserve owned by the Kiehne family.

All five came home with elk a 6x6, two 5x5s, a 4x5 and a 3x3.

They're all considered "must-do" wishes, meaning time may not be on their side.

Other recent hunts have been hosted by the Quien Sabe Ranch near Albuquerque.

But it's not just hunting wishes that are granted.

Two girls from California were sent to Hawaii for deep-sea fishing in August.

Megan Sharp, 12, suffers from cystic fibrosis, but that didn't stop her from catching a blue marlin that was nearly twice as long 101 inches as she is tall and 2 1/2 times 167 pounds her body weight.

The trip for both girls was completely donated by a fishing boat captain who provided his boat, time and crew for the girls.

There are 22 hunts currently booked.

Tina Pattison is amazed at the success of the program, but not surprised.

"I just never realized how well it would do so fast," Pattison said. "We're reaching more children. St. Jude's Children Hospitals are now on board and have been referring kids to us."

The group has still not made up with Make-A-Wish, which has remained cool to Hunt of a Lifetime. Make -A-Wish quit offering hunts after getting pressure from animal rights groups over a controversial bear hunt that drew a lot of bad press a decade ago.

"(Make-A-Wish) will not support us, but if a child makes a wish, they'll let them know we exist," Pattison said.

Hunt of a Lifetime has grown. It now has a five-member board of directors, but it is still a completely volunteer organization.

"None of us are getting paid," Pattison said. "I'm still in the dining room."

Dealing with critically ill children is difficult, but Pattison said the rewards are tremendous.

"I cry when they die," Pattison said. "But at the same time, if I wasn't doing it, they wouldn't have their last dream. I know what that last dream meant to my son."

The group never stops working, and is constantly seeking to grow its database of anyone who can help in whatever way possible cash, hunts, guiding services, even frequent flyer miles to help cover airfare.

But most of all, Hunt of a Lifetime is looking for kids who are seriously ill, younger than 21 years of age, and have a dream of going on a hunting or fishing trip of a lifetime.