

30TH BIG GAME AWARDS

At our 30th Big Game Awards held this past August at the Bass Pro Shop's Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium in Springfield, Missouri, the Boone and Crockett Club had the opportunity to showcase an important part of the future of our hunting tradition at its fourth Jack Steele Parker Generation Next banquet. This event honors young men and women 16 and under who, over the past three years, have entered a Boone and Crockett record-book animal.

I was unable to attend, but friends who were there mentioned to me that they were struck not only by how excited these youngsters were about their accomplishments but also the understanding and perspective these young hunters have in regards to wildlife conservation and the principles of Fair Chase.

Three years ago, at the 2016 Generation Next banquet, 168 youth hunters had entered their trophies into the conservation records and 42 of them and their families were able to participate in the banquet. This year, entries from young hunters climbed

to 175 and 47 of them and their families were able to come to Springfield for the banquet.

I don't know of any other such gathering of young hunters in America. It is, in a sense, a unique snapshot on a triennial basis of what our future may well look like.

Allow me a few quick observations:

It's gratifying to see that these young hunters hail not just from a handful of western states but from a wide geographic cross-section of America—34 states in all—and from four Canadian provinces. It is equally gratifying to see that record-book animals were typically taken in the state in which the hunter resides. This underscores the fact that hunting not only continues to have a broad appeal but that our wildlife management programs are helping to produce healthy and growing numbers of big game animals in diverse locations across our nation.

Wisconsin took top honors with 16 Boone and Crockett entries followed by Alaska, Montana and Utah

with 11 each. Notably, both Virginia and North Carolina each had three record-book animals.

Of the 175 record-book entries over the past three years, 36 were submitted by young women, a tick over 20 percent of the total. Not that many years ago, record-book entries from women of any age were more of an anomaly than a statistic. This surge in female participation—especially at younger ages—is, in my view, one of the most positive and promising aspects about hunting in America.

At the 2016 Generation Next banquet, outdoor TV host Randy Newberg spoke to the audience of how the discipline of hunting had taught him life skills such as self-reliance, problem solving, humility, and sportsmanship. In any discussion about hunting, notably with those who do not hunt, we should be sure to make the point that these “dividends” are the true measure of value we gain from time afield. In our increasingly “indoor world,” what other experiences can offer young



Doug Painter
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

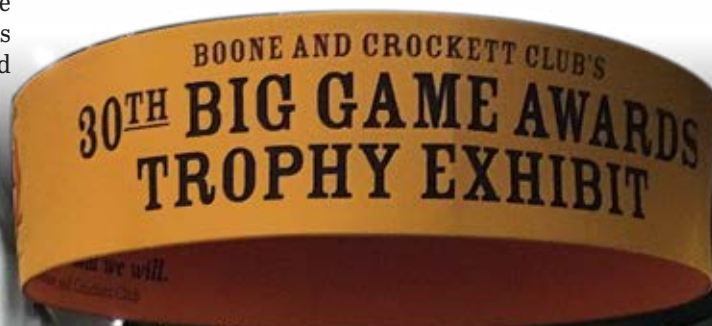
people such benefits?

At this year's banquet, keynote speaker Melissa Bachman emphasized the importance of making hunting a fun and welcoming experience for youngsters. Melissa is absolutely right. Sure, there's a serious side to our sport, but there are lots of ways to make the experience fun for kids as well.

I've spent just over 45 years on this beat and have witnessed many a change in our world. One thing, however, has remained a constant. Over the decades, every hunting survey I've seen notes that spending quality time outdoors with family and friends is the primary reward from our hunting experience.

It's really why, each fall, we lace up our boots.

Hope to see you down the trail. ■



The 30th Big Game Awards Trophy Exhibit at the Bass Pro Shop's Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium in Springfield, Missouri.