

FROM THE EDITOR

Over the years, I've had the privilege to hunt in some of the world's more remote and exotic locations, from Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve to Russia's Siberian wilderness. Several years ago, however, I hunted somewhere that was neither far-off nor foreign but was, nonetheless, a whole new world to me.

This hunt began when a great friend of mine picked me up at the Sioux Falls, South Dakota, airport. We then drove a few hours back to his place, an old farmhouse near the town of De Smet. I knew we'd be hunting pheasant—this was South Dakota, after all—but I didn't know exactly where we would be chasing roosters.

After breakfast the next morning we grabbed our guns, gathered the dogs, and headed out the kitchen door. Instead of getting into the pickup truck, however, we simply walked through the backyard and onto an adjacent field where we started hunting!

Now, if you live in a rural area or grew up "down on the farm," you're no doubt getting a chuckle out of this. After all, what's the big deal about hunting on your own "back forty?" Well, for someone who grew up in Washington, D.C., and spent 40-plus years living not 50 miles from New York City, it was, for me, a unique experience.

Back in 1950, 60 percent of our population was classified as urban. According to the latest U.S. census (2010), that urban classification has climbed to 80.7% and

continues to grow. You can bet that few, if any, of America's urban dwellers can walk out their kitchen door and go hunting. Over recent decades our resource—game animals and the land on which they live—have become increasingly distant from the broad base of our users, the millions of hunters who depend on access to public hunting areas. Indeed, both national and state studies confirm that access is a key factor in influencing a decline in hunting participation among active hunters.

It is, of course, easy to lament the challenges our community faces today. More importantly, how do we turn those challenges into opportunities that will help sustain and grow our hunting heritage?

One of the most positive trends I've seen over the past 15 or so years is the number of state wildlife agencies who now view license holders not just as licensees, but as customers. This change in perception has helped generate a number of new strategies designed to expand

hunting opportunities and encourage new participation. A few quick examples:

- Not too many years ago, Pennsylvania GPS mapped their public hunting lands. This not only helped hunters find these locations statewide but also provided precise boundaries for each area. A number of state agencies have done the same.
- Tennessee has long been a leader in the Scholastic Clay Target Program with, last time I heard, some 3,000 active participants in the state. As the program got going, the agency invited these young shooters to go on an agency sponsored duck hunt. Not surprisingly, many signed up.
- Missouri, long a leader in recruitment and retention efforts, has not only built more than a 100 open-to-the-public ranges in the state; they also offer a wide variety of hunting seminars at their larger shooting facilities. What a great way to turn a trap shooter into a turkey hunter.



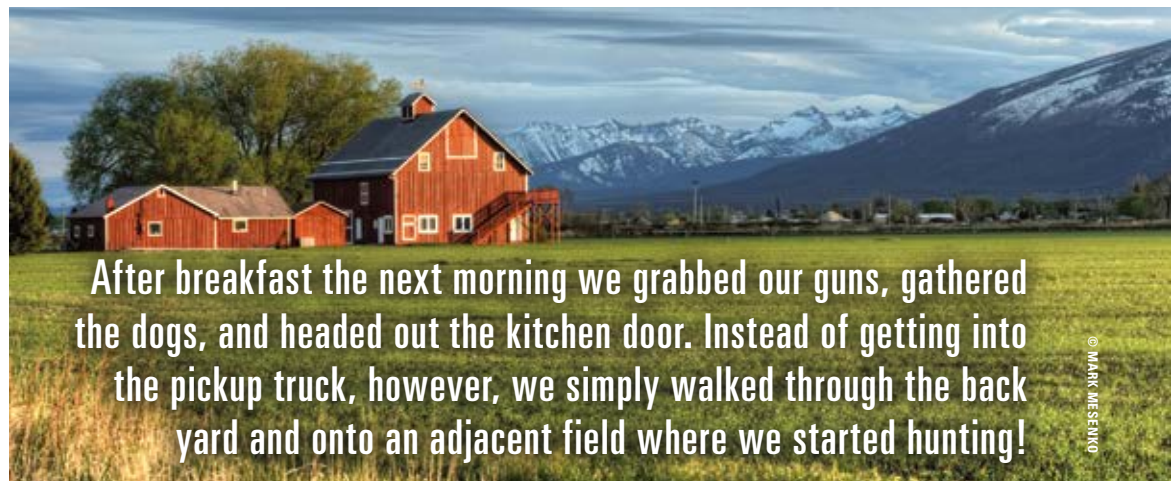
Doug Painter
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Space doesn't allow me to provide more examples of such marketing strategies. Suffice it to say, state agencies are today involved in efforts well outside their traditional, or historic roles. And our community is all the better for it!

Access, of course, isn't our only issue. It is however, a good example of how creative strategies and a willingness to "shake things up" can make a difference. It's often said today that we live in a disruptive era, where companies such as Uber and Airbnb have "changed the landscape" in only a few years.

So for 2016, let's roll up our sleeves and put our thinking caps on. As we look at the challenges ahead, let's see how we can be disruptive, in a constructive way.

Hope to see you down the trail. ■



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