

A helping hand: Case Archery Club gives big boost to Adaptive Sportsmen

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In one of Aldo Leopold's essays, he describes how the energy in a blade of grass moves through a rabbit and in turn through a hawk and eventually back to the earth and into grass again.

Life and death are part of the same continuum, always linked. The death of one nourishes the life of another.

The circle of life doesn't always move so elegantly in the affairs of humans, especially when money and ego are involved.

But every now and then a shining example of good will surfaces, when the dying gasp of one group is the wind in the sails of another.

Take the J.I. Case Archery Club of Racine, founded in 1978, and Adaptive Sportsmen, Inc., founded, well, still with wet ink on its non-profit incorporation papers.

The Case Archers, as they were commonly known, originated as an employee club at one of Racine's largest employers. At first, it was just a group of guys who shot archery at Little John's Archery Club in Racine.

After several years in the mid-1970s, they decided to formalize the club.

Case managers agreed, and subsidized the archers just like they did softball and volleyball leagues.

"It got to be pretty popular," said Jerry Jensen of Racine, past president of the club. "There was a real camaraderie, a real love for the sport and the outdoors."

The club held quarterly meetings, a summer picnic, a fall deer hunt and a winter indoor archery league. Over the years, the club shot above the old R.S. Supply in downtown Racine, at Kenosha Bowmen, at West Allis Bowmen and finally at Racine Instinctive Bowmen in Franksville.

The Thursday night league at RIB is still known as the "Case Archery League."

Membership reached about 50 at its peak, according to Jensen. After several years, it began admitting non-Case employees.

The club also held various "smokers" and other fund-raisers. The last one, with a

Casino Night theme, raised more than \$2,000 for the club.

However, even financially solvent clubs can't escape the ravages of retirement and corporate downsizing and a hectic culture that leaves little time for leisure pursuits. By 2000, membership in the Case Archers had dwindled to about 15.

"For everybody we lost, there was a different reason we lost them," said Jensen, a 20-year member of the club. "The handwriting was on the wall."

Jensen, then president, held several meetings during which the future of the club was debated. There was broad agreement that the club was going to dissolve. But there was some difference of opinion as to what should be done with the assets.

Some wanted to divide up the treasury and go their own ways. Others wanted to hold one last big party. Still others thought it best to donate the money to a worthy group.

Jensen, who also volunteers with Racine's Old Timers Athletic Club, briefly considered donating to that group. The potential conflict of interest swayed him to strike that thought.

Without having a consensus on how to disperse the club's funds, Jensen decided to call one last meeting and decide what to do.

Just days before the meeting, Jensen learned of John Mitchell, formerly state director for a group of disabled archers and now head of the recently formed Adaptive Sportsmen, Inc.

Adaptive Sportsmen has a stated goal to provide outdoor recreational opportunities for physically challenged people. The club received approval from the state and from the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in September.

Though so recently formed, already there was significant enthusiasm among volunteers. Brian Graham of Racine and Mike Gustin of Burlington serve on the group's board of directors. However, its treasury was non-existent.

"I thought it was a great idea," Jensen said of donating to Adaptive Sportsmen. "It was just what I thought the club could agree on."

So one recent winter evening, John Mitchell was invited to the last formal meeting of the Case Archers.

Mitchell, who began life in an iron-lung and has dealt with the hardships wrought by polio for his entire life, is professional, articulate and a conservation veteran.

He also projects a genuine passion for helping physically-challenged folks enjoy the great outdoors.

Done deal.

"It was unanimous," Jensen said. "There wasn't a no vote in the house."

Jensen executed the transfer of funds, about \$1,800 in all, to the Adaptive Sportsmen.

"We are extremely grateful," Mitchell said. "This was a Godsend for us, especially at this early time in our club's history."

Jensen said he and his fellow Case Archers felt an elevated sense of self worth by making the donation to Adaptive Sportsmen.

"To help them continue when we were going out is fantastic," Jensen said. "It's a great union of two organizations."

Just like nature intended.