

# A hunter's classroom to the forest

## Organizations team up to mentor county youth

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In an effort to attract more young people to the sport of hunting, several Alabama organizations have joined together to host mentored hunts for Mobile County youth.

During the recent deer season, the Wild Turkey Federation, Alabama's Land Division, Alabama Department of Conservation and the Mobile County School System joined forces to host a day in the woodlands for several students from Mobile County public schools. Organizers explained that the program was put in place to offer area youth their first opportunity, not only go into the forest for the first time, but to also handle a firearm and hunt.

Tommy Sheffield, facilities manager for the Mobile County Public School System, said the event was one of the best things he has ever been involved with. Because of the response from the participants, plans are in place to make the mentored hunts a regular event on the school system property.

"We had one of the best experiences you can have in the outdoors. I have to thank the board members of the Mobile County Public School System and Superintendent Martha Peek for supporting this program that we have put on here today," Sheffield said. "None of this could have happened here today without the help of the Wild Turkey Federation and the Alabama State Lands Division.

Sheffield said the event began much like a field trip for the participants, each of whom had never been in the woods, never hunted and

never discharged a firearm. After traveling to Scoutshire Camp, south of Citronelle near Celeste Road, the students were put through a four-hour classroom program where they were taught the laws and rules of hunters' education, firearm safety, wildlife management and a number of other classroom programs. At the close of the session, each student had earned their certificate for passing the hunter's education course, a requirement to receive an Alabama hunting license.

After traveling to a section of school board property the students were assigned, a guide acted as a mentor for the afternoon hunt.

Jeremy Doss of the Alabama Conservation Department, explained the mentor program, which was hosted in Citronelle, as an attempt to bridge the gap by placing an adult with the youths and



Photo submitted

Baker High student Bailee Jordan sights in a rifle under the guidance of Jeremy Doss, conservation enforcement officer for the State of Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources.

teach them basic skills of hunting.

"This is our second year

to host this type program; the first year was a pilot program. In that first year we

discovered this mentor program and this year we have expanded on it and we have had great support from the Wild Turkey Federation and the Mobile County School System," Doss said. "In moving forward we are looking for other ways to expand the program and create other partnerships. In the end the most important thing for us is that we educate people and we educate them right and we fill in for the people who are missing with the mentors of the outdoors."

After being paired with their guides, the students were taken to shooting houses where they awaited their deer to come out of the brush. According to Sheffield, each of the students was able to harvest a deer, some were able to take a buck while others harvested does.



Photo submitted

Taking part in the hunt were, from left, Bailee Jordan of Baker High; LTC (Ret) Robert Barrow, director of Army instruction for Mobile County Public School System; Drake Fuller of Mary Montgomery High; Nathan McGregor of Vigor High; Christopher Willhite of Baker High School; and Arrington Firlie of Eichold Mertz Elementary Magnet School of Math.

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