



Tristan Dowell helps local hunters

**By Tammarrah Pledger
Goldthwaite Eagle**

Triston Dowell of Goldthwaite has had his hands on rifles at least since he was as tall as one. While that may not be unusual among Mills County residents, Dowell has taken his rifle relationship to the next level.

Dowell, a 2015 graduate of Goldthwaite High School, earned a welding degree from Ranger College right after high school and then went to work at the Mills County General Store in Goldthwaite, he told *The Eagle* last week. Coming from a long line of hunters himself, and working at a retailer that relies in large part on the hunting industry for the lion's share of its business, it made a ton of sense to turn that interest into a career.

In March of 2019, Dowell entered the gunsmithing program at the Colorado School of Trades in Denver, he said. He completed what should have been a 14-month program, though it took a little longer due to delays related to COVID-19 closures, he added. In July of this year, he had finished and came home, returning to the General Store as the Assistant Manager/Gunsmith.

"I really enjoy building rifles," Dowell said, "and I'm super picky. It has to

be 100 percent right before I will send it out." His studies have helped him to advise customers about what types of rifles are best suited for their intended targets. For example, hunters going after larger game like elk require a different rifle than hunters looking to harvest a whitetail deer or a feral hog. Moreover, the stature of the hunter and his or her experience also comes into play when considering size and recoil, Dowell said.

He said his schooling allowed him to work with actual customers and firearms while he was still learning, and he has already earned a reputation for customer satisfaction with the firearms he produces and recommends. It's also come in handy in his job, giving him a unique expertise when it comes to ordering and back ordering firearms used by those who patronize the General Store.

Certified in Glock handguns, Dowell said in the future he may pursue certifications in other brands as well. He also said that because of COVID-19 restrictions, currently it is difficult to acquire some rifles and ammo, so he "hasn't really been able to use his full skill set" just yet. Hopefully that will change soon.

While he still has a lot he would like



Triston Dowell, right, is pictured with his dad, Scott Dowell, who was gifted the .308 Winchester that Triston built as part of his gunsmithing courses.

to do professionally as a gunsmith, Dowell may have already created his personal opus. While still in school, his final project rifle was a 308 he gifted to his dad, Scott Dowell, when it was completed.

Dowell explained some 20 years ago, when he was still a child, their family had a house fire and his dad lost a 308 that he really loved. The project rifle started as a bolt action Remington 700 as it is coming from the factory, he said. His task was to pull the factory barrel off, and rebuild it with one issued by the school. Us-

ing a lathe, he turned down the barrel to the chamber end, threaded to change the action, and chambered it as a 308 Winchester.

When it was done, Dowell presented it to his dad to replace the 308 he had lost in the fire, and "you could just tell from his reaction ... it means the world to him," he said.

Dowell is a son of Scott & Crystal Dowell of Goldthwaite. He is the grandson of Annette & the late Lanny Dowell of Goldthwaite, and Bobby & Lorene Wheeler, also of Goldthwaite.

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