

Some old friends are making new ones in central Oklahoma, and it appears they will be changing the face of hunting lands and habitat over a pretty large swath of the area while they're at it. In 13 years since Adam Maris — a former Oklahoma State University and Central Oklahoma baseball standout — founded the Spring Valley Anglers Rod and Gun Club on a clear spring creek in Northwest Arkansas and built a lodge, conference center, cabins (and the coolest stream-side deck you've ever seen) he's added hunting and fishing properties in Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma for private and corporate club members. Now the club is expanding to areas near his old stomping grounds. The club is building a 12,000-square-foot lodge and facilities. It's a private rod and gun club but, make no mistake, it is bringing business and opportunity to rural Oklahoma landowners. They've leased about 20,000 acres within less than an hour's drive of the lodge, and that could soon double, Maris said. The new lodge area, with two buildings, a large deck and beautiful view over the Arkansas River, will comfortably sleep 20. Most rooms have two queen-size beds and a full bath, but they do have one room that has several beds and a bath — perfect for a couple guys and their kids. The main house has five bedrooms and five-and-a-half bathrooms. Plus there will be a game room with a full bar, golf simulator, pool table, shuffle board, ping pong, theater screen and lounge, outdoor hot tub, fireplace and TV. Guides and staff will bunk in another building that will store equipment and include a game processing area. Wednesday, about a 20-minute drive from the lodge, Maris and I watched about 400-500 mallards, pintails and other ducks on land where a man had worked with the Wetland Reserve Program to improve habitat and create a hunting retreat for family and friends. "We'll have a group in here hunting opening day," Maris said. The man has teamed up with the club and if things work out well, the Oklahoma property can be improved even more and the man and his family will still have this fine spot, plus

have access to other properties the club owns in Arkansas and Kansas. It's the kind of mutually beneficial partnership the club likes to create, Maris said. Habitat improvement, good hunting, good relationships, the outdoors experience – those were central themes that ran through conversation as we took a few hours to look over the new lodge.

It's mostly still under construction but soon to be finished. We also toured around to look at a few of the hunting properties where its 150 club members, plus guests – guided or unguided – will chase ducks, geese, pheasants, quail, turkeys, deer and feral hogs for years to come. –What separates us from other guides, outfitters is we don't do public hunts, – Maris said. –It's all membership based. We're not competing with the (guide businesses). We're just trying to service our members. – –The day of knocking on the door and getting permission to hunt are pretty much over, – Maris said. –Landowners have to worry about liability, and many have been burned in the past by unethical hunters who left trash, forgot to close gates, asked permission once and assumed they had lifetime access, name your scenario, they've suffered it. –

Area farmers are responding positively to the club, Maris said. In fact, only friends and family of the landowners (and occasional trespassers) have hunted most of the places club members will hunt. Such is the case with about 1,200 acres the Hughes family has owned for 20-50 years in the area, according to farmer Nick Hughes.

–They've got a long history of being good neighbors and they've got a good insurance policy, – Hughes said. Hughes said he appreciated their creative approach, long experience and the idea of working together. They're not just coming in to pay for access; they will work with him to make land improvements that not only add value to his property but add crops and practices that bring in more income to the farm and add some quality of life for a family that likes to hunt and fish. Hughes said he has recommended them to other landowners in the area, and he also steered the club owner toward a local friend who developed

Next Level deer mineral food and Sweet Gold attractant. The club now is buying those locally produced products for use on its thousands of leased acres, he said.

The Hughes family likes to hunt doves, but it wasn't really worth it to plant an area just for dove hunting, he said. With the club they're planning a new millet field that will bring in some dove hunting revenue through the club and will be cut for hay as well. Hunting, farming, making a living

that's what it's all about. "The only real cost is labor and we

get the hay benefit," he said. "They've come up with some unconventional stuff; they're

really working to be good neighbors." Kelly Bostian 918-581-8357 kelly.bostian@tulsaworld.com Twitter: @KellyB