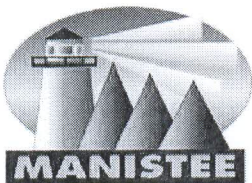
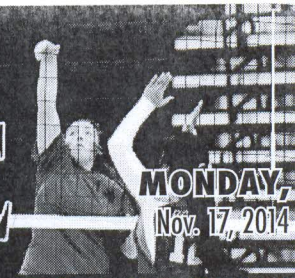


# NEWS



# ADVOCATE



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## Tales from Whitetail Lodge



Kyle Kotecki/Courtesy Photos

The group at Whitetail Lodge pose with its opening-day buck on Saturday in Manistee County. Pictured (front row, left to right) are Mike Wrzesinski, Jared Wrzesinski, Adam Hornkohl, Tucker Hanson, (middle row) Elliot Hornkohl, Jon Hornkohl, Kyle Hornkohl, Steve Hanson, Dave Boertman, (back row) Travis Hanson, Bob Hornkohl, Greg Hornkohl and Ernie Hornkohl.

### Local family keeps deer camp tradition alive

By KYLE KOTECKI • SPECIAL TO THE NEWS ADVOCATE

MANISTEE — Ernie Hornkohl and his brother, Bob, manned the stove early Saturday morning, scrambling eggs and frying bacon. The duo have been cooking together on the opening day of deer season for four decades. This year, at Ernie's camp — the Whitetail Lodge — they had over a dozen mouths to feed.

"I shag these guys out of bed first thing in the morning," Ernie said. "Four-thirty in the morning I'm waking them up for breakfast. Everybody doesn't get up at 4:30, but Bob and I usually get breakfast going and we have to push some people (to wake up). It's tradition."

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# HUNTING CAMP: FROM PAGE 1

Tradition. It's a word that often comes up when hunting is discussed. The cabins scattered throughout the woods of Northern Michigan are comprised of wood, nails and some shingles. The camps themselves are comprised of memories and traditions, built upon a foundation of friendship and family.

"Bob used to have a cabin about 3 miles from here on 5 acres, but it burned down," Ernie said. "I'm glad it burned down because he sold the property and now he stays with us. He's been here for 40 years."

## FAMILY

People have been hunting deer in the Manistee area for centuries, starting with the Native Americans and leading up to the hunters of today. The Whitetail Lodge has been active in various forms since 1967, when Ernie purchased some property and outfitted it with a guard shack he procured from PCA and an outhouse. Through various additions it evolved over time, and the three-room cabin of today — complete with indoor plumbing and a sleeping loft — is a palace by comparison. Of course, Ernie didn't have to build it alone.

"It was a family thing more than anything," he said. "And the guys that hunted with us. Family and friends."

Four generations of Hornkohls have hunted on the property, from Ernie's father, Dan Hornkohl, to his grandchildren. These days, Ernie and Bob are the elder statesmen, watching as the youngsters bound about the cabin, full of enthusiasm and vigor, excited for the opportunity to bag their first buck. Ernie recalled his early hunting days.

"I was hunting on this piece of property before I even owned it," he said. "I was 17 years old, and probably 100 feet from where we are now I shot my first buck in 1954. Ironically, I bought the property when I grew up."

## MEMORIES

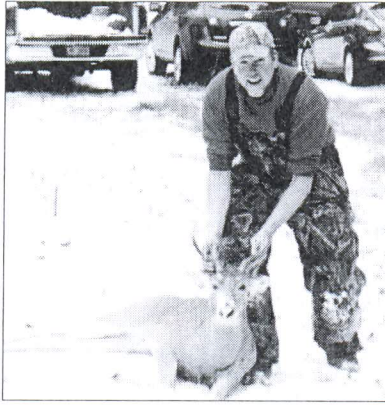
A well-worn log book sits upon a shelf next to the television. It chronicles the Whitetail Lodge's opening three days of deer season from 1974 to present day, with a record of who shot what, the weather and anything else worthy of note. In that time, over 130 bucks have been taken by the boarders of the Whitetail Lodge, each meticulously documented. Certain years, however, can be recalled without disturbing the book from its place of rest.

"In 1985 we shot 11 bucks in the opening two days," Ernie said.

"In those days (Ernie's son Jon Hornkohl) always shot a deer," Jeff Hanson added. "He shot a deer every year for like freaking 15 years. We were thinking to ourselves, 'What in the hell?'"

"Remember that one year (Jon) shot one?" Ernie asked. "Then we were hanging it up and he said 'I'm going to take a walk,' and he got another one. He walks away and, 'BANG!' He shot another one."

Cram enough hunters into a hunting cabin and it doesn't take long for them to start swapping deer camp stories. Wait long enough and the stories shift away from the hunting aspects of camp. Steve Hanson was asked about the year he received a rude awakening at the hands of Jon.



Steve Hanson and the seven-point buck he bagged on opening day at Whitetail Lodge.

"(Jon) is a sleepwalker," Steve began. "It's like, ridiculous. And this was during the O.J. Simpson trial, when (Nicole Brown Simpson), you know, got her head chopped off or whatever. Well, we had been watching it all night on the news — the trial was going on and stuff."

Everyone in the cabin had heard the story before, yet were barely able to hold back their laughter long enough for Steve to continue.

"So I'm laying down sleeping and Jon must have got over me and grabbed my head and was holding me. And I was screaming like a girl and everybody was like 'What is that?' And I'm just screaming and I look up at him and he's right over me, scowling. It was almost like he had an imaginary knife."

"I screamed like a girl, man. It was a high-pitched, girl scream," Steve said, shaking his head. "It really was."

## THE HUNT

After breakfast, the cabin was abuzz with activity as the men began gearing up for a long day in the woods, everyone playfully squabbling over who snored louder than whom, or who was up all night texting his girlfriend on a cell phone.

"I bought these boots back in 1956," Bob announced, shoving his foot into a timeworn piece of footwear. "I bought them in high school. They're very warm."

Fueled by ground bologna sandwiches and a thirst for adventure, the intrepid hunters made their way into the woods, hoping to bag a deer, but knowing it was another great opening day at the Whitetail Lodge.

You see, you don't go to deer camp for the pickled asparagus, and certainly not for a comfortable night's sleep. You don't even go for the deer — not really, anyway. You go to deer camp to unite with friends and family over a common interest. To rehash memories and to make new ones. To teach the value of patience to your children. You go in order to share a time-honored tradition with the people you care about.

"The last few years (the hunting) has really gone downhill," Ernie said.

That may be true — the log book says it is — but the Whitetail Lodge shows no signs of slowing down.





Kyle Kotecki/Courtesy Photos

The Hornkohl family plays cards at Whitetail Lodge on Friday night while awaiting opening day.