

Governor's Ringneck Classic a success

By Sam Dieter

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One group of four hunters outside Oakley had several stories to take home along with their pheasants Saturday morning during the second annual Governor's Ringneck Classic hunt.

Guide Matt Mildenerger's three dogs flushed out a hen along a stretch of country road, which they thought might be their last bird until a big rooster flew out of the grass into Tom Palace's sights.

"That one's going to the taxidermist, I think," Mildenerger said as he examined the tail feathers. But it was some shorter grass almost a mile away where about 15 birds flew up, and where the hunt ended about 10:30 a.m. after each hunter reached his limit of four birds.

That gave the group first place for the classic, which brought 63 hunters from across the state to the Buffalo Bill Cultural Center in Oakley on Saturday. They set out with 15 different randomly-drawn guides about 8:30 a.m. Saturday and were allowed to hunt as late as 4 p.m. on tracts of land between Colby and Scott City.

There had been a dinner, auction and music the night before at the center, along with receptions and clay and trap shooting tournaments on Thursday and Friday. The hunt Saturday was followed by an awards dinner, when the hunters got commemorative glass paper weights.

Money raised by the event goes to the Kansas Classic Conservation Foundation, the Logan County Health Care Foundation, the Buffalo Bill Center and Pheasants Forever. This was the second year the hunt has been in Oakley; next year, it'll move to Norton.

"We didn't let many go," Palace said back at Mildenerger's house, after they had cleaned all the birds — except for his trophy.

"I think everybody shot well today," said Mike Macken, another hunter, adding that he had never had his limit of four birds so early.



Hunter Rory Feek (left above) and guide Coulter Boyd inspected one of many pheasants they shot during the Governor's Ringneck Classic Hunt on Saturday near Oakley. Hunting dogs brought by Matt Mildenerger of

Oakley, head guide for the hunt, were busy all day bringing back downed birds (above right). That's Dane with the bird in his mouth.



The hunters had been drawn from all walks of life. Palace, Topeka, is executive director of the Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association of Kansas, which helped sponsor the hunt. Rory Feek, Nashville, and his wife Joey had helped provide the entertainment; and Jerry Thomas, Scott City, did paintings which were raffled off to pay for the event. He had earlier shot a double which, Mildenerger said, would have been good enough to paint.

Macken lives in Quinter and is a friend of Mildenerger's, as is Coulter Boyd, one of the guides, who is a freshman at Fort Hays State University.

"That's a great thing, it brings people from all walks of life together," Palace said. "It's good for Kansas."

The hunters said they liked be-

ing outdoors, watching the dogs work and being able to socialize with people from around the state.

"It's good for your head, it's good for your heart," Macken said.

Macken added that hunting is one recreational activity Kansas can hang its hat on.

"It's probably one of the funnest things I do with my kids any more," he said, "and I think it instills pretty good value in your kids."

This group of hunters took first place in the hunt, reaching their limit of four birds head about 10:30 a.m. Saturday just north of Oakley.



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