

Premier hunting resort in southeast Kansas

By Ron Wilson

Director

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Where would you find the world's largest sporting clay tower? Go ahead, take a shot.

No, not in Texas. The world's largest sporting clay tower -- and one of the finest venues for hunting anywhere -- is right here in rural Kansas.

Jeff Oakes is general manager of Flint Oak, a southeast Kansas hunting lodge and resort. It began as a vision of Ray Walton, a successful businessman in Wichita. He enjoyed hunting and his wife got him a bird dog, but he was finding it

harder and harder to find a place in the country where he and his friends could go hunting together.

So, Ray bought scenic acreage in the southern Flint Hills and then decided to use the land as a private-member hunting club.

"Ray used to joke that the Brittany bird dog his wife got him caused him to spend \$20 million," Jeff Oakes said. Sometimes those free gifts can get expensive.

In 1982, Flint Oak opened its doors. It expanded through the years, and today Flint Oak has 5,000 acres of land and lakes for hunting and fishing. Flint Oak offers field hunts for upland game birds; driven, European-style pheasant shoots; and deer, duck, dove and wild turkey

hunting for members. Fully-guided three-hour field hunts include one to three hunters with a guide and well-trained bird dogs. For those who don't choose to walk, Flint Oak offers vehicle-assisted hunts in which hunters ride a four-wheeled vehicle to the dogs on point.

"We have many hunters -- even 80 years old -- who enjoy hunting this way, even though they can't walk the long distances involved in a traditional field hunt," Jeff said. "It can be magic when we have three generations in the field at the same time, experiencing Flint Oak."

Flint Oak has 95 hunting dogs, including pointers, English and Irish setters, Brittany spaniels, German shorthairs, and Labrador retriev-

ers. Other shooting options include sporting clays, skeet shooting, trap shooting, and five stand -- plus the largest sporting clay tower in the world.

For fishermen, Flint Oak offers both guided and non-guided opportunities on three beautiful lakes and Indian Creek. Indian Lake was initially stocked with 8,000 2-pound bass and 1,500 wipers that now weigh in at over 10 pounds.

Flint Oak has volleyball, horse-shoes, picnic sites and a large heated swimming pool. For equestrians, there are six paddocks and more than 16 miles of trails through natural wildlife habitat.

In 2003, Flint Oak opened a new lodge with sleeping accommoda-

tions, dining area, and a pro shop. The main lodge has 40 rooms and 80 beds. Occupancy for the entire facility is 140 people. Rooms range from "an old-fashioned bunkhouse" to deluxe accommodations with full baths.

In summertime, Flint Oak's facilities are open to the public for shooting sports, corporate retreats, weddings, company picnics, youth camps, reunions, charity events, fishing, nature trails and more.

Today, Flint Oak has more than 50 employees and 350 memberships, representing 29 states plus foreign countries. During 2010, more than 10,000 guests came to visit.

Using the multiplier effect, the company's \$1.2 million payroll has

an estimated impact of \$1.8 million on the local economy of a truly rural county.

"There's not a stoplight in the whole county," Jeff said.

Flint Oak generates \$330,000 thousand in sales tax, which is 60 percent of all sales tax collected in Elk County. The closest town is Fall River, a community of 158 people. Now, that's rural.

Its natural, rural setting makes Flint Oak picturesque and appealing to visitors, particularly when coupled with good service and high quality lodging and attractions. Flint Oak has been described as "America's premier hunting resort" and "an outdoorsman's paradise."

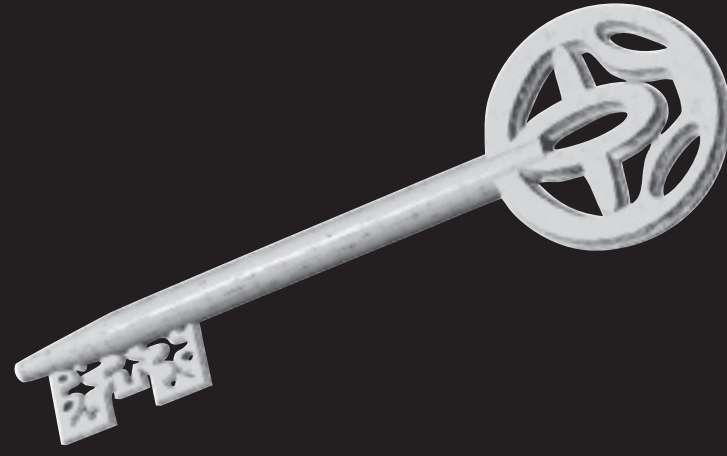
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