



Sun Photograph by LISA YANICK-JONAITIS

Clare resident Scott Chaffee with one of his champion bird dogs. Chaffee has trained bird dogs at his home for the past 30 years and has consistently turned out champions at Pioneer Kennels.

Chaffee has champion bird dogs

By JIM LAHDE
Sun Sports Editor

Scott Chaffee has a unique skill, one that keeps him in demand.

For the past 30 years the lifelong Clare resident has been training bird dogs at his home, consistently pumping out champion after champion at Pioneer Kennels.

For Chaffee this passion, which began in his youth while hunting pheasants with his father and brothers, has turned into a full-time business as his training services are sought out by bird dog owners from coast to coast.

In short Chaffee is one of the best at what he does and people search out

his services because of the results he produces.

Through the years Chaffee, who also coaches the Clare High School girls varsity basketball team and runs a plumbing supply company, has handled and trained 34 grouse and woodcock championship placements which is the most by any Michigan trainer ever. His dogs have also won dozens upon dozens of shooting dog and derby classic honors as well as taken home dog of the year honors from this association or that.

Thus whatever it is Chaffee is teaching the dogs up at Pioneer Kennels has been working and working well dating back some two decades.

"It comes from being competitive

and this was another outlet for me to compete in," Chaffee said of what drives him to produce the best hunting dogs that money can buy. "I played basketball and baseball in high school and after I graduated college in 1977 I came back home and started working with our dogs."

Just over a month ago he claimed what is perhaps his biggest honor to date as he won the 2008 Grand National Grouse Championship at the Gladwin Game Refuge in Meridith, Chaffee and his dog Autumn Moon, which is owned by Jack Harang, finished top amongst a field of 77 dogs that hailed from all over North America.

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Bird Dogs

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The event, which is one of two national events of its kind held yearly, spanned the course of one week and each dog was critiqued on numerous criteria ranging from gait to ground application to handling response. During his one-hour trial run on the 6,500-acre site Chaffee and Autumn Moon proved to be the cream of the crop which is a testimony to Chaffee's training ability.

"It's a test or a show that imitates hunting and finds out who has the best dog," said Chaffee, who evaluates 10 to 12 dogs per year for various owners. "I might of had an advantage because my dogs are used to this kind of cover but most of the professionals are prepared too."

As for the critique itself Chaffee said there are numerous things that the judges and marshalls are looking for during a trial.

"Dogs are judged on style,

their gait and how they respond to their handlers. There's ground application, where they are going and how they are getting there — are they looking for a bird or not," Chaffee said. "Then there's how many birds did they find and how did they handle them? It's kind of a high-pressure situation because you might have an owner that wants results."

While winning the 66th annual Grand National Grouse Dog championship could be seen as the pinnacle of one's training career to Chaffee it's also proof positive that he took the right career path.

"I started out as amateur in 1977 and turned pro in 1985," he added. "I have learned there are no shortcuts in this business. To take them through from beginning to be a finished dog is the most rewarding thing to me. I have also met people from all over the country and have hunted all over, so that's kind of fun too."