Some of Will Hollrith's happiest moments are spent camouflaged in the woods with a bow in his hand, and he shares the joy as an advocate for teaching young people the discipline of archery

Ask Will Hollrith of Grafton what he likes about hunting deer and turkey with a bow and arrow and he will rattle off a list of reasons and get in a plug for teaching archery to students.

He was instrumental in having archery added to the physical education program at John Long Middle School in Grafton and now raises money to support programs at the middle school and Grafton High School.

Mostly, Hollrith loves being out in nature — camouflaged so well that the wildlife around him is unaware of his presence — calling to turkeys in the spring and rattling antlers to lure rutting bucks in the fall.

"By rattling antlers, you're imitating a sparring match between bucks. A buck comes, figuring there must be a doe in season nearby," Hollrith said. "Bucks go from one doe family to another to another, ready to mate.

"I have a burning passion to be in nature and bow hunt."

Archery hunting is a sport he enjoys sharing with his father George, 16-year-old son Keagan, son-in-law Bryan Medinger and his father-in-law Harvey Rettler.

"It's a lifetime activity that I can share with my son," Hollrith said. "It creates a strong family bond."

His wife Kris and daughter Ashley don't hunt, but his daughter sometimes sits in a blind with her husband when he's hunting turkeys with a bow.

Hollrith was 23 when he went hunting with a bow for the first time. Almost instantly it became his preferred method of hunting. He finds it more challenging and fulfilling than hunting with a gun, which he and his son still do during the gun deer season. But Hollrith said that's more a

social time to be with his family on their land in Columbus County near Portage.

After the nine-day gun season ends, he picks up his sophisticated bow again.

Hollrith has such a passion for archery that in 2006 he raised $6,000 to purchase Genesis compound bows for the middle school through the National Archery in the Schools Program. The Northshore Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Buckskin Bowmen Archery Club in Grafton and his family's business, Hollrith Realty in Grafton, provided the funds.

Students who can't use a compound bow, including a student who has one arm, use a crossbow.

"I knew nothing about the program until Will came to me. He said he would take care of all the funding and brought in the in-service program to get us trained as teachers," said Joe Hildebrand, physical education teacher at John Long Middle School.

"Each year, we build on the lessons, so students aren't doing the same thing every year, which makes it more interesting and challenging. We've had kids in wheelchairs and kids who are elite athletes, and they all enjoy it and are challenged. I notice absenteeism is down when we're doing the unit."

Hollrith said, "I believe the archery program helps kids become better students. It's an Olympic sport that they can do all their lives, whether target shooting or hunting."

Hildebrand said he never used a bow before Hollrith brought the program to the school. Now, he enjoys target shooting.

In the high school, archery is part of an outdoors program that includes fishing and bicycling. Hollrith is also an avid bicyclist and accompanies student bike rides.

Hollrith taught his son to use a bow when the boy was 7.

"He was barely able to pull back on the bow and get the arrow to the target," Hollrith recalled.

Last year, Keagan went bow hunting by himself for the first time and got a doe and a turkey. He's gotten three turkeys with a bow since he started hunting at age 11.

"To bring in a wild tom turkey in the spring is the most exciting thing. It's like a large buck," Hollrith said.

While bow hunting, Hollrith said, he's seen things he never imagined he would see.

Once he saw a nubby buck and a young doe nurse from their mother.

Another time while rattling antlers, seven bucks came to check out the ruckus.

“That was one of the most exciting things,” he said. “There’s always an exciting mystery that can occur when hunting, and that’s what causes the heart to pound. With a bow, you don’t always shoot when you see a buck. You want to be sure that it will be a clean hit and not just injure the animal.”

He shoots does for meat, but won’t take a buck unless it’s at least 3-1/2 years old.

“That’s a personal thing with me,” Hollrith said. “You have to leave the young bucks so they can become big bucks with big racks.”

Hollrith does his hunting in Portage, sometimes rising at 3 a.m. so he can hunt in the morning, then return to Grafton to work in the afternoon.

He is also a mentor in the National Turkey Federation’s learn-to-hunt program, teaching boys and girls and sometimes their parents how to hunt safely with a bow or a gun.

Hollrith would like to expand the archery-in-schools program and is willing to help other schools in Ozaukee County raise funds for it.

“I’m good at getting the players together and raising the money, but you have to have a proponent in the school who wants it,” he said.

Anyone who would like to know more about the archery-in-schools program can call Hollrith at 377-3338.

Image Information: ALMOST INVISIBLE in the woods, Will Hollrith of Grafton was ready to hunt for deer with his bow. Photo by Sam Arendt