

APRIL • MAY • JUNE 2017

MEMBER Spotlight

Heather Miller



Hello everyone! My name is Heather Miller, I am 24 years old and live in the small town of Halifax Pa on my family's farm. I am a full time taxidermist at my own shop here in Halifax. I opened Wild by Design Taxidermy on January 1st 2016, so I am still very new to running my own business. I really enjoy working on mammals of all kinds. From the small to the large I really enjoy anything that I can put expression and detail into.

My shop keeps me busy year round, which I am very thankful for! I usually get to slow down a little around September which is nice since it allows me to do some of the things I like to do in my spare time. Other than taxidermy I enjoying hunting and fishing of course, but I also enjoy to ride my horses, show my cattle, baking, cooking, riding snowmobile and doing anything adventurous. I grew up in 4H and FFA showing cattle, goats, horses, pigs and sheep. I have always enjoyed being around animals and admiring the beauty that they have.

Which leads into how I got interested in the field of taxidermy. I was always drawing and painting animals as a kid and I loved art and being creative. I had always thought that taxidermy would have been a really neat profession where I could use my love of animals and artistic talent. After attending a little college I decided that it was not for me and I needed something that was more hands on.

I contacted our local taxidermist Robert Swope of Swopes Taxidermy to pick his brain about the different taxidermy schools. He said that he could teach me there at his shop, so that's the route that I took. After learning the different species I began working for him full time for 4 years. He decided he would like to retire and I took the opportunity of taking over his business and location. It was a great blessing

and I am so thankful that I was able to jump right into an established business and have someone who taught me a lot of great things about running a successful taxidermy shop.

I remember when I went to my first PTA convention in Seven Springs. I thought it was the coolest thing to see all of the suppliers and sit in on the seminars where I learned SO much. I remember walking through the competition room where it was filled from wall to wall with mounts of all kinds and I was taking pictures of everything! At that point I wasn't even paying attention to ribbons because to me everything looked so nice. I thought about how neat it would be to do a piece and enter it there at the show. So I entered a red fox shoulder pedestal in the amateur division and received a blue ribbon and a best of category. I was shocked and it got me really excited to enter something else. I missed the next year but in 2016 I entered a lifesize raccoon in the professional division and I was just hoping for a red ribbon because I knew how hard it was to get a blue ribbon at our state show and thought that there's no way I could be at that level. Well when I walked into the competition room and saw a blue ribbon sitting next to my coon I was ecstatic! I then took him to the National Show in June and received a National Champion award for him.

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I encourage everyone to compete, no matter what level you think you may be at. The only way to improve your work is to have someone tell you what to improve. The great thing about critiques is that they will give you little tips and tricks to help you achieve the desired look you are going for. There are a million different ways to do something, and sometimes one way might work better for you than what you are currently doing. That's what is so great about attending the state shows and competitions because you get to talk to so many other taxidermists and you will discover things that you never thought about.

I hope to see you at our PTA state show! If you ever have any questions I am more than willing to help you with what I can! There's no need to be shy. I learned this over a few years so just take it from me. To all of those that have given me some great ideas and answering many questions I thank you so much!!

