

MEMBER

Spotlight

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Dan Swanson



Greetings friends, My name is Dan Swanson. My wife Tina, son Soren and I live in the small town of Ludlow, Pennsylvania, in the heart of the Allegheny National Forest. I own and operate Dan Swanson and Son Taxidermy along with my cousin and retired Navy Veteran Clark Green. I'm also into my fourth year serving on the Board of Directors for the Pennsylvania Taxidermy Association.

I spend the winter months working full time in my taxidermy shop and then return to my job as a property manager in the spring of each year, at which time my days become very long between working full time, working the taxidermy shop in the evenings, coaching baseball, and keeping up with the lawn mowing business and most importantly being a husband and father.

Having grown up in the forest, I have always had a love for anything outdoors. Fishing, trapping, hunting or just hiking in general were how I spent the majority of my free time. My early childhood was spent fishing with my dad, grandfathers, and anyone else who would go along, or quite simply by myself. For years, my group of friends and I would spend summer days catching and releasing the local snake population. As I became old enough to tag along on hunts but not yet old enough to shoot, there were very special days that I was allowed to take days off of school each squirrel season to be the carrier of the harvest. Little did I know that those "preserved" squirrel hides would be my earliest attempts at taxidermy.

My real introduction to taxidermy came at about the age of 8. My parents made a pilgrimage to Grice's Gun Shop in Clearfield and while we were in town, they took me to Clearfield Taxidermy where they gave us a tour of the facility. From that day on I was hooked. I remember sticking my small, little fist up into the nose cavity of a moose manikin that was sitting on the floor. How exciting!

A short few years later my taxidermy dreams were thrown to the wayside when we discovered that I was very allergic to deer hair. Even at that time I realized that whitetail deer were the predominant species for a taxidermist in our region and I wasn't willing to struggle through swollen eyes and runny noses, or the

dreaded allergy shots required to control it. Baseball soon replaced the taxidermy dreams.

Flash forward about twenty years. Modern medicine brought me to the realization that I could keep my allergies under control and once again return to the dreams of the little boy in the rooms of Clearfield Taxidermy. My first mount was a great six point that my Dad and I both shot while hunting together. It still hangs in my parents den and is a constant reminder of where I started and how far I have come.

As fate would have it, I was put in contact with Paul Czarnecki with the suggestion that "he can put you on the right track". As any of you who know Paul will agree, he has a way of putting people on track and I quickly realized that the track I was on was going to be a long uphill climb unless I sought out the proper training. I immediately joined the PTA and began doing one on one classes with some of the best taxidermist I could find.

That winter I competed at the Harrisburg show with a deer I had shot in Manitoba. I got a second place ribbon in the amateur division, but the critique I received from Matt Zimmerman was worth its weight in gold. I was hooked and have competed ever since. If you want to really know what can be bettered in your work, compete!

If I could offer any advice to people either just starting out or wanting to make their mounts or business better, it would be to join your state taxidermy association, and there is none better than the PTA. The convention and seminars are top notch.

My final piece of advice, take business courses! Taxidermists are traditionally people with a love of the outdoors and a big heart. That doesn't necessarily make a good business person. Believe me, I learned the hard way and until I began to take business courses and really sat down and crunched the numbers, I was just spinning my wheels. Don't make the same mistake.

So in closing, I would like to say thank you to my wife, son and family for tolerating my dream, temper tantrums when things go bad, and the time away when the shop calls. Also I am forever indebted to the people who helped make me a better taxidermist, and that starts right here in the Pennsylvania Taxidermy Association. Thank you all.

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