

How the Tim Fitch Memorial 5K Began
By Evangeline G. Traugott, Youth Ambassador for Pheasants Forever

Pheasants Forever works tirelessly to make an impact on people in our Pennsylvania communities. For example, the mentored youth hunts educate various young individuals about gun safety and cultivate admiration for the outdoors. Also, our annual Veteran's Day hunt where Pheasants Forever shows appreciation for the most deserving men and women in our country. Pheasants Forever is there to honor and serve them, showing the utmost respect. Whether it's a word of thanks, a smile, or providing a meal and refreshments throughout the day, Pheasants Forever influences a multitude of Veterans each year. They continue to expectantly sign up for the hunt the following year. The Veteran's Hunt has been special to many people, including a man named Tim Fitch.

Tim Fitch served in the US Army during the Persian Gulf War. He received the Army Achievement Medal, second award, the Southwest Asia Service Medal with two Stars, and Army Commendation Medal. Tim loved the outdoors and participated in numerous organizations that prioritized his love for nature. One of those organizations was Pheasants Forever. Tim loved our Veteran's hunt. He worked with Penn Dot as an equipment operator for several years. Sadly, on June 14th, 2021, Tim passed away in an equipment accident at age 51. His passing affected the lives of many. Recently, I interviewed one of his closest friends, Lorrie Surra who worked with Tim at Penn Dot for 16 years. Mrs. Surra told me all about how the Memorial Run began and gave me an inside look at the project. "I could talk for hours about Tim," she touchingly stated. "Tim loved his family and was especially proud of his children's accomplishments. He was a proud dad and loyal friend." The story of how the Memorial 5K began is remarkably inspiring and quite interesting.

After Mrs. Surra's dear friend passed away, there was no doubt in her mind that she should honor Tim Fitch. Mrs. Surra had determination and admiration for this project. The idea came to her at the Elk County Fair after talking to Tim's father and Dick Bodenhorn with Pheasants Forever. They produced the idea of having a 5k run in Tim's name. Because of Tim's love for the Pheasants Forever Veteran's Hunt, Mrs. Surra wanted all of the proceeds of the run to go to the Veteran's Hunt. They would have it on August 20th, 2022, at 10:00 AM. With a brilliant idea in place, Mrs. Surra now had to focus on the details.

Mrs. Surra was “blindsided” by all of the details that must go into the event. She had never done anything like this before, and it required copious moving pieces. First, Mrs. Surra got together with Taylor Grim. Taylor Grim was a phenomenal help in giving advice and information about putting together a 5K. She previously put together a Bunny Hop 5k for people with brain aneurysms, so Ms. Grim knew all the details required.

After talking with Taylor, Mrs. Surra contacted Pheasants Forever and got connected with Bob and Cathy Schmid. Together, they advertised on Facebook and put together an online registration. “Bob deserves a lot of the credit,” Mrs. Surra explained, “I work with computers, but I have no idea how to do anything on Facebook. He was a huge help.” Cathy Schmid was the first on the registry list, even if it was only a test.

Fox Township Park was the next crucial part of composing the event. A team of people came together to help tremendously with the event. Mrs. Surra met with Robin Singer, employed by Fox Township. Together, they searched for the starting point and mapped out the route. They were committed to making sure it was, in fact, a 5K route. After discovering that the run crossed a state highway, even the town Fire Station pitched in to block off the road. So many people came together to make that 5K, truly, a wonderful event.

Close family and friends filled in the last touches to the run. People donated a multitude of snacks and water for the runners. People like Mrs. Surra’s husband stood at the halfway mark to provide support and refreshments. Tim’s family added the sweetest details. Tim’s wife Noreen brought a picture board of lovely photos. A portion of them were of Tim enjoying the Veteran’s hunt. Caroline, Tim’s daughter, brought her artistic skills to the event, designing the tee shirts. She designed a wildlife mural of everything Tim loved to put on the back of every shirt. “Tim always talked about Caroline and her art,” Mrs. Surra reminisced. Having Caroline as a part of the event added an incredibly special touch.

Mrs. Surra informed me that normally for a 5K run to be a success, you have to have thirty-five people. An amazing outcome of seventy-five people showed up in support of Tim Fitch. The event took off without a hitch and the support was generous. Pheasants Forever is extremely grateful to be involved in this memorial run. Mrs. Surra proudly stated, “I am glad Tim benefited from the Pheasants Forever Veteran’s Hunt and I hope my son will benefit from it in the future.”

Pheasants Forever, the Penn Dot community, family, friends, and the community all came together for a compelling cause. Love and support were displayed in leaps and bounds. So many different people put together their talents and energy to create a beautiful event and memories that last a lifetime.

Join us in supporting Pheasants Forever as we remember Tim. Be a part of our memorial run on August 5th of this year. Registration is open on the Pheasant's Forever Facebook page prior to the event. The fee is \$30 for registration and it includes a t-shirt! You can also register the morning of August 5th at 9:00am (before the race begins at 10:00am) for a fee of \$20 but a t-shirt is not included. Pheasants Forever is extremely grateful to be involved in this memorial run to honor a great man.