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Leggett died doing what he loved

By Jim Servi

Contributing Writer

Tomahawk, Wis. — Jay Leggett died unexpectedly, at age 50, on Nov. 23, after shooting a deer and returning to his family deer camp to get a knife.

Despite living in Los Angeles, he rarely missed a Wisconsin gun deer season and said that opening day was "better than Christmas" in previous interviews.

An autopsy came back inconclusive, but indicated that cause of death most likely was a heart attack. The 911 call came in to the Lincoln County Sheriff's Department at 4:07 p.m., and Tomahawk EMS quickly responded. The paramedics took over CPR treatment from the family, but were unable to resuscitate Leggett.

Leggett was a Tomahawk native who graduated from UW-Stevens Point. He started acting at the Second City Improv Theater in Chicago shortly after graduation and then moved to Los Angeles to pursue his dreams. Nationally, he is best known for his time as a cast member of "In Living Color," a sketch comedy TV series that ran



Jay Leggett

during the early 1990s, and for co-writing several of his own movies, including "Employee of the Month" and "Without a Paddle."

Locally, Leggett is probably best known for the documentary he directed, called "To The Hunt: Deer Season in Tomahawk Wisconsin," which premiered in Tomahawk just before the Wisconsin gun deer season opened in 2010. The entire movie highlights the Wisconsin deer-hunting tradition.

It's safe to say that Hollywood doesn't have too many outdoor advocates, but Leggett was certainly one of them, and he made it a point to tell everyone he met about Wisconsin and the hunting tradition.

"When I go to L.A. and talk about hunting, they don't get it," he told the *Merrill Foto News* in a 2010 interview. "This is my way of taking a whole community of people who will never come to a hunting culture and let them experience what it's like — at least a little bit — to go through a nine-day hunt, and especially with a hunting shack."

On Dec. 7, 2013, Jay Michael Leggett was laid to rest at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Tomahawk. His friend and colleague Mitch Rouse summed up the ceremony best during the service: "I spent so much time with Jay trying not to laugh; to try not to cry is hard now."

Fifty doves were released by family and friends to represent his 50 years on earth.

Leggett's love of the outdoors will carry on in the many lives he touched, and, because of his influence on the big screen, many others will be exposed to "the hunt" even now that he is gone. Friends and family members said Leggett will be remembered for his many passions — writing, humor, and teaching — but in the Tomahawk area and northern Wisconsin, he'll likely be best remembered for that love of the outdoors that he talks about in the song he wrote below about his "favorite place on earth."

When I was a little boy, my father would take us away,

West past the fall of the Spirit — we're going to God's Country he'd say.

Take me to the Newwood — out where I know I'll have room to roam,

Where the air's clear as crystal and the morning mist will always be calling me home.

Deep in the heart of my darkest days, when my soul cries out for a sweet place to fly,

I dream of its beauty, the tall shining timbers, the black velvet star-studded sky.

So take me to the Newwood, out where I know I'll have room to roam,

Where the air's clear as crystal and the morning mist will always be calling me home.