

By MICHAEL PEARCE

• Wichita Eagle

CHASE COUNTY (AP) — Theresa Vail’s job has included a lot of cameras and fashionable clothing since she won the Miss Kansas crown last year. She recently got a look at a future that will contain more of the same when she relinquishes her crown June 7.

From then on, though, the cameras will be videoing her on hunts and other outdoors passions for “Limitless,” a series she’ll be hosting on the Outdoors Channel next year. The clothing will be mostly camo, made by “She,” a line of women’s outdoors apparel Vail has been hired to promote and help design.

Vail filmed her first episode for the show while at the Governor’s Turkey Hunt in El Dorado. The show was about a Flint Hills turkey hunt with her father, Mark. Both shot nice toms 20 minutes into the hunt Friday morning.



Vail has received attention for openly speaking of her love of hunting, firearms and her career in the Kansas Army National Guard. She gained more national attention when she announced she would not cover her tattoos in the Miss America competition in Atlantic City last September.

Two months later, the 23-year-old chemistry and Chinese major at Kansas State realized that her career goal of becoming a dentist might be put on hold when the Outdoor Channel called to talk about her possibly hosting a series on their network.

“I told them I didn’t want to do what everybody else was doing and they said they didn’t either,” Vail said while taking a break from Friday’s hunt. “We both wanted it to have more than just me on hunts. I was sold from there on.”

She had gotten a taste of outdoors television in late December, when she and cameraman David Blanton met for an archery deer hunt near Pratt. It snowed hard, and the wind-chill and temperatures were brutal. She got a nice, mature whitetail with her bow. Blanton, Realtree Outdoors host, got a look at someone he thought could easily succeed in the business.

“She just absolutely energized me more than anything. She is an amazing person, really,” Blanton said. “She really wants to teach people they can do things outside their comfort zone, to believe in themselves. They’ll see when the shows begin to air.”

Vail said about half of each segment will be based on hunting, usually with archery gear. The rest will be about a particular personal challenge. To go along with a New Mexico elk hunt she’ll be spending a day training with the state’s Smoke Jumper fire fighters.

“You have 100 pounds of gear on, and you’re running up and down buildings carrying people in a fireman’s carry,” she said. “It’s going to be pretty tough, but I thrive on things like that.”

Another show will have her participating next year in a marathon in New Mexico that honors soldiers from the Bataan Death March in World War II. She recently hosted several pageant

contestants at the event, which is held largely across boot-sucking sand dunes. Vail carried 46 pounds in a rucksack to compete in the event's toughest category.

Vail also wants to be as hands-on as possible in her hunts that will include at least three trips for elk, several for deer and possibly at least one for bear. That means she'll be insisting on field-dressing and packing out loads of meat, when needed.

Though a longtime hunter, she admits she does have plenty to learn.

"I'm not afraid to say, 'Hey, I don't know how to do this,' but I want to learn and do it myself," she said. "That's empowering and more people need to do it. I've never (backpacked the meat from an elk down a mountain), but I will learn how and that's the kind of thing that makes me so proud."

Friday morning's hunt with guide Pat Post, her father and two cameramen required some quick thinking.

Post's scouting had found where a sizable flock of turkeys was roosting in a high-rise of a sycamore over a gorgeous Flint Hills stream. The crew of five moved close to the roost while tom turkeys filled the still air with scores of gobbles.

Four toms strutted toward Post's decoys shortly after fly-down. A mechanical problem caused Vail's gun to only "click" when she pulled the trigger. Using the sound of her dad's shot to cover her noise, she quickly worked the action on the semi-automatic 12 gauge and killed a nice tom five yards away.

Vail has also been hired by Bass Pro Shops for assorted company promotions and work on the She clothing line, which they own. She said she'll finish the two semesters needed for her college degree online.

She also re-enlisted for another six years in the National Guard. Vail said they're willing to work with her schedule since she often promotes the military. Her father has had a long career as an Army dentist.

After working with Vail on several projects, the two cameramen in Kansas to film the turkey hunt believe she'll be able to get done all she's mentioned, and probably more.

"She's not afraid of trying anything," cameraman Casey Keefer said. "There's nothing timid at all about Theresa. She has so much drive and personality."

Cameraman Jason Brown agreed, saying, "It's like the title of her show, 'Limitless,' there are no limits in Theresa."