

Repeating Itself

The Utsey family has found ways to live off their Alabama land passed down for six generations.

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IF YOU GET TO TALKING WITH JAKE UTSEY

and the subject turns to history, his eyes begin to sparkle. Ask him nicely and he may even show you his modest museum showcasing the military memorabilia he's acquired—everything from World War I helmets, Nazi insignia rings and Vietnam-era canteens.

Much of Jake's own history courses through the dense, ruddy Alabama soils where he makes his home and his living; portions of the property have been in the Utsey family for more than 150 years. Water Valley Lodge sits on a slice of land in Gilberttown, in southwest Alabama. It is home to timber, gently rolling pastureland, hay fields and woods teeming with wildlife.

Sometimes, though, it's good to get perspective beyond the bounds of his rural home. Jake makes it a point to see how other people live and work; this past summer he and his son, John Jacob, traipsed through the Ukraine, squeezing into narrow concrete bunkers and studying Soviet-era artillery.

"I do think it's important for people to travel," Jake says. "It teaches us that in most respects, people are the same and so are our needs."

Not only is it important to broaden his worldview,

for Jake it just makes good business sense. Water Valley Lodge, the Utseys' hunting operation, hosts a range of visitors; the family sees 200 to 400 hunters a year. "People come from all over the world," Jake says. "The farthest anyone's come to hunt is Pakistan and Japan, but we've had hunters from Scotland, Israel, Germany, French Quebec and [other regions in] Canada."

Choosing A Lifestyle

Water Valley Lodge has hunting rights to 30,000 acres of land. "Some is in hunting clubs and some is leased privately," Jake explains. His family owns more than a third of that acreage, and Jake rents the rest. Most of the farmed land is currently in timber; Jake owns a small hay operation; and he's clearing land for future livestock use. The property also boasts a large hunting lodge, dining hall, bunkhouse, cabins, an office and the house where Jake resides with wife, Pia, son, John Jacob, 10, and daughter, Gaddy, 9.

Some of the land Jake farms and hunts has been in the family since before the Civil War. "A lot of the land was then lost due to economic collapse post-Civil War and newly instituted taxes levied by



“There is nothing out there better than connections to family through dirt.”