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STEELERS:
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Page D1



YOUR NEWS:
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of Hannah Montana
Inside

INTERSTATE 83:
Plans look
to ease traffic
Page C1

YORK SUNDAY NEWS

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17301
17302
17329
17309
17311
17312
17313
17314
17315
17316
17317
17318
17319
17321
17322
17323
17327
17329
17331
17406
17407
17339
17342
17345
17346
17347
17349
17352
17355
17356
17358
17360
17361
17327
17362
17363
17364
17365
17366
17366
17401
17367
17370
17371



Bryce Myers of Heidelberg Township takes his turn on the line during a practice of the Mason-Dixon Claybusters trap-shooting team. The group has grown rapidly since it's start a year ago.

Click. Pull. Aim. Shoot.

Clay target group for kids shoots for education, safety and personal development

By JENNIFER VOGELSONG
Daily Record/Sunday News

Carrie Ness will be the first to tell you that anyone who sees her at the Jefferson Sportsmen's Association would probably think she was there with a brother, an uncle or other male relative. The 12-year-old Dallastown seventh-grader with glasses and a blond ponytail has a tiny frame and speaks softly — not exactly the image that comes to mind when you think of youth sport shooting.

But then she picks up her gun, slides the safety goggles onto the bridge of her nose and takes her place on a paved strip on the shooting range. She reaches into the shell pouch at her hip, pops a yellow cylinder into the action of her rifle, and waits until the echo of the shooter next to her has faded. Carrie clicks the action closed, mounts the gun to her shoulder and leans forward.

She reminds herself not to look at the BBs on the end of the barrel — it's not very accurate, she says. She calls for the target and prepares for the machine inside the cinderblock trap house to hurl an orange clay disc into the air.

A bang, and she's done. "Sometimes, it's hard to remember everything people tell you," she said. "But I've started to get better at it."

Carrie, like many members of the Mason-Dixon Clay Busters trap shooting team, doesn't



DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS — JENNIFER VOGELSONG

Carrie Ness, 12, pulls a handful of shells from the pouch at her side. Ness joined the Mason-Dixon Claybusters at her grandfather's urging. She is one of several girls on the team.

hunt. Before this year, she had never touched a gun.

Now, she can shatter 12 of 25 clays, and her arm doesn't get sore from the recoil of a shot.

When Carrie shoots a good round, she knows her grandpa, Chet Wise, is proud of her as he watches from the sidelines. He encouraged her to give the team a try after she watched him shoot a round at the York Chapter of the Isaak Walton League.

Wise is glad his granddaughter stuck with the sport, even though it was challenging at first. "Everybody's saying we gotta get kids involved or these (sportsmen's) clubs are not gonna have anyone."

That's one reason that Roger Beardsley of Glen Rock organized the group a year ago. But

it's far from the only one. His own three children — two sons and a daughter — were interested in the sport, but there were no clubs in the area.

"It's kind of strange," he said. "PA is one of the biggest trap-shooting states, but it has the fewest organized groups. In places like Oklahoma, it's a big-time varsity sport and thousands of kids participate."

The 20 slots on the Clay Busters team filled in less than a week. Beardsley had to turn kids down. "There was such a need for this," said Beardsley, adding it's important for young shooters to learn the sport in a kid-friendly environment.

See CLAY, page F5

Clay

Continued from F1

"It takes a lot for a kid to stand at this line with a bunch of old guys from a sportsmen's club," he said. "Even though they would welcome them and help them, it wouldn't be the same."

Safe handling of guns is among the first things new members learn. Each teen who joins the team must complete a 10-hour hunting safety course and adhere to strict rules about when and how they load their guns at practices and competitions.

None of the shooters, or their teammates who are watching, chat or joke around much at practices, especially after they take their guns from their cases, or borrow one from the club's rack. "When they're up at the line, they're all business," Beardsley said. "It's not a place to horse around."

It's also a matter of focus and respect for those who are shooting.

Blane Vanover, 13, of Dallastown said the most difficult part of the sport is maintaining concentration. "If somebody's laughing real loud or talking, it messes you up," he said.

He started shooting with the team after a cousin told him about it. "It's something fun to do on weekends," he said. "And it's cool to blow things up."

On the line, the shooters establish a rhythm:

Click.

"Pull!"

Aim.

Shoot.

"You have about a second to make up your mind and shoot, so you have to be quick," Beardsley said. "Some of them are very competitive shooters because of their young eyes."

Beardsley said the rising cost of ammunition and an increasing number of activities competing for kids' time and attention are the biggest challenges to getting young people involved in target shooting.

"It's a great sport," he said. "They're outside in the fresh air and sunshine, they're having a good time and they're learning some skills."

Reach Jennifer Vogel song at 771-2034 or jvogelsong@ydr.com.

ABOUT THIS ZIP CODE

Population: 7,128
Number of households: 2,831
Average house value: \$124,800
Average income per household: \$46,581
Number of businesses: 139
Number of employees: 2,150
Source: www.zip-codes.com

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Unzipping York County is a monthly series that travels through the county's 57 postal ZIP codes to uncover some of the best untold stories. So far, we've visited:

- A tiny pinball repair shop in 17401.
- A group of men who gather and gab daily in 17408.
- A former pro-baseball scout coaching kids in 17319.
- A small sign shop that does big-time business in 17316.
- A man who left the corporate world to start an organic farm in 17331.
- A rural retreat that transforms to keep up with the times in 17365.
- A couple raising bison and other animals in 17309.
- A fish farm on Brunner Island in 17370.
- One of the country's largest makers of micro-print race cars in 17339.
- A gunsmith who crafts custom rifles in 17362.

To read these stories, visit www.ydr.com/zipcodes.

TERMS TO KNOW

Skeet shooting: Crossing targets are thrown from trap houses in the same direction. Shooters stand in different positions to shoot from a variety of angles.

Trap shooting: Outgoing targets are thrown from a trap house in unpredictable patterns and at unpredictable angles that simulate birds taking flight. Shooters stand in different positions to shoot from a variety of angles.

Sporting clays: Shooters move among stations where targets are thrown in patterns that simulate the variety of challenges in field shooting.

Source: www.claytargetsonline.com

THE CLAY BUSTERS

Number of members: 19
Range of ages: 11 to 17 years old
Geographic distribution: Members come from across York County and northern Maryland.
When they practice: Spring and fall
When they compete: Summer
Where they practice: Jefferson Sportsmen's Association and the York Chapter of the Isaak Walton League near Dallastown.
For details: Visit www.masondixonclaybusters.com