

SNYDER: Glen Rock youngster is state junior trap champion

— again

By ANDY SNYDER 505-5446/@ydsports York Dispatch

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It's an age-old question.

How do we ensure the next generation — the kids we see buried in their smartphones at the bus stop — grow into respectable, trustworthy adults?

The experts have a list of things we're "supposed" to do. But I say the answer is simple. Give 'em a gun, step aside, and tell them to hit the target.

I've met with many of York County's youngest shooters and they are some exceptional youngsters. They are responsible, eager and have a vision for where they want to head.

Take Mark Beardsley, for example. He's a champion. Earlier this month, the high school senior from Glen Rock traveled to the Pennsylvania State Junior Olympic Trap Championship in Dalmatia. He came home with some serious gold medals around his neck. Breaking 95 out of the 125 targets that were tossed in front of him, Mark earned himself the title of Pennsylvania's top Junior Olympic trap shooter for the second year in a row.

Beardsley is part of Mason-Dixon Clay Busters, a youth shooting program that teaches kids a lot more than how to hit a clay bird. It teaches them accountability and the value of setting goals.

"It's fun," Mark said. "I have had the opportunity to meet people from all over the world, and to be able to keep in touch with them. I am always competing against my previous best score and striving to continue to improve, it's a challenge."

The program opens many doors for the young shooters. Beardsley just signed a letter of intent to continue his shooting while in college, plus he'll likely do a bit more traveling before he jumps into the realm of higher learning.

"My next step is to finish this year's competition schedule in sporting clays, skeet and trap, which culminate at the SCTP (Scholastic Clay Target Program) Nationals held in Sparta, Ill.," he said. "If I can raise the funds, I would like to represent Pennsylvania at the National Junior Olympic Shotgun Championships in Colorado Springs in July."

Beardsley's father, Roger, is the Clay Busters' head coach. His role extends far beyond helping the young shooters hit their targets. Yes, he's quite good at teaching the fundamentals of the sport, but he's equally talented at teaching personal responsibility.

"We provide a character-building environment where youth can grow in character, and develop their marksmanship skills in a safe and affirming environment," Roger Beardsley said. "It is very rewarding as a coach to see the young people in this program mature and grow into responsible young adults. I feel that the accountability required to handle firearms helps them develop into responsible young adults."

While the Clay Busters are part of a larger scholastic program, unlike football, baseball and soccer, it is not promoted by our schools. That means funding is always an issue. Fortunately, sportsmen are often quite generous. The team gets support from several local sportsmen's clubs. These organizations clearly understand what it takes to raise a healthy crop of youngsters.

Let's face it. Today's students have more challenges than ever. They face a tough battle with plenty of obstacles. The more ways we can steer them in the right direction, the better off we will all be. We need to give our youngest generation a clear target to aim for. Teach them to shoot and watch all the good that will follow.

Andy Snyder writes about the outdoors for The York Dispatch. He can be reached at sports@yorkdispatch.com. For information about the Clay Busters, check out www.MasonDixonClayBusters.com.