

From the Editor

It's long been an exhortation to grassroots activists to "take someone shooting" as a way of demystifying guns and introducing them to the "gun culture." The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) even has a program devoted to the idea, called "First Shots." Over the years, at events like the Gun Rights Policy Conference, I've heard national leaders urge their fellow activists to invite a friend or co-worker along on a trip to the range.

The concept is also behind programs run by national, state and local groups for legislators and legislative aides, for journalists and, in the case of our own "Firearms & Fiction" series, for mystery, science fiction and even romance writers.

Getting "hands on" is the surest way to show and tell. And there is quite a bit of evidence that this approach works. Not every person who gets out on to the range is automatically going to become a gunowner or a gun rights activist, but it is a great way to build bridges to the apathetic, uniformed or unsure.

I was reminded of this recently when I worked a gun show after a long absence from them. It was the weekend following the NRA Meetings and we had a few leftover boxes of books and bumper stickers (most of which are available at the Second Amendment Foundation's website, saf.org) and the show was being held at the county fairgrounds, about a 20 minute ride from home. Since the promoters had asked us to come to other shows previously, I gave them a call, and they moved a few things around and found a last-minute spot for the traditional eight-foot table.

In addition to books, stickers, copies of *Women & Guns* and *Gun Week* and our "lawsuit" portable display, which reads, "Winning Firearms Freedom One Lawsuit at a Time," I also brought along my friend and neighbor Anne.

She is not a gunowner, but holds generally sympathetic views. I've taken her out for informal shotgun shooting a few times, and I think she'd be much more apt to go hunting than I would. But she had never attended a gun show before.

She was being a good friend by getting up a little earlier on a Spring Saturday morning and helping schlep the display and boxes to the show. It took us only 20 minutes or so to set up, and our wall table (backing up on a loading door) was between a Rochester-area gun dealer and a table offering raffle tickets on either a handgun or rifle, to benefit an area 4-H youth shooting program.

Before we were fully set up, Anne had bought a few raffle tickets.

The gun dealer, who was a woman, by the way, was selling mostly airguns, scopes and tactical lights. She sold out of a box of key-chain-sized pepper sprays by Saturday afternoon.

I was impressed with the technique of the raffle ticket sellers, who had a well-honed and cheerful patter, inviting anyone who walked by "to support the kids and win a gun."

As usual at gun shows, there were any number of handguns, rifles and shotguns for sale, not just on the tables, but by attendees as well. Stepping outside at one point I heard one dealer tell another about his purchase of a vintage airgun—"I got a good deal, but so did he, I

showed him the price right on my phone." I can only assume there's an app for that these days—as there seems to be for everything else.

Also as is the case at most gun shows, there was tons of ammunition, lots of military surplus, books, memorabilia, knives, and a table manned by our county pistol licensing office, under the direction of County Clerk Kathy Hochul, who is now in Congress, having won a special election a couple weeks after the show.

On the ride home—where we fortuitously got lost right near one of our favorite garden nurseries—I asked Anne how she liked the show. "I hope I win that gun," she said.

The following day, I headed to the fairgrounds on my own and spent a sadly rather quiet Sunday talking to folks who came by the booth, selling a few bumper stickers, reading people's t-shirts, and, early on, scurrying over to the military surplus tables and investing in some warm socks—a draft from the loading door was really chilly.

For all the table thumping that goes on about "gun show loopholes" and "gun show culture" as if it was somehow completely different from any number of other weekend shows held at the fairgrounds, it seems to me the first question activists should ask is "have you ever been to a gun show?"

And the second question should be: "Would you like to?"



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