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T/C ARMS IS BACK,  
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# SHOOTING INDUSTRY

THE INDUSTRY'S BUSINESS MAGAZINE — EST. 1955



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## Motivations For Sales?

There are numerous ways to motivate your sales team to push a particular product category or line — and some manufacturers have developed programs to incentivize sales associates and develop them into enthusiasts of their brands.

In “Deal Me In,” first-time *SI* contributor Peter Suci highlights how dealer incentive programs are increasingly crucial for reps behind the counter.

“The pro deals and incentive programs can help get the firearm in the hands of salespeople,” observes Mike Waugh, purchaser of Fountain Valley, Calif.-based RifleGear.

“They then use the gun, they get excited about it and they share that enthusiasm with the customer.”

This enthusiasm can help a sales associate steer the sale toward a favored product — as you’ve read in these pages before (and have experienced on the floor of your own stores). There are customers who will value an associate’s firsthand experiences with a particular product if they’re on the fence between two products or brands.

For more, see **pp. 28–31**.

### READER FEEDBACK LEADS TO FRESH TAKE

In the May 2024 issue, Massad Ayoob’s *Personal Defense Market* column focused on selling the defensive battery. Reader Kyle Barrett, who owns two stores in Arizona, wrote in — informing us of a potential “content hole” with pistol-caliber carbines not mentioned.

Well, Ayoob returns this month with a fresh take on selling the defensive battery — focusing on pistol-caliber carbines, as well as the value of electronic hearing protection.

And, the feedback counts: “Editor Jade Moldae and I greatly appreciate this sort of input. *You* are our customers, and we want your feedback as to what you want to see in



SEPTEMBER 2024

these pages,” he writes. See **p. 22**.

### GUNSMITHING: AN OPPORTUNITY GENERATOR

In the opening sentences of his article “Turning Lemons Into Loyalty,” Bryan Hendricks pens precisely why an in-house gunsmith is an essential offering for those stores with the volume and capital to support the role.

“When a customer buys a lemon firearm, he or she almost always blames the retailer, not the manufacturer. When it happens, a gunsmith can salvage the retailer’s relationship with the customer,” Hendricks says.

See Part 1 of what will be a three-part series on **pp. 38–41**.

### OCTOBER PREVIEW: HANDGUNS, SECURITY & MORE

In next month’s issue, Tim Barker examines the handgun market — and while it may seem repetitive at times, as the top-selling brands tend to be the same from store to store, Barker learns what niche brands perform well in showcases.

Other highlights of the issue include a look at cyber security, tips for getting more out of training, part two of the gunsmithing series and more.

Have a comment on anything you see in this issue or something you’d like to see in these pages? Send the *SI* team an email anytime: [comments@shootingindustry.com](mailto:comments@shootingindustry.com). **SI**

Corporate Officers **RANDY MOLDÉ, MARJORIE YOUNG, AMY VON ROSEN**

Editor **JADE MOLDAE**

Associate Editor **JENNA BUCKLEY**

Art Director **NATALIE HARGER**

Circulation/Production Director **HEATHER ARNOLD**

Production Manager **LORI ROBBINS**

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Staff Photographer **JOSEPH NOVELOZO**

Editorial Review **CONSOL TORRES**

Contributing Editors **CAROLEE ANITA BOYLES,**

**TIM BARKER, ASHLEY MCGEE, MASSAD AYOOB,**

**BRYAN HENDRICKS, PAT COVERT, NANCY KEATON,**

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North East **AMY TANGUAY**

■ [amy.tanguay@fmghq.com](mailto:amy.tanguay@fmghq.com)

South East **TOM VOREL**

■ [tom.vorel@fmghq.com](mailto:tom.vorel@fmghq.com)

Online Traffic Manager **LORI ROBBINS**

■ [lori.robbins@fmghq.com](mailto:lori.robbins@fmghq.com)

Classified Advertising **AMY TANGUAY**

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**EDITORIAL** [editor@shootingindustry.com](mailto:editor@shootingindustry.com)

**PRODUCTION** [lori.robbins@fmghq.com](mailto:lori.robbins@fmghq.com)



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### FMG PUBLICATIONS

*American Handgunner*

Editor **TOM MCHALE**

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## YES, WE'RE IN A DE-EVOLUTION

I just got my July copy of *Shooting Industry* and couldn't agree more with Hank Yacek's take on the industry ("Are We In A De-Evolution?"). It's ironic: I just got finished penning an email to an executive at a major firearms company complaining about exactly what Yacek wrote about.

I, too, think this industry is committing suicide with its business practices and greed. The manufacturers are to blame for allowing drop-ship-only stores to proliferate. I've been in the gun business for 55 years and I've never seen such a mess as we have today.

On GunBroker, I found a link with 46 listings for a particular firearm. Out of the 46, only the top two sellers actually had this item in their possession. The rest were drop shippers that would have a sale fulfilled by a distributor. I also can't believe they all have been approved drop shippers either.

Just what is the criteria to become a drop shipper? Storefront? Inventory? Overhead? Employees? Liability

insurance? Breathing air? The only one I can think of is the latter ...

We can't have a healthy industry when manufacturers let the distribution channel become so diluted with people who have absolutely no business selling products they don't have.

How would mainstream manufacturers react if they, as a manufacturer, had 100 other competitors trying to sell their guns to distribution — but they don't have them and rely on someone else to fulfill the distributor's orders? What if the distributors didn't know who was a legitimate business and who was just a drop shipper? They have 100 choices. If their volume was diluted like ours is, how could they survive on a drastically reduced revenue stream? We don't need a gas station on every corner.

The economy sucks and we all know sales are down — so why not take this opportunity to clean up this mess the manufacturers have allowed to grow into a pandemic?

— **Edward Pepper, CEO/Owner**  
Osage County Guns  
Wright City, Mo.

**We can't have a healthy industry when manufacturers let the distribution channel become so diluted with people who have absolutely no business selling products they don't have.**

## HAVE A THOUGHT WHILE READING THE ISSUE?

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## 2024 SSSF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP SETS NEW RECORDS

The 2023–2024 season of the Scholastic Shooting Sports Foundation’s (SSSF) youth development programs concluded in July with another record-breaking National Championship.

Hosted at the Cardinal Shooting Center in Marengo, Ohio, the 2024 edition of the annual youth shooting sports competition set the mark as the largest shoot in Cardinal Center history. Between the SSSF’s clay target and action shooting youth programs, 40 states were represented at the National Championships, which saw more than 3 million rounds safely fired without incident.

Action shooting sports participation continues to grow throughout the nation for young athletes and had a strong showing at the SSSF’s Scholastic Action Shooting Program (SASP) National

Championship. This year, the SASP broke the world record for the largest action shooting event in the world — all by youth athletes. With over 2,600 entries, athletes safely fired over 565,000 rounds of ammunition in competition without incident, along with side matches, sponsor demos and practices — tallying in additional hundreds of thousands of rounds.

SCTP participation surged as well, with over 3,100 athletes and more than 9,000 event entries during the 12-day event schedule. This marks the largest National Championship the SCTP has ever conducted, with over 2 million White Flyer targets being thrown in competition, side matches and practice.

Shooting sports continues to be a level-playing field where winning can be achieved without being the

strongest athlete or the fastest runner. Athletes come from a wide range of backgrounds and some who do not find their place in traditional ball sports often find success in shooting sports. Athletes also find enormous success in youth shooting sports, regardless of gender. The SASP’s National Championships saw 31% female participation, with many claiming high honors at the end of the event.

A staple of additional activities at SCTP Nationals is the Last Competitor Standing or “Annie Oakley” event. This massive-scale elimination event saw well over 700 clay target athletes lined up across the length of two-dozen trap fields to determine who would come home with bragging rights and impressive prizes from SCTP sponsors. When narrowed down to the top male and female athlete, the two went head to head and Karly Turinske kept her mental game strong, claiming the title of Last Competitor Standing.

The SASP and SCTP programs focus on team-based youth shooting sports as the catalyst for youth development into high-quality, responsible young adults. SCTP and SASP members benefit from a year long season, with local, state and regional events, culminating in the National Championship each July. As the largest youth shooting sports event in the world, the youth development

Continued on p. 12

## FEDERAL AMMUNITION AWARDED U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS CONTRACT

Federal Ammunition announced a one-year, \$3.6 million contract from the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to supply it with 7.62x51mm rifle ammunition for the MK316.

Federal will produce the 7.62x51mm,

175-grain, precision match rifle cartridge at its facility in Anoka, Minn.

“Federal’s performance reputation for our match ammunition has always been a competitive advantage shot after shot, lot to lot. MK316 Mod 0 fits in perfectly with Federal’s history of producing extremely accurate ammunition held to tight tolerances required by strict U.S. military specifications,” said Federal President and CEO Jason Vanderbrink.



Federal is currently producing the same load for the U.S. Navy in a separate contract and remains committed to supplying the U.S. warfighter with the best products to protect and defend.

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# INDUSTRY NEWS

## USA HIGH SCHOOL CLAY TARGET LEAGUE ANNOUNCES 2024 NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

The USA High School Clay Target League announced the individual and team winners of its 2024 National Championship, held July 10-14 at the Michigan Trapshooting Association in Mason, Mich.

Brody Lenington of Cedar Vale-Dexter High School (Kansas) won the men's title and Madelyn Coats of Franklin-Waverly High School (Illinois) earned the women's title.

Oregon's Yamhill-Carlton High School secured the team champion title, finishing ahead of 259 other high school clay target teams.

A total of nearly 3,000 athletes representing 456 high schools from across the nation competed in the championship event. The final championship round earned honors for the top 10 men and



The top of the pyramid: Out of nearly 3,000 competitors, here are a collection of the top-performing athletes during the 2024 USA High School Clay Target National Championship.

women athletes, along with the top five high school clay target teams in the country.

Over 37,000 student-athletes representing 1,795 high school teams across the country participated in USA Clay Target League programs this past spring. The top student-athletes, based on season averages at the completion of the spring season, qualified to compete at the National Championship.

The 2024 USA High School Clay Target National Championship was presented by Scheels, along with the U.S. Army, Friends of NRA, Lansing Sports Commission, Ducks Unlimited, Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's Outdoor Fund, Walker's, Do-All Outdoors, Mark Zauhar, Sportsman's Guide, Guns.com, Spandau Arms, Strike Visuals and Winchester.

[/ highschool.usaclaytarget.com](https://highschool.usaclaytarget.com)

## BLUE PAYMENT LAUNCHES KNIFE-FRIENDLY SHOPIFY PAYMENT GATEWAYS

Blue Payment Agency Inc., a leader in high-risk payment processing, announced the launch of its specialized knife-friendly payment gateways for Shopify websites. This new program provides seamless and secure payment processing solutions for Shopify merchants selling knives, collectible swords and other bladed weapons.

"Feedback from clients over the past year has been clear. There is a significant need for knife-friendly credit-card processing, particularly for Shopify

merchants," said Alex Roy, president of Blue Payment Agency.

Blue Payment Agency, established in 2014, has built its reputation on expertise in high-risk payment processing, particularly in regulated categories. The company utilizes high-risk merchant accounts explicitly approved for selling knives and other bladed weapons, paired with the easily integrated Authorize.net payment gateway. This combination allows knife and blade merchants to enjoy straightforward, low-stress online payment acceptance using the native Shopify shopping cart.

New website owners often overlook the allowed-use policies of standard payment gateways. This leads to processor-forced refunds, lost sales, held



deposits and shutdown accounts when selling regulated items like fixed-blade, gravity or survival knives.

Blue Payment Agency offers clients one-on-one application, setup and integration assistance at no additional charge. While clients can apply, upload documents and integrate payment processing online themselves, the agency also offers personalized support to ensure everything is set up correctly.

[/ bluepaymentagency.com](https://bluepaymentagency.com)

### Continued from p. 10

programs hold industry-wide support, with many sponsors present on site to support the event such as GLOCK, Remington, Winchester, Browning, Kolar, Beretta, Ruger and more.

Both programs serve as official

youth feeders for the respective sports of USA Shooting. Athletes competing in the international disciplines of the SCTP and SASP often have Junior Olympic and Olympic goals in mind, with the youth feeding programs fostering those ambitions with additional opportunities.

At the Paris Olympics, three active

SASP athletes represented the U.S., along with SCTP alumni — most prominently Vincent Hancock, a now four-time Olympic Skeet Champion, four-time World Champion and 16-time World Cup medalist.

[/ sssonline.org](https://sssonline.org)

## C&H COMPANIES ANNOUNCES PARAGON ACQUISITION, EXPANSION PLAN

C&H Precision Family of Companies announced its successful acquisition of Paragon Weapon Light Cleaner, a firearms cleaning solution company based in Florida.

C&H Companies acquired a majority stake in Paragon from its founding members in August, initiating a strategic partnership designed to enhance the capabilities and market presence of both companies. C&H Companies has now completed the acquisition process, assuming full ownership of Paragon.

“This acquisition marks a significant milestone in our ongoing growth and

expansion within the firearms sector. We are eager to integrate Paragon’s innovative products and expertise into our operations, which will undoubtedly strengthen our market position and enhance our ability to serve our customers,” said Buck Holly, founder and CEO of C&H Precision Family of Companies.

C&H Companies also owns C&H Precision, a prominent player in the firearms industry, and will continue to look for strategic acquisitions in the same and adjacent markets.

The company also broke ground on its new headquarters in Richmond Hill, Ga., in March of this year. The facility will span 50,000 sq. ft. and create up to 60 jobs, as well as being a planned community-gathering location. The new C&H complex will also house all Paragon operations.



In plans released earlier, the C&H Companies campus will include state-of-the-art manufacturing, indoor shooting ranges for the public and law enforcement, an FFL retail store, a sandwich and coffee shop and more. This multi-use facility will not only increase C&H Companies’ manufacturing and design capacity to support its growing business needs, but it also will increase the company’s involvement and contributions to the local community.

[/chpws.com](http://chpws.com)

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# INDUSTRY NEWS

## 2024 TOM KNAPP MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIPS PRESENTED

Two 4-H shooting sports teen ambassadors were awarded 2024 Tom Knapp Memorial Scholarships during the National 4-H Shooting Sports Invitational held in Grand Island, Neb., June 24–28.

Jessica Laffey from Colorado and Kaeli-Gracyn Bourgoyne from Louisiana each received \$2,500 scholarship checks from Jon Zinnel, director of community relations for Federal Ammunition, during the competition's opening ceremonies. Federal and Champion Traps & Targets, in collaboration with the National 4-H Shooting Sports Committee, oversee the scholarship program.

"Both Jessica and Kaeli-Gracyn demonstrated an impressive understanding of how wildlife is managed, plus how hunting and shooting sports programs play a vital role in operating and funding the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation in our country," said Zinnel. "As a former National 4-H Shooting Sports Ambassador, reviewing these applications is a highlight of my year."



Federal Ammunition's Jon Zinnel presents Kaeli-Gracyn Bourgoyne with a Tom Knapp scholarship during the National 4-H Shooting Sports Invitational.

Federal continues as the longest-tenured sponsor for the 4-H Shooting Sports Program, which welcomed over 700 athletes from over 40 states to the event. The organization introduces hundreds of thousands of new shooting sports enthusiasts to a wide array of shooting disciplines each year through safe and controlled programs led by certified instructors nationally.

The Tom Knapp Memorial Scholarships, established in 2016, are awarded annually in honor of the late

exhibition shooter Tom Knapp, who left an indelible mark on the shooting sports community.

Knapp also was a respected Champion Targets and Federal Ammunition ambassador. With the support of Knapp's wife, Colleen, Champion extended Knapp's licensed products program to fund an endowed scholarship that annually awards \$2,500 to two National 4-H Ambassadors.

[/ federalpremium.com](http://federalpremium.com)  
[/ championtarget.com](http://championtarget.com)

## NSSF ANNOUNCES NEW PROJECT CHILDSAFE LAUNCH

The NSSF announced the launch of its Project ChildSafe initiative and its message of preventing unauthorized access to firearms in greater Prescott, Ariz. Gunsite Academy, the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office and representatives of the Prescott P.D., Prescott Valley P.D. and Chino Valley P.D. all are partnered in this effort.

The NSSF has provided thousands of firearm safety kits that include a gunlock and safety brochure to the community for distribution to gun owners and their families.

"No one wants their firearm in the hands of an unsupervised child, a person with suicidal thoughts or a thief who might use the firearm to commit a crime. Gun owners have many storage options to choose from to prevent unwanted access, including lock boxes, safes for homes and vehicles and digital devices. There's a device to meet every gun owner's storage

needs," said Bill Brassard, senior director of communications for NSSF at a press conference announcing the initiative.

Project ChildSafe gunlocks will be available at the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office and substations.

"Gunsite Academy has been at the forefront of firearm safety and training for almost 50 years. Gunsite is proud to partner with the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office and the NSSF to continue promoting gun safety and proper training," said Ken Campbell, CEO of Gunsite Academy.

Project ChildSafe is marking its 25th year of promoting safe firearm handling and secure storage. The program began in 1999 in five pilot cities. Today, Project ChildSafe operates in all 50 states and the five U.S. territories, has worked with more than 15,000 law enforcement partners and distributed more than 41 million firearm safety kits that each include a cable gun lock.

In Arizona and nationally, most firearm-related fatalities are suicide deaths. The NSSF has responded to this

by developing resources, in partnership with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, to make gun owners and their families aware of the warning signs of suicide, how to reach out to someone who's struggling and knowing about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

According to National Safety Council data from 2022, preventable firearm injury-related deaths have declined by 39.2% over the past 20 years, which coincides with Project ChildSafe's efforts.

[/ nssf.org](http://nssf.org)  
[/ projectchildsafe.org](http://projectchildsafe.org)  
[/ gunsite.com](http://gunsite.com)



## IHEA-USA EXPANDS HUNTER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP WITH SAVAGE ARMS

The International Hunter Education Association-USA (IHEA-USA) announced the expansion of its partnership with Savage Arms. This collaboration advances firearm education and safety initiatives, demonstrating both organizations' unwavering commitment to promoting safe and responsible practices.

"Worldwide, IHEA has helped educate tens of thousands of new hunters every year. The safe hunting practices that are taught by these great instructors are creating a strong, safe future for our hunting lifestyle," Savage Arms released in a statement.

As part of the expanded partnership program, Savage Arms will include a promotional card with every firearm sold, encouraging customers to sign up for IHEA-USA's Firearm Fundamentals online courses. These courses are designed to give new hunters and firearm enthusiasts a solid foundation in firearm safety and handling. They are built with and adopted by many state wildlife agencies.

In addition to promoting the Firearm Fundamentals course, the promotional cards will provide an option to donate to IHEA-USA directly, further supporting the organization's efforts to promote hunting safety and conservation.

"Savage Arms has been a long-standing partner of IHEA and the conservation industry with their support of hunter education instructors, and this partnership further demonstrates their



dedication to safety and responsible gun ownership. We hope this partnership benefits Savage Arms customers and helps to create safer, more knowledgeable firearm owners," said IHEA-USA Executive Director Alex Baer.

The Firearm Fundamentals courses are available online at [ffcourse.org](http://ffcourse.org).

[/savagearms.com](http://savagearms.com)

[/ihea-usa.org](http://ihea-usa.org)

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# INDUSTRY NEWS

## SILENCERCO ACQUIRES ZEV TECHNOLOGIES, RESETS BRAND FOCUS

SilencerCo announced its acquisition of certain business operations of Zev Technologies, a firearm and firearm parts manufacturer. The two brands plan to bring quality, innovative products to the firearms industry.

SilencerCo plans to bring renewed focus to the Zev Technologies brand as Zev shifts away from its OEM operations while maintaining its headquarters in Centralia, Wash.

Zev Technologies is an industry leader that has created many influential products over the years. The company pioneered the Glock customization trend with its popular slides, triggers, barrels and more. Zev also created the OZ9 Pistol, with a unique internal design meant to



give shooters more balance and control. Zev and Magpul are currently working to create the Folding Defensive Pistol (FDP-9) and the Folding Defensive Carbine (FDC-9).

“We are very happy to align ourselves with such an innovative company as Zev Technologies. We look forward to the launch of the FDP-9/FDC-9 in conjunction with Magpul, and anticipate that product launch taking place later this year,” said Jonathon Shults, SilencerCo CEO.

Moving forward, SilencerCo will be highly focused on furthering Zev’s

brand. SilencerCo will be bringing additional resources for Zev-specific product launches and innovation. With this direction, Zev will have more opportunities to flourish as a brand.

“Our team is excited for the future of Zev under this new acquisition. We look forward to working closely with SilencerCo to enhance both of our brands and product lines,” said Taylor Goode, Zev Technologies president.

[/ silencerco.com](https://silencerco.com)  
[/ zevtechnologies.com](https://zevtechnologies.com)

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## NSSF PRIORITIZES CYBERSECURITY AWARENESS FOR MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

The NSSF announced an agreement with KnowBe4, the provider of the world's largest security awareness training and simulated phishing platform.

The partnership will enhance NSSF's security awareness efforts and bolster the overall security culture of its member organizations. Additionally, NSSF members will have exclusive access to special offers from KnowBe4, accessible through the NSSF member portal.

KnowBe4 helps increase employee awareness of cybersecurity threats and

teaches them how to respond to schemes such as phishing and social engineering that frequently affect organizations. Social engineering and phishing are responsible for 70 to 90% of all wdata breaches.

KnowBe4's awareness training includes baseline testing, user training and automated, simulated phishing attacks for businesses of all sizes.

"Through frequent phishing email tests, as well as mandatory monthly cybersecurity awareness training modules, our staff has become much more attuned to the attacks that they will encounter in the real world. We have built the muscle memory critical to reporting incidents as quickly as possible to limit any impact of a real-world incident," said Joe Bartozzi, NSSF president and CEO.

**NSSF**  
The Firearm Industry  
Trade Association

"This enhanced relationship provides us with endless opportunities to help organizations better manage the ongoing problem of social engineering. By taking an active role in improving the NSSF's security culture, they are ultimately helping to build stronger protections against attacks via the often-forgotten human element," said Stu Sjouwerman, CEO of KnowBe4.

[/ nssf.org](http://nssf.org)  
[/ knowbe4.com](http://knowbe4.com)

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[GZANDERS.COM](http://GZANDERS.COM)

# INDUSTRY NEWS

## WINCHESTER AMMUNITION HONORS MACK'S PRAIRIE WINGS, MARION MCCOLLUM

Winchester announced a commemorative Xpert waterfowl ammunition offering, available in fall 2024, to honor the 80th anniversary of Mack's Prairie Wings and its former president and CEO, the late Marion McCollum. The commemorative ammunition will be available in 12 GA, 3", No.2 shot.

The "Winchester Life" TV series, available on Waypoint TV, will also feature an episode dedicated to the McCollum legacy and rich waterfowl history rooted in Stuttgart, Ark.

"Marion McCollum will forever be

known for his tireless work in promoting hunting and conservation, as well as his efforts in growing the shooting sports with more youth participants," said Brett Flaugher, president of Winchester Ammunition. "The Winchester-Mack's Prairie Wings relationship was built over decades, thanks in large part to Marion's trust in our products, our legendary brand and our people. Likewise, Winchester has always remained committed to Mack's Prairie Wings and Marion's efforts in introducing new people to the outdoors."

Mack's Prairie Wings is truly America's Premier Waterfowl Outfitter. To meet the demand of duck hunters coming to the waterfowl paradise of Stuttgart, Ark., McCollum's Hardware Store began stocking items to outfit hunters in the 1930s. Today, that section in a hardware store has turned into a 120,000-sq. ft.



Winchester Xpert 12 GA

facility, of which 40,000 sq. ft. is retail showroom space.

[/ winchester.com](http://winchester.com)

## WINCHESTER CONTINUES NSSF FIRST SHOTS PROGRAM SUPPORT

Winchester announced a donation of more than 120,000 rounds of rimfire ammunition to NSSF's First Shots program, a commitment to the mission of introducing more people to the shooting sports.

"This is an extraordinary show of support by Winchester for NSSF's First Shots program. Through its ammunition donations, Winchester has made it possible for thousands of first-time and novice target shooters to receive an introduction

to target shooting and learning how to handle and shoot firearms safely," said Zach Snow, NSSF director of member development.

First Shots is an introductory and refresher program made available through host target-shooting ranges across the country. By providing educational experiences that are safe, fun and memorable, host ranges are having great success in attracting first-timers, further engaging new gun owners and reactivating lapsed participants. Surveys show that more than 43% of First Shots participants are converted to target-shooting enthusiasts, who, on average, individually spend more than \$600 annually on their shooting sports endeavors.



"Winchester continues its industry leadership in helping people learn and have positive experiences at shooting ranges throughout the country. The commitment to the NSSF First Shots Program and its mission is strong," said Jason Gilbertson, director of marketing for Winchester Ammunition.

[/ winchester.com](http://winchester.com)

[/ nssf.org](http://nssf.org)

## PYRAMYD AIR, MACE BRAND FORM PARTNERSHIP

Premier online airgun and outdoor gear store Pyramyd AIR announced its strategic partnership with Mace Security International Inc. (Mace Brand), a leading personal safety and security product manufacturer. The two Cleveland-area companies are joining forces to provide safety solutions for outdoor enthusiasts.

Pyramyd AIR will integrate a variety of Mace Brand products into its extensive customer catalog. One of these is Mace

Brand pepper gel, which has an 18' range and UV dye for assailant identification. Also featured will be the Mace Brand personal alarm keychain that emits a 130dB sound to deter threats and attract help. Mace Brand bear spray will be another important outdoor safety product in the lineup.

"Safety is paramount for anyone enjoying outdoor activities. By teaming up with Mace Brand, we can provide our customers with top-tier safety products they need to stay safe in any environment," said Val Gamera, president of Pyramyd AIR.



Mace Security International has spent more than 40 years designing and manufacturing consumer and tactical products for personal defense and security under its world-renowned Mace Brand, the original trusted brand of defense spray products.

[/ pyramydair.com](http://pyramydair.com)

[/ mace.com](http://mace.com)

## SOUTHWICK RELEASES “2023 HUNTING & SHOOTING MARKET SIZE” REPORT

Southwick Associates has released the “2023 Hunting & Shooting Market Size” report, detailing the specifics of the more than \$22 billion hunting and shooting equipment market in 2023.

The report includes both retail unit and dollar sales estimates of more than 80 products directly associated with hunting, recreational shooting and personal protection. Breakouts are included for specific product attributes, such as action type or caliber/gauge, the primary purpose for consumers’ purchases and more. Only equipment directly associated

with hunting, recreational shooting and personal protection has sales figures included in the report. Other items such as travel-related spending, real estate and indirect equipment such as vehicles are not included.

The overall market value dropped from 2022 estimates, but was still higher than pre-pandemic levels, with firearms and ammunition declining less than anticipated.

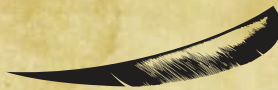
“Consumer purchases of firearms and ammunition were stronger than expected in 2023, as dealers continued to work through inventory and realign product assortments,” said Nancy Bacon, VP of Southwick Associates. “Inflationary pressures continue to affect the consumer, but they appeared to be resilient in 2023, with increases in hunting and



shooting accessories that may not have been broadly available in the last couple of years. The new market size report will help businesses understand the new market environment and identify opportunities.”

Custom research into specific market niches is also available from Southwick, as are reports identifying the top brands, sales by retail channel and more. To purchase a report or to discuss any custom research needs, contact Nancy Bacon at [nancy@southwickassociates.com](mailto:nancy@southwickassociates.com). [/ southwickassociates.com](https://southwickassociates.com)

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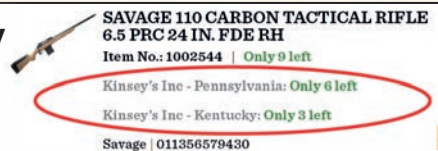
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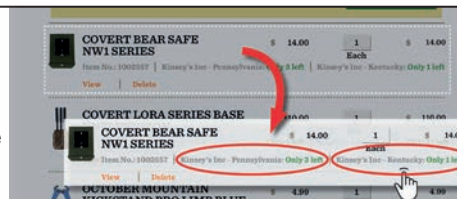


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# NEWSMAKERS



J. HERMAN

### Vudoo Gun Works Appoints Executives

Vudoo Gun Works announced the appointment of Jacob Herman as the new CEO, the promotion of Jack Oliver to COO and the hire of Heather Miller as VP of sales and marketing.

Herman brings more than 20 years of industry experience to his new position.



J. OLIVER



H. MILLER

Formerly the director of engineering, Oliver will manage manufacturing, supply chain and quality control, ensuring the consistent delivery of top-tier products.

“His expertise and innovative mindset have been invaluable to our engineering efforts,” noted Herman.

Armed with over a decade of experience in the firearms industry, Miller will develop and execute sales strategies, oversee marketing initiatives and strengthen customer relationships.

Herman shared, “Her arrival marks a dynamic new phase for our company, and we are excited to see the epic advancements she’ll bring to our team and customers.”



I. PAUL

### TAG Precision Adds Sales Manager

Ian Paul has joined TAG Precision as the company’s new sales manager.

“His extensive experience and enthusiasm for the firearms industry make him a perfect fit for our mission to deliver the most innovative and versatile sights in the market,” said Michael Neff, TAG CEO and owner.

Paul has over 12 years of experience from sales-related roles. Most recently, he served as

the e-commerce manager for Clay Shooters Supply. He also spent time as a senior account manager at Davidson’s.



L. CUENCO

### FALCO Holsters Taps Content Creators

FALCO Holsters announced the addition of Luke Cuenco as a content creator.

Accompanied by Nic Lenze, Cuenco will create product reviews, how-to guides and application videos to highlight the features and benefits of FALCO holsters. His work will be featured across the company’s social media platforms, website and YouTube channel.

Cuenco has been an integral part of FALCO for many years, creating blogs about guns, holsters, concealed carry and the gun-ownership lifestyle, where he heavily promotes regular training and safety.



J. RAWLINSON

### NASP Selects VP

The National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) welcomed Jeff Rawlinson as VP. His duties

include growing the relationship between NASP and the nation’s state fish and wildlife agencies, conservation organizations and various shooting sports organizations. He is also involved in the coordination of all internal and external activities as well as day-to-day operations.

NASP President Tommy Floyd said, “Jeff has developed tremendous positive relationships with state fish and wildlife agencies, conservation organizations and the entire R3 community through his work with Nebraska. His deep commitment to connecting young people to the outdoors makes him a great candidate to help lead our growing organization.”

Rawlinson has served as an assistant division administrator with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission where he has worked for the past 25 years.

He has been a hunter and bowhunter education instructor for over 25 years and is a member of several wildlife agencies and committees.



N. HORVATH



B. PIERSON



J. HONEA

### Staccato Promotes Executives

Staccato announced the promotion of three senior executives: CEO Nate Horvath is now serving as co-chairman of the board, and Buck Pierson and Justin Honea were named co-CEOs.

Horvath is focusing on strategically extending the company’s reach through deeper customer interactions, building company partnerships and providing leadership to new Staccato customer offerings.

Pierson previously held the title of chief business development officer and was responsible for building the company’s customer base. He joined Staccato in 2018.

Honea joined the company three years ago and was instrumental in enhancing operational efficiency and implementing precision manufacturing as the company’s COO.

Horvath commented, “Buck and Justin have been my key lieutenants responsible for so much of Staccato’s success and were handpicked successors. I now can focus on deepening and expanding our customer experience as we focus on launching new businesses and unique experiences around our

recently launched Staccato Ammo and Ranch offerings.”



P. KERSKER

### American Outdoor Brands Promotes Sales VP

Pete Kersker was promoted to American Outdoor Brands' (AOB) VP of Sales — Outdoor Sports. In this newly created position, he will lead domestic sales of the company's outdoor sports product categories: personal protection, hunting, shooting, fishing, camping and cutlery.

Brent Vulgamott, COO of American Outdoor Brands, stated, “We're proud to announce this promotion that recognizes his contributions, and which underscores the importance that the outdoor sports product categories play in our long-term growth strategy.”

Kersker joined AOB in 2016 as a sales manager and was later promoted

to director of sales. Most recently, he served as senior director of sales.

Kersker earned a bachelor's degree at Keene State College.



R. HERRERA

### LaserMax Welcomes Brand Ambassador

LaserMax announced its newest brand ambassador, Ramiro Herrera.

“Ramiro's extensive experience, dedication to safety and passion for firearms perfectly aligns with our brand values. We look forward to a long and successful partnership,” said Alex Chavez, LaserMax senior product manager.

Herrera, a former army sergeant, was awarded the Combat Medical Badge, Expert Field Medical Badge, Soldier's Medal and the Purple Heart. He currently works as a private firearms instructor and is also a social

media influencer.



S. KESLER

### Streamlight Inc. Taps Regional Sales Manager

Scott Kesler is now serving as the Streamlight Regional Sales Manager — Industrial/Fire Division for the West Coast territory (AZ, NV, CA, OR, WA, AK and HI). He is responsible for working with distributors and independent sales representatives to increase product awareness and sales.

Streamlight CRO Michael F. Dineen said, “[Kesler's] dedication to volunteer and instructional firefighting work will serve our Industrial/Fire division well.”

Most recently, he served as an account manager for Bradken.

Kesler earned a degree in advertising from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. **SI**

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BY MASSAD AYOOB

## FINDING OUT WHAT YOUR CUSTOMERS WANT

**Y**ou don't need me or anyone else to tell you a key to successful sales is to offer something the customer wants. You're holding one example of it in your hands. *Shooting Industry* is a trade publication for those whose profession is retail sales of firearms and related products.

A while back in this column, we discussed how American gun owners have traditionally modeled their choice of defensive firearms, particularly handguns, on what the police used.

Kyle Barrett, owner of America Fidelis Guns & Ammo in Buckeye, Ariz., and Rim Country Guns in Payson, Ariz., wrote *SI* the following letter:

*I know Mr. Ayoob's article ("Selling The Defensive Battery," Personal Defense Market, May 2024) focused on the parallels between police guns and home-defense guns, but there's one tool he left out of the defensive battery: a pistol-caliber carbine (PCC).*

*At our shops, we often recommend PCCs like the KelTec SUB2000 or the Beretta CX4 Storm for home defense because they have a few advantages over rifles. They are shorter and lighter, they take the same magazines as your handgun, they shoot cheaper ammo — which makes practicing more accessible*

*— and they are much quieter than rifles.*

*This last point is something a lot of people don't think about in a defensive encounter: We're careful to warn people a PCC will still ring their ears, but it will be much less disorienting to shoot indoors than an AR.*

*And, while we're on the topic, we like to recommend a set of electronic muffs to keep near the home-defense carbine.*

### ASK, AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE

Editor Jade Moldae and I greatly appreciate this sort of input. *You* are our customers, and we want your feedback as to what you want to see in these pages.

Mr. Barrett gave some great selling points on pistol-caliber carbines in his letter. As he notes: "They're shorter and lighter, they take the same magazines as your handgun they shoot cheaper ammo which makes practicing more accessible, and they are much quieter than rifles."

Additional selling points? How about mild recoil? The mildest, of course, is .22 LR. Now, most of us would be loath to recommend people use a cartridge as feeble as .22 LR to protect themselves and their loved ones, but we have to remember a lot of buyers have physical disabilities that make anything larger in

◀ Mike DeBono, on staff at Pro Arms in Live Oak, Fla., puts a Ruger PCC 9mm carbine through its paces. Notice his use of 3M Peltor Tactical Sport electronic earmuffs.

caliber just too intimidating.

Something like a standard Ruger 10/22 looks like, well, a .22. But one in an AR-15 configuration looks like the dreaded misnamed "assault rifle" the media and certain politicians have told the public is an incredibly deadly "weapon of war" (even though no nation on earth issues semi-automatic AR-15s as a standard infantry weapon).

What's the point of mentioning this to a customer? The point is a great sound bite we should use more than we do when defending the law-abiding public's right to own AR-15s: If these things are so intimidating that two sitting presidents and an entire political party have called for them to be banned, shouldn't they be intimidating enough that a violent home invader seeing one pointed at him would be more likely to run away so no one's blood had to be spilled at all?



**You don't need me or anyone else to tell you a key to successful sales is to offer something the customer wants.**

This intimidation value works for an AR-15 in .223/5.56 or any other caliber. It means it's a good argument for an AR-15 in a pistol caliber, or even in .22 LR. (If I had to defend myself against deadly danger with one of my .22s, I would pick my Smith & Wesson M&P 15-22.)

### NOW HEAR THIS

Mr. Barrett writes, "We like to recommend a set of electronic muffs to keep near the home defense carbine." I could not agree more enthusiastically.

These have numerous advantages. On the range, of course, this sort of active hearing protection allows the shooter to hear range commands but still preserve their hearing. The best of these units will make small sounds louder and

loud sounds quieter. This is obviously advantageous to the shooter.

Let's not forget, though, many of your customers teach — tutoring their own friends and family members even if they don't hang out a shingle as a professional firearms instructor. Active muffs can literally be lifesavers when worn by firearms instructors.

When the first of these active muffs came out in the early 1980s, I was a distributor for the Gentex line. I made sure to get them into the hands of men like Bill Jordan and John Farnam. The latter soon reported back on a "save."

John had been contracted to teach on a range where the only backstop was some woods that the host assured him couldn't be occupied. As a firing line prepared to shoot, John's now-amplified hearing brought something to his attention. He froze the line and a few moments later, a mentally challenged young man emerged from the woods who would have been directly in the line of fire had John's enhanced hearing not alerted him that the man was there.

A lot of firearms mishaps are preceded by the person messing with a stuck slide or muttering "damn gun" or words to that effect. If the instructor can hear it in time — even if the shooter's body position blocks the range safety officer's view of his hands — being able to pick up those small sounds can make for a warning heeded in time to prevent tragedy.

Many of your customers are woods-walkers — hunters and hikers. Remind them the best of the active muffs amplify sounds they might not have picked up with the naked ear, even if they have perfect hearing. As far back as the 1980s, I can recall hunting in Africa wearing the early Gentex Wolf Ears. And, despite impaired natural hearing, I was able to hear animals moving when even the bushmen — whose legendary senses make us pavement-walkers feel like Helen Keller — hadn't heard them yet.

#### TACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Let's talk about tactical applications.

Remind your tactically oriented customers that gunfire reverberating indoors will temporarily reduce

## ICONIC FIREARM BUSINESS FOR SALE

Sharps Rifle Company, founded in 1848 by Christian Sharps, is known for firearms innovation, long-range accuracy, and high-quality products. After 11+ years at the helm, we are contemplating transitioning to retirement and offering the company for sale. Consider the possibilities of owning this historic and profitable rifle company, which has a well-known presence in media and history.

Sharps today focuses on the AR/MSR rifle platform, which has a loyal following in the military, LE, and civilian markets. Segments include hunting/outdoor enthusiasts, sports shooters, competitive shooters, and manufacturers/gunsmiths of AR platform products. We have a subscriber base of over 20,000 discrete contacts and over 8,000 active customers. Please see our online store @ [www.srcarms.com](http://www.srcarms.com) for a better overview of Sharps offerings.

Constantly innovating, the new owner will assume three in-force patents for AR bolt carrier group systems and six trademarks. Two of these patents are for controlling the flow of gas through the bolt carrier group, a key advantage for shooters using suppressors. This proprietary technology and Intellectual property can position the right buyer with significant competitive market advantages.

Sharps Rifle's loyal following, innovative engineering and patents make it a great fit for the right buyer. Our CEO, Jay Johnston, can provide full details and patent information at [jjohnston@sharpsriflecompany.com](mailto:jjohnston@sharpsriflecompany.com).



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### Active muffs can literally be lifesavers when worn by firearms instructors.

hearing at the moment when they need all their senses to be at their most sensitive and acute. Active muffs will also allow them to hear danger coming sooner than the naked ear might allow. Let them put on a pair, turn them on and turn their foot on the floor. They'll be able to hear sole on floor or carpet.

Suppose the customer says, "My

home-defense gun has a suppressor, so I don't have to worry about that." The suppressor solves only part of the problem. It doesn't let them hear an intruder's movements any better; good active muffs will. A suppressor doesn't mute the alarming and potentially deafening gunfire of the opponent; active muffs do. And they don't require a long wait and license fee paid to ATF.

And finally, remind the customer any intruder he takes at gunpoint will see he's wearing muffs and realize, "This homeowner ain't bluffing about being ready to shoot!"

Let me conclude by thanking Mr. Barrett one more time for his comments. *Shooting Industry* is for you, the dealer. Let the editor know what you want us to write about. **SI**



BY BETHANY BEATHARD

## ATTRACTING & RETAINING FEMALE CUSTOMERS

**T**he numbers don't lie: In recent years, there's been a significant increase in the number of women participating in the shooting sports. This growing demographic is reshaping the industry and presenting new profit opportunities for dealers and shooting ranges alike.

Catering to female customers is not just a matter of inclusivity. Statistically, women carry the "buying power" in the family budget. Keeping this in mind is a smart business move that can lead to increased sales and customer loyalty.

### UNDERSTANDING THE FEMALE CUSTOMER BASE

Women in the shooting sports represent various age groups, backgrounds and locations — each bringing unique perspectives and needs. There has been a significant increase in female participation across different segments, including recreational shooting, competitive sports and hunting. Common interests among women in the shooting sports often include target shooting, self-defense training and hunting — with a strong emphasis on safety and education programs.

Women also value the social aspects of shooting, often participating in group activities and seeking a sense of community. It's crucial for dealers

to recognize female shooters are not a homogenous group; their preferences and expectations vary widely based on factors such as age, experience level, cultural background and individual goals.

Make sure you tailor your approach in marketing, product selection and customer service to address this diversity. It's essential for effectively attracting and retaining female customers.

### CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Know your customer: Creating a welcoming environment for female customers in stores and shooting ranges is crucial for retaining their business and encouraging their participation in the sport.

Equally important is the role of friendly and knowledgeable staff. Having female staff members and/or instructors can make women customers feel more represented. This is not necessary, but can make them more comfortable.

Most businesses prioritize safety by providing the availability of protective gear and outerwear. However, including various styles and sizes to accommodate all body types and female-tailored fit is an added benefit. By addressing these key areas, dealers and shooting ranges

◀ Tailoring your approach to marketing, product selection and customer service to better serve women are keys to a thriving customer base.

can create a more inviting atmosphere that appeals to women and supports their continued engagement in shooting sports. Ultimately, it has an impact on their customer loyalty.

### OFFER WOMEN-SPECIFIC PRODUCTS, SERVICES

To effectively cater to women customers and retain their business, it is important for stores and shooting ranges to offer women-specific products and services. This includes a product selection tailored to women, such as firearms and accessories designed with female shooters in mind, as well as apparel and gear.



**Having female staff members and/or instructors can make women customers feel more represented. This is not necessary, but can make them more comfortable.**

Women want the same quality of gear men have. Gone are the days where manufacturers could "pink it and bling it" and call it "women's." When it comes to firearm selection, most women are using the same guns as men.

Additionally, special services and events can greatly enhance the experience for women. Hosting women-only classes and providing women-led training sessions creates a supportive learning environment. These types of events can allow women to foster community and camaraderie. By focusing on these targeted offerings, businesses can create a more inclusive and appealing atmosphere that meets the unique needs of their female customers.



“Gun dealers — along with local ranges and certified firearm instructors — would benefit by partnering together to offer incentives that are specifically catered to women such as ladies’ night or discounted range days with the purchase of a new firearm or vice versa,” advised Lakeisha Woodard of HALO Hunting. “Host special networking events periodically that are tailored to teach, train and inform women will attract women from all demographics. When women feel comfortable and welcome, there’s a great chance they’ll return to your place of business and refer a friend.”

### EFFECTIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES

To better market to women customers, stores and shooting ranges should implement targeted advertising and social media campaigns that resonate with this audience. Highlighting female testimonials and success stories can create a relatable and inspiring message. The reality is women want to follow like-minded women. They want to see the products being used and promoted.

Utilizing platforms and channels popular among women ensures representation and the campaigns will reach the intended demographic. Additionally, collaborations and sponsorships are powerful tools.

This is a social media generation: consider partnering with female influencers and shooting organizations — which can enhance credibility and visibility — while sponsoring women’s shooting events and competitions demonstrates a commitment to supporting female shooters. Together, these strategies can build a strong connection with women customers and build long-term loyalty.

“When dealers carry products tailored for women hunters, they not only embrace the future of hunting, but also play a vital role in its sustainability. Female hunters are essential for recruiting and retaining participants — crucial for conservation efforts,” noted Alli Armstrong Vaughan of Grace Camo & Lace.

Beyond providing products that cater to women’s specific needs, Vaughan suggests dealers and ranges offer opportunities for learning and community engagement.

“By organizing and hosting events, dealers demonstrate their commitment beyond profit, setting themselves apart from others in the field,” she said. “Empowering women with the confidence to pursue their outdoor and hunting passions is key to success. By achieving this, dealers can cultivate the trust necessary to foster loyal relationships among their female clientele.”




**When dealers carry products tailored for women hunters, they not only embrace the future of hunting, but also play a vital role in its sustainability.”**

**Alli Armstrong Vaughan**  
*Grace Camo & Lace*

### BUILDING COMMUNITY (AND LOYALTY)

Expanding your customer base to include women is a journey of continuous improvement, which will involve adapting strategies based on feedback and staying updated with industry trends and the evolving needs of female customers.

If you can be flexible and responsive, you can ensure your store continues to meet and exceed the expectations of your women customers, developing long-term loyalty and engagement.

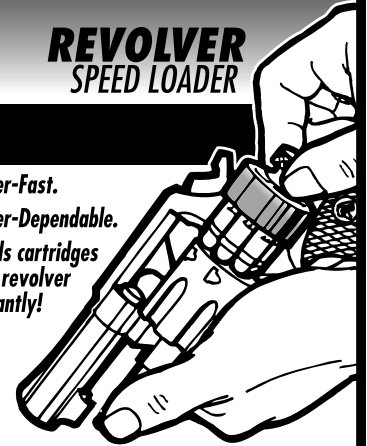
It’s exciting to watch the innovation of manufacturers and the reactive response of dealers to increase of women customers in the shooting industry. So, let’s keep going! 

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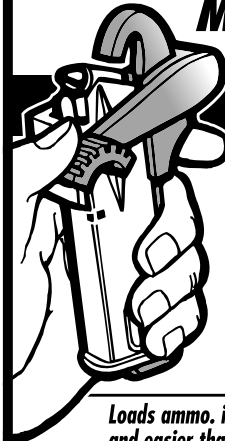
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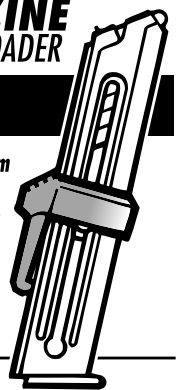
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BY NANCY KEATON

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS HELP REACH MORE GROUPS

**G**un retailers can be much more than just stores. You can bring in a wide variety of community members by offering classes that could attract customers who may not otherwise see themselves connecting with you.

Many in your community — especially women — are in professions where they can be targeted as victims. You can be a resource and show them how to protect their lives and those of their customers, clients or patients. Even if they aren't allowed to possess firearms where they work, you can lend insights into how they don't have to be sitting ducks — cowering in a corner waiting to be rescued. And you can do these by stepping out of the box and creating strong community partnerships with other local organizations.

### THE RANGE STL

Elizabeth Starks, assistant training manager with The Range STL in Ballwin, Mo., talks about classes they offer that draw in a large audience of non-traditional customers.

#### Teachers

The Range STL offers a Teacher's Trauma course every summer, free to teachers.

"It's our basic tactical triage and trauma course, so a class that is typically \$250 is free during the summer for teachers," Starks explained.

And, that audience is primarily

women.

"Last year, we held two separate classes and they both filled up," she recalled. "It's very hands-on, so in the classroom they go over things like tourniquet application, wound packing and Quick Clot. Then we'll bring in our kids to role-play the victims. We make it interesting and it's a whole new experience for the teachers."

Starks reports the classes each held 16 students and drew all of them through regular advertising and word of mouth.

#### Realtors

Often alone, realtors represent another category of customers you can welcome through outreach — but it will take some effort, Starks noted.

"I don't think realtors typically look at a gun range for safety training," she said. "It's a course we can offer outside of the gun range so we can talk about the awareness aspect, and we can also do the physical hand-to-hand stuff. We offer the option to do shooting as well. So, it can be either/or — it just depends on what they want. We just want to be able to facilitate self-defense for whatever level or tool that they're willing to use. It's a fairly new course for us, but the students are primarily women."

### REPUBLIC GUN CLUB

At Republic Gun Club (Waco, Texas), Training Director Endri Kennon talks

◀ Endri Kennon, training director at Republic Gun Club, has had significant success welcoming realtors, college students and even school districts to training events at the club.

about their program partnerships that have been very successful in attracting new customers, as well.

#### Realtors

Like Range STL, Republic Gun Club has been successful in attracting realtors through its Realtor Safety class.

"It's very popular," Kennon said. "We have had people travel from all over to take our course. A lot of realtors go to difficult neighborhoods; they go out by themselves at night, sometimes in the middle of the woods. They don't know who they're meeting. What checks and balances do they have in place as far as communication and backup plans? Have they researched the area they're going to?"

He shows realtors a website where they can type in the address they're going to and it shows the crime statistics and what types of crimes are reported in that area.

"They have a better understanding of what they're getting themselves into when they go show these homes," Kennon reasoned. "I get a lot of feedback the class is very informative."

#### College Students

Are any colleges near you? Freshmen, on their own for the first time, are more likely to have safety top of mind.

"Talking to Baylor [University] students about situational awareness is a big one. A lot of them come from out of state; they're away from their parents for the first time and one of the biggest things about being on your own is knowing how to develop a good home plan," Kennon shared.

The class offers practical know-how, as well as the importance of situational awareness.

"They're not worldly yet so they don't know a lot of those things. I've had to replace screws, talk about how the window locks work, stuff like that," Kennon shared. "So, we talk a lot about — how to build their protection plan and more importantly, situational awareness."

He continued, "Waco is a big tourist area. We've got people from all over and we've got highways that run every which way, so they really need to be paying attention to their surroundings and staying off their cell phones.

## Law Enforcement

Connect with local law enforcement. Even if they have a place they regularly train, invite them to visit your range anyway. Republic Gun Club has a strong partnership with law enforcement and Kennon reports a lot of officers come back for more training on their own. Make sure to let them know you are there to provide more in-depth training.

## School Districts

Due to the required Texas Guardian Program, Kennon reports the biggest group requesting training is school districts. As with The Range STL's Teacher Trauma class, since educators are primarily female, this is a huge audience to tap into.

Being a Guardian is a choice, so teachers can't be mandated to take the training and carry a firearm.

Kennon conveyed, "We're taking educators who are passionate about education and the state has now mandated this Guardian program to protect the children on the campuses. Now we're asking educators to do something they're not comfortable with. That's a huge responsibility and all of them take it seriously. Once they are finished with their initial training, they realize they want to learn a lot more, so yes, we have many teachers coming back in for more."

Even if your state does not have requirements for schools, you can teach other classes such as the trauma class that The Range STL provides, as well as situational awareness and alternative weapons classes to help teachers feel more empowered in a bad situation.

## GO TO THEM

Kennon explains how they have been reaching out to a wider audience.

"Last year we spent a lot of time traveling to different realtors, from Round Rock to Austin to Houston to Dallas, and passed out flyers."

Since it's a non-shooting class, it can be held in any type of conference room. Kennon said in addition to traveling to the requestor's site, they also offer an option at their store, held in the classroom, with lunch provided.

For the Baylor students, Kennon



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**We just want to be able to facilitate self-defense for whatever level or tool that they're willing to use."**

**Elizabeth Starks** - Assistant Training Manager  
*The Range STL*

travels to campus to meet with students in their comfort zone. Young, shy students may not feel comfortable walking into your store, but they'll feel more comfortable and receptive in their space, with their friends around.

For the school district Guardian Training, Kennon shared that originally, they were the ones contacting the ISDs (independent school district) to let them know the training is available at Republic Gun Club because the schools were all trying to build a program from scratch.

"Now other ISDs are reaching out to us because they know what we can do, and how well we do it," he smiled.

## BRAINSTORM

Think about other programs or job positions that might be targeted. What groups would be interested in learning

how to defend themselves when they may not be allowed to have a gun or simply may not want to have a gun? What audience will benefit from classes in situational awareness, alternative weapons or medical trauma?

Here are a few ideas to help you get started:

- Service organizations such as Soroptimist, Lions, Rotary, etc.
- Domestic violence shelter workers and clients
- Food banks
- Medical professionals
- Home health providers
- Home parenting instructors
- Chamber of Commerce business meetings

Don't wait for them to come to you. Go to their offices and talk about what you can offer. Ask to be a speaker at one of their meetings. People don't know what is available until you tell them.

## THE BOTTOM LINE: HELPING MORE CUSTOMERS

We already know once customers — especially women — connect with you inside your space, they're likely to be return customers. However, connecting with them in *their* space will also make them much more comfortable to walk into your store or range, find the person they connected with and continue the relationship — a win for your business as well as the new audience you're able to empower and serve. **SI**



# Deal Me In

THE ADVANTAGES OF DEALER INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

BY PETER SUCIU

**I**T might have the makings of a joke: A customer walks into a shop with no idea what he or she wants and asks the counter staff their opinion. There's no punch line, of course, but the customer's follow-up questions are almost certain to include, "So, what do you like?"

Chances are good those who have been working the counter long enough have developed some favorites, and likewise some biases. For manufacturers in any industry where their products are sold at retail it comes with the territory, but in the world of firearms, the customer likely also expects the sales staff to be familiar with a range of products.

This is where dealer incentive programs are increasingly crucial. They can help ensure the sales staff is educated on the products — even more importantly, enable those on the sales floor the opportunity to acquire a firearm that might otherwise be out of their budget.

"Ultimately, for those just getting started in the industry in sales, buying a \$4,000 to \$5,000 firearm isn't feasible," said Mike Waugh, purchaser for RifleGear, a brick-and-mortar

◀ **The counter staff at Palmetto State Armory is already well-versed with a range of firearms, but dealer incentive programs encourage further education. (Image: Patrick D. Hulon)**

retail and e-commerce business in Fountain Valley, Calif. “The pro deals and incentive programs can help get the firearm in the hands of salespeople. They then use the gun, they get excited about it and they share that enthusiasm with the customer.”

This point is echoed by Raleigh Whalen, director of sales at Weatherby. He told *Shooting Industry* the company launched its dealer incentive and training program this past April, and it is already seeing success.

“With our dealer incentive program, salespeople can earn points that can be used toward a purchase,” shared Whalen. “But part of our incentive program is how it can be used alongside our short training videos. These enable the salesperson to be more knowledgeable about our products. And we have to remember today’s customer is already more educated than ever because of what is out there on the internet, so our training videos help keep the sales staff up to speed.”

### **STRENGTHENING THE CRITICAL LINK**

Firearm sales have remained strong since the pandemic, when the industry experienced a lot of growth from first-time buyers. Even now, there remains a mix of customers with different knowledge bases — some will walk into a shop knowing exactly what they want and others need more assistance.

It is the latter type of customer where incentive programs are so important, as they can help ensure the brand is presented as an option.

“We see incentive programs as helping point the customer in a good



**After all the marketing has been done, all the advertising out there and all the reviews, the person behind the counter remains the crucial link in getting the product in the customer’s hands. The more they know, the better they can do in making a sale.”**

Raleigh Whalen  
Director of Sales  
*Weatherby*

direction,” explained Patrick D. Hulon, retail operations manager at Palmetto State Armory’s Greenville, S.C. location. “It also helps get something in front of the customer they might not have considered otherwise.”

Yet, it isn’t about pushing the customer to something they may not want.

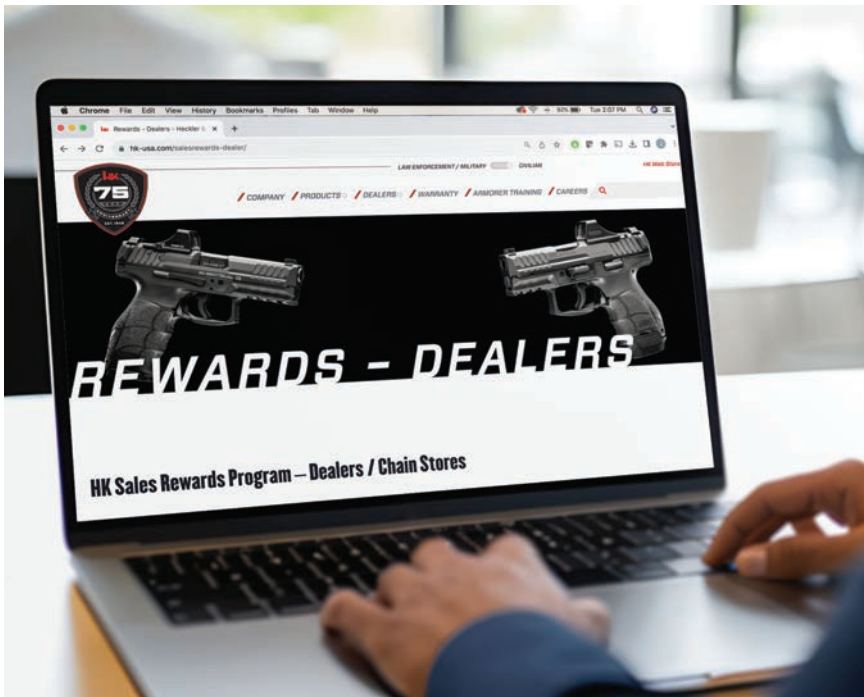
“This isn’t about taking business from other brands; this is for the vast majority of customers who walk into a shop and are completely undecided,” suggested Nathan Schueth, director of sales and business development at Heckler & Koch. “When that customer who doesn’t know what they want walks into a shop, they’re prepared to get an education. They’re going to be offered options, and we’re hoping to be one of those three to five options. Incentive programs are already here to stay. They are yet another ‘tool’ in the ‘tool belt’ of a competent sales staff. The key is to pick the right tool for the job!”

### **NOT PUSHING TOWARD THE “WRONG PRODUCT”**

What incentive programs should not do is encourage sales staff to push products that aren’t right for the



Mike Waugh (left) and Liam Melugin are firm believers in focusing on what products best fit a customer’s needs — but there are times when a customer need will match an incentive program for the sales associate.



H&K posts important information on its HK Sales Rewards Program for dealers on its website. Educate your sales associates on which programs are best to enroll in.

customer or fail to meet their needs. This isn't going to result in repeat customers, and it certainly won't build brand loyalty for the store or the gun manufacturer.

"We understand many first-time gun buyers may not even have a clue what they want," said Waugh, who was also a sales associate with RifleGear for five years. "Working for a non-commission-based company, which is most salespeople in the gun industry, the reward system shouldn't interfere with the integrity of the business."

Liam Melugin, a sales associate and laser engraver at RifleGear, also offered his thoughts as someone in the proverbial trenches. He recently received an HK MR556 rifle from the incentive program and was already well-versed in it before he was able to acquire it.

"I like to keep my knowledge base very diverse," he shared. "I also tend to ignore the incentive programs when it comes to making the sale. I may include a firearm that's part of



**Whether working toward their next firearm or not, incentive programs can help inspire and motivate sales associates. It can encourage excitement.**

a program, but I don't go out of my way to push it more than I would any other."

It's likely newer employees may believe there is a quick route to the bonuses, and as a result, may tend to

focus too much on incentive programs.

"Some salespeople don't use them in the way they should," Waugh acknowledged, "but they're the minority. You're not going to be a good salesperson if you push a product that doesn't fit the customer's needs."

Shop managers therefore need to stress to salespeople that firearms buyers are often repeat customers and long-term relationships are better than just a quick sale. This fact is especially important with a first-time buyer.

"We do address this with our staff," confirmed Hulon. "We need those first-time customers to leave satisfied and to be repeat customers. We'd like them to come back and buy from us."

### **THE COMPLAINTS — BECAUSE NO SYSTEM IS PERFECT**

In an ideal world, the dealer incentive programs would be entirely without any problems. Yet, things are never as perfect or ideal as we'd often like. There are a few shortcomings with incentive programs, brought on by concerns over customer privacy.

While the programs typically allow the sales staff to earn points by uploading a copy of the receipt, some may require a bit more personal information from the customer. Some buyers will happily share/post/tweet, etc. a photo of their new purchase all over social media and brag about it to everyone who will listen. Yet they may not be comfortable providing personal information to the staff — beyond what is required by law, of course.

"The only downside I see with incentive programs are those requiring us to provide personal information from the buyer," said Waugh. "Even when customers fill out the paperwork, they may not want to provide additional information that could be sent to the manufacturer. This can result in a sale where the points didn't count toward the incentive program."

### **FUTURE BRAND AMBASSADORS**

A final consideration about



**Incentive programs are already here to stay. They are yet another ‘tool’ in the ‘tool belt’ of a competent sales staff. The key is to pick the right tool for the job!”**

**Nathan Schueth**  
Director of Sales & Business Dev.  
Heckler & Koch

incentive programs: They help put higher-end products in the hands of sales associates, who will likely be more knowledgeable and experienced with the firearm. Those individuals will become de facto brand ambassadors, influencers and evangelists for a brand.

“Weatherby has been an elite brand going back to Roy Weatherby’s days,” noted Whalen. “Many of the firearms are out of the price range of a lot of consumers, and the counter shop guys often can’t afford them either. The points program gets our rifles and shotguns with our logo in their hands, and we understand they’ll talk their friends, take the gun to the range — which is another part of the marketing effort.”

Whether working toward their next firearm or not, incentive programs can help inspire and motivate sales associates. It can encourage excitement.

“It makes the product aspirational,” said Schueth. “Once they have it, that salesperson will understand its value all the more, and while I don’t like the term, they’re the ‘community influencer’ for the product, and they become the local expert for the brand.”

In other words, incentive programs are a key component of firearms marketing that will pay dividends for years to come.

“We realize after all the marketing has been done, all the advertising out there and all the reviews, the person behind the counter remains the crucial link in getting the product in the customer’s hands,” explained Whalen. “The more they know, the better they can do in making a sale.” **SI**

Dealers: What rewards programs have been worthwhile for your sales teams? Weigh in! [comments@shootingindustry.com](mailto:comments@shootingindustry.com)

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BY BRIAN ARMSTRONG

# CONCEALED TRENDS UNVEILED

**IT'S CHALLENGING TO KEEP UP WITH THE TRENDS IN CONCEALED CARRY ACROSS THE COUNTRY BECAUSE DIFFERENT STATES ARE CHANGING SO MANY LAWS.**

In addition to my usual research, I reached out to a wide range of other instructors and industry peers for additional context. (I'm fortunate because I get to attend industry events and meet some well-known names most people don't have the opportunity to, so this was a good time to get their input.)

## **THE RISE OF MICRO-COMPACT PISTOLS**

Compact and micro-compact pistols have experienced a surge in popularity in recent years, and 2024 is continuing the trend. Because of their design, these smaller frames are easily concealed and can hold more rounds than their predecessors.

Gun Camps lead instructors Twista (yes, he is the same Twista the rapper some of you old-school folks know) and Eddie Caravana, better known as Eddie Tactical, and I talked about what we're seeing with students. They just built a fantastic training facility in Chicago that reminds me of the one Taran Tactical uses to train all the big names in Hollywood.

Twista frequently appendix carries, and he stressed the importance of safety.

"I prefer a 1911- or 2011-style because you have a thumb safety, grip safety and you're ready to shoot as soon as you snatch it out. I carry a Staccato CS because it's compact, and the fact is it's a 2011 style, so I'm familiar with it. You know everybody has their preferences. I like to be able to put on certain accessories like dots and TAC lights. I also like the CS because it shoots like a full size."

Caravana made a good point about magazine capacity: "You can have 15 to 20 rounds, but if it's not shootable and

**WITH THE RISE OF APPENDIX CARRY AND OTHER UNCONVENTIONAL CARRY METHODS, FINDING A HOLSTER THAT FITS YOUR CUSTOMER'S BODY TYPE AND LIFESTYLE IS GETTING EASIER.**



you're not able to get rounds on target, you might as well get something with 10 rounds that shoots well for you."

A firearm that fits the shooter's hand properly, along with more states attempting to implement magazine capacity limits, has continued to push sales of smaller frames.

Ron Holmes, USMC MSgt (Ret.) director of training and product development for Ryker USA had an excellent tip for selling guns, too.

"Something I have learned in 16 years of running my own firearms instruction company is not everyone's body will allow them to shoot like a special operator," he said. "Meaning, when you have a 70-year-old grandmother with arthritic hands show up at the counter, you are going to have to modify her grip. The gun store clerk selling her a pistol, because it's easy to rack, is not how you set this woman up for success. So, my suggestion is, don't just push product, help the unknowing make the best-educated decision they can."

### THE IMPORTANCE OF HOLSTER SELECTION

As concealed carry continues to grow, so does the importance of choosing the right holster. With the rise of appendix carry and other unconventional carry methods, finding a holster that fits your customer's body type and lifestyle is getting easier.

Holmes noted, "Holsters can easily become overwhelming for the new shooter. One thing I teach is, 'If I carry this, can I wear that?' and 'If I wear that, can I carry this?' I have not found a one-size-fits-all holster."

## PROPER TRAINING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER, AND MANY PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR WAYS TO TRAIN AT HOME.

Customers are looking for options that offer adjustable retention and a comfortable fit. Remember, the best holster is the one the customer will actually use, and a store can excel by explaining other options are available besides plain Kydex. Not everyone is a fan of appendix carry, but it's here to stay, and holsters like the Phlster Enigma and CrossBreed's hybrid style are big sellers.

### ACCESSORIES

More accessories are available than ever, and customers can get

confused about what's a priority.

The pocketknife market in the U.S. is massive, and it's driven by people using them for everyday carry (EDC). In 2023, consumers spent over \$600 million worldwide, with North America accounting for around a third of total sales. Prices range from a few dollars to hundreds of dollars, and here is a wide selection.

When it comes to pocketknives, a traditional store prevails over a website because more than half of the purchases take place in physical stores. Also, unlike firearms, knives have a high markup, so you can often double your money.

Mike Pierson from KRATE Tactical lends, "OTF (out the front) knives are becoming quite popular as laws progress. Customers want a high-quality knife

for EDC at a price point that makes sense, so I expect good growth in the market."

Soft body armor like vests and shirts is another growing market, along with backpack inserts. There are many options, and prices vary, so knowing what you're selling is crucial. It's not just about whether the vest will stop the bullet, but also how much the armor will absorb and dissipate the impact.

Premier Body Armor has a line of shirts and vests you can easily conceal with regular clothing at a reasonable price point. Body armor is not an item to go cheap on, and families are more than willing to invest in things to protect their kids, like an insert for a backpack.

As a STOP THE BLEED instructor, I'm seeing more demand for medical supplies, and a good-quality tourniquet



Soft body armor represents a burgeoning profit center for you, as defense-minded customers are seeking additional methods to protect themselves.

is at the top of the list. They're inexpensive compared to other firearm products and are not typically available at a local store — which could represent another profit center for you.

### TRAINING

With 29 states allowing constitutional carry, concealed carry is becoming more mainstream. Proper training is more important than ever, and many people are looking for ways to train at home.

Alicia Garcia, also known as the Boomstick Babe, is an instructor from Colorado. Her philosophy is, "You want to encourage gun owners to train more actively. It's

essential every firearm comes with at least three magazines along with night sights, and the customer should have immediate access to affordable holster options. Red dots and optics are great tools, however, I am a firm believer in night sights as they're not reliant on batteries and are one less cost a new shooter needs. I'd rather see them put that money toward good training."

The Mantis-X dry-fire device has been popular for a long time, and recently, there has been a trend to make training at home more realistic. Devices to reset the trigger, such as a TTrigger or DryFireMag magazine, are popular.



With restrictions loosening in some states, OTF knives (such as those pictured here from KRATE Tactical) are growing into a popular option for customers.

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MANY STORES  
OVERLOOK, AND  
TEAMING UP WITH  
THE RIGHT PEOPLE  
HELPS EVERYONE.**

Keep in mind: If you develop relationships with local instructors, they can be an asset and help you drive sales. This is something many stores overlook, and teaming up with the right people helps everyone.

Garcia has similar thoughts about this: "I was a customer in the 2A space long before I was a content creator or political advocate. One of the things that was a deciding factor for me in what to buy or who to support was if there were efforts to showcase people who looked like me in their marketing and if they were active in protecting the Second Amendment."

Customers consistently buy more firearms and accessories in election years, and 2024 is shaping up to be big. 

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BY PAT COVERT

# A NICE SLICE OF PROFITS!

## PROCEEDS APLENTY TO BE HAD IN HUNTING KNIVES

**M**any firearms retailers can stand a boost in profits during these times of high inflation — and with hunting season just around the corner, opportunity awaits.

Sales of hunting knives, with their friendlier markups, can significantly complement your firearms sales. And, this multi-billion dollar industry boosts sales without breaking the bank. If you've been wanting to add cutlery to your hunting program for the first time or would like to fine-tune your current one *Shooting Industry* has assembled a panel of seasoned experts who can help you sort through the many options of both fixed blades and folding knives available to hunters today.

Joining us are Doug Flagg, VP of marketing and

innovation for Columbia River Knife & Tool (CRKT) and Ken Griffey, president of Bear & Son Cutlery from the manufacturing side. On the retail front, we have Randy Yerkes, knife manager of Mark's Outdoors, in Vestavia Hills, Ala. Yerkes has spent 25 years in retail knife sales and, needless to say, knows how to sell knives!

### OPTIONS ABOUND

Choices in cutlery for the great outdoors have never been greater for the American hunter. As if sorting between the right balance of fixed blades and folders was not tough enough, the retailer must factor in newer alternatives such as scalpel-based technology and hot new steels hitting the market.

We asked our experts whether hunters prefer to carry fixed blades, folding knives or both.

"It's an age-old question, and one that can be difficult to answer as knives are such a subjective thing," CRKT's Flagg replied. "Although, if I had to choose one based

on my experience — both personal and professional — I'd say hunters lean more toward fixed blades. Their simplicity, reliability and ease of cleaning are hard to beat. Nevertheless, it's common for hunters, me included, to head into the field with both types of knives."

Bear & Sons' Griffey is in agreement.

"From a knife manufacturer's standpoint, the preference for fixed blades or folding knives among hunters varies based on personal preference and specific hunting scenarios," he said. "However, fixed-blade knives tend to dominate the segment due to their durability and reliability in field tasks."

Making it a consensus is Mark's Outdoors' Yerkes.

"For hunting, our biggest sellers by far are fixed-blade sheath knives because they're much easier to carry and harder to lose. The ratio of fixed blades to folding knives is about 60:40."

### PROCESSING GAME

Next, we posed the

question: Do hunters prefer a separate knife for game processing?

"You can process an animal with just about any knife, but I think many hunters do have a go-to processing knife used solely for that purpose," Flagg noted. "A jack-of-all-trades knife is great, but the one I'm using for game processing, especially for finer more detailed cuts, is really going to be used for that function alone."

Griffey concurred: "Hunters often prefer having a separate knife specifically designed for game processing as it allows for more precise and efficient handling during this stage of hunting."

Our retail expert Randy Yerkes also agrees.

"I think many hunters prefer a separate knife for game processing. When you process a lot of game, you need a knife with superior steel that will last a long time," he remarked.

### FUTURE TRENDS?

Our experts shared their insights on how innovations, such as new steels and scalpel-based technology, are primed to impact the hunting market.

Bear & Son's Griffey stated: "There has been a noticeable shift in the hunting-knife segment in recent years. Modern designs, technologies and different types of steel have gained popularity due to their appearance, shapes, strengths and ease of maintenance."

CRKT's Flagg lends, "I'd say, overall, the category is seeing an upgrade in materials, plus fit and finish in hunting knives.

I know it's something we're certainly trying to accomplish here at CRKT and it's exciting to see so many brands elevating their game."

Randy Yerkes specifically addressed scalpel-based technology.

"Replaceable-blade knives are becoming more popular, but standard fixed blades still dominate," he noted. "Scalpel blades are relatively easy to replace but do require a learning curve or they can be hazardous."

### BOLSTERING SALES

There are many ways to promote your store's hunting-knife inventory, many at no cost to you. It starts with an educated staff.

"Consumers want to know the 'why' — as in, 'Why should I buy this particular knife versus another?'" CRKT's Flagg suggested. "This starts with the sales associates. The more you can do to help educate your people, the more it will translate into retail sales. Of course, in-store and POP displays, advertising — both

traditional and social — and direct mail all play important roles in the purchasing process."

**"Consumers want to know the 'why' — as in, 'Why should I buy this particular knife versus another?' This starts with the sales associates. The more you can do to help educate your people the more it will translate into retail sales."**

— DOUG FLAGG  
VP OF MARKETING, CRKT

Bear & Sons' Griffey added, "I do believe a big part lies in understanding the needs and preferences of our retail customers. In-store displays should showcase the quality, durability and versatility of our knives. Plus, it allows customers to see and feel the product



Randy Yerkes, Mark's Outdoors' seasoned knife manager, oversees the store's expansive cutlery department.

firsthand. We try to advertise across the nation and highlight our knives' features and performance, effectively communicating our value to potential buyers. Additionally, we try and engage with the hunting communities and influencers so we can help build trust and credibility, further enhancing the brand's reputation among hunters."

Knife Manager Randy Yerkes shared the keys to Mark's Outdoors' 45 years of success.

"In-store, you need a knowledgeable sales staff to guide the customer to a successful sale. We ask them how they're going use the knife, such as game processing, food prep, chores around the camp and the like," he explained. "We also ask them where they're going to be using it — such as saltwater or freshwater environments. These factors into the type of steels and handle materials are best for their needs."

Promotionally, the retail store uses two main outlets to reach their customers.

"We do email blasts to customers, typically 10,000 at a time," Yerkes noted. "This has proven to be a very effective way to reach our customers during hunting season and other times of the year as well."

Mark's Outdoors also maintains a healthy presence on local television during hunting season.

"We have had great success running television ads prior to and during hunting season. Our hunting knife sales really pick up in the fall when the season starts and remain

steady throughout January," he maintained.

### YOU KNOW YOUR MARKET BEST

Every market is different and some media are more affordable than others. Mark's Outdoors has honed its advertising approach over the years and found what is effective for their store. But as the saying goes, "There's more than one way to skin a cat." You do have options.

Some manufacturers offer co-op advertising for a variety of print and broadcast media that can deeply reduce the outlay in promoting your store. Most manufacturers, especially the larger ones, also offer a bevy of in-store promotional items such as posters, flyers and inexpensive giveaways to create awareness in your cutlery section.

No matter whether your retail store is centered around a firearms nucleus or part of a broader blend of outdoor sports, hunting knives can pad your bottom line — and in inflationary times, every bit helps.

Also, don't forget the ancillary products that go with knives such as sharpeners, corrosion preventives, sheathing alternatives and the like.

Make this season a more profitable one by taking advantage of this lucrative category. **SI**

#### FOR MORE INFO:

Columbia River Knife & Tool  
[crkt.com](http://crkt.com)

Bear & Son Cutlery  
[bearandsoncutlery.com](http://bearandsoncutlery.com)

Mark's Outdoors  
[marksoutdoors.com](http://marksoutdoors.com)



By Bryan Hendricks

# TURNING Lemons INTO Loyalty

## Gunsmith Services Fill Multiple Niches

**W**hen a customer buys a lemon firearm, he or she almost always blames the retailer, not the manufacturer. When it happens, a professional gunsmith can salvage the retailer's relationship with the customer.

Garrison Burge, gunsmith at Beech Grove Firearms in Indianapolis, said a gunsmith is essential to a gun shop's success because a gunsmith's responsiveness preserves customer

loyalty.

"When you get unsatisfactory food at a restaurant, who gets yelled at, the cook or the server? It's never the chef," Burge posed. "When a customer's firearm is not right, they don't call up Savage or Ruger or whoever made it. They go to the gun dealer who sold it to them."

### TIME IS MONEY

A shop can send a lemon back to the manufacturer, but getting it back will take time. A resident gunsmith or a gunsmith on-call can repair the gun on warranty and return it to the customer in a fraction of the time.

"Some people don't want to wait six weeks to 10 months to get their

gun back," Burge said. "Ten months is the longest a manufacturer had a firearm out on a warranty. If there's been a recall or if a firearm broke within a few months of purchase, most of the time a manufacturer doesn't have a problem if you have an in-house gunsmith sending a part to the gunsmith to repair the firearm. They will get the part to us in three to five business days. It takes me an hour to repair it. That's five days compared to the customer sending it to the manufacturer and not seeing their gun for six weeks."

Unfortunately, the most troublesome guns are inexpensive entry-level guns. Those are also high-volume sellers. Retailers don't test-fire new guns, so they can't cull lemons before selling them. Being able to service them is one way a resident gunsmith can turn a negative situation into a positive.

### OFFER WHAT THE COMPETITION DOESN'T

Another positive is servicing guns from competing retailers who don't or can't employ their own smith.

"There's a shop about six miles

Images: F.J.G. Jardim (From "Revolver Resurrection," *American Handgunner DIY Guns* 2022 Special Edition)

south of us,” Burge shared. “They have an indoor gun range, and with an indoor gun range, there are times when people are going to experience problems with guns when they’re shooting. That shop does not have a gunsmith. There are numerous times a week I get a customer from there. Their range officer sent them here to have their firearm repaired. From a business standpoint, I’m very happy they do not have one.”

### SPECIALISTS NEEDED

Browning built roughly 2 million Auto-5 semi-autos from about 1900–1998. Collectors value them highly, and a great many Auto-5s are still in service, but Browning does not support the Auto-5 anymore. There’s still a lot of money to be made servicing these classics, be it general maintenance, repair or full restoration, but a local gun store isn’t equipped to do it.

Art Isaacson, founder of Art’s Gun Shop in Hillsboro, Mo., fills the void. If a customer takes the beat-up Sweet Sixteen or field-worn Superposed they inherited from their grandfather to you — chances are good you’ll want to send it to Art’s.

“If you want to restore an old Winchester, you call Doug Turnbull,” he stated. “If you want to restore a Browning, you call me.”

As with classic muscle cars among baby boomers, hunters and shooters of that generation have a nostalgic fondness for the firearms they remember from their youth. This demographic has sufficient disposal income to devote to restoring those guns. If it’s a higher-grade model, there’s also sufficient financial incentive for an owner to restore an old Browning.

“I did contract work for Browning for 25 years,” Isaacson said. “For 25 years I was the guy who blued 90% of A-5s, Superposed and Citori. That’s where my paychecks came from. I didn’t leave them until I knew had enough to carry me through. My customers pay me a lot more than Browning ever did.”

Experience taught him to stay in his lane. He works almost exclusively on Brownings.

## ANOTHER POSITIVE IS SERVICING GUNS FROM COMPETING RETAILERS WHO DON’T OR CAN’T EMPLOY THEIR OWN SMITH.

“I need to specialize in one or two models and work on the better stuff,” Isaacson noted. “It takes a lot of years to get there, and it means keeping parts in stock. I don’t know anything about Savages. I just do what I was trained on. I have the parts and the know-how to do them.”

It’s an economy of scale. Profit margins are slim in gunsmithing. If a generalist must replace a part in a random firearm, ordering the part costs the customer extra money and extends the gun’s time out of service. A specialist like Isaacson will already have parts on hand for firearms he handles in bulk. This streamlines his workflow and allows him to complete jobs faster.

“If you lose a part for an oddball gun, you will pay a lot of money

ordering a new part,” Isaacson said. “If you lose a part to a Browning Citori, I’ve got a box full of them.”

A shop like Art’s or Turnbull’s requires micro-specialists who concentrate on the vital steps of gun restoration. Isaacson says there aren’t enough micro-specialists to keep up with demand.

“There’s a shortage of wood fitters,” Isaacson informed. “If somebody wants to learn to fit wood, he could be a busy guy. If he’s a good wood finisher, and especially if he’s a good engraver, he can take in a lot of work.”

### GENERAL SPECIALIST

Collectors acquire more than just Browning and Winchester, and they need gunsmiths to service and restore obscure and out-of-production models. Don Keller, owner of The Trade Blanket in Paron, Ark., has carved out a niche market servicing guns beyond the scope of ordinary smiths.

“I restore antique firearms made primarily before 1920,” Keller said. “I do all kinds of work, but the majority of it is restoring older Winchesters, Marlins, L.C. Smith, Parker and things along those lines.”

Much of Keller’s restoration work comes from Southern states where high humidity contributes to rust and



As avid gunsmiths will know, the best way to minimize the odds of messing something else up on a gun needing special attention is by removing the parts of the gun that will be in the way or subject to damage. The Real Avid gunsmith screwdriver set has hollow-ground bits to fit each screw slot and apply maximum torque without destroying screw heads.

wood degradation. Vintage firearms from the South tend to be in rougher condition than those from more arid environments.

“Historically, people in the South, where you’ve got high humidity — especially during the black powder cartridge era — didn’t take care of their guns very well,” Keller explained. “Most of those guns are not in shootable condition, but they can be restored to be fired.”

Keller runs a low-volume operation. He had six guns in the works in June. Of course, he does a lot of conventional jobs are typical in the retail environment. Most of his business comes by word of mouth, but he also gets referrals from retailers in central Arkansas, like Fort Thompson Sporting Goods and Don’s Weaponry, both of which have been featured in these pages.

“I put 21 red dot sights on shotguns for turkey hunters this season,” he said. “All of those came from referrals

**“THERE’S A SHORTAGE OF WOOD FITTERS. IF SOMEBODY WANTS TO LEARN TO FIT WOOD, HE COULD BE A BUSY GUY. IF HE’S A GOOD WOOD FINISHER, AND ESPECIALLY IF HE’S A GOOD ENGRAVER, HE CAN TAKE IN A LOT OF WORK.”**

**Art Isaacson - Founder**  
Art’s Gun Shop

from Fort Thompson’s. I’ve got more work than I want to do right now. I don’t really advertise. I just give them a box of business cards every three or four months.”

Keller also modifies and

modernizes vintage firearms. Even if these projects devalue a classic firearm dramatically, they enable them to continue to be useful.

“I’ve got an L.C. Smith side-by-side I’m converting from 16 gauge to 28 gauge,” he shared. “My barrel liner guy in Tennessee makes me a 28-gauge barrel liner, and then I turn it down to fit inside dimension of a 16 gauge.”

That’s borderline blasphemous. Why?

“L.C. Smith only made one 28 gauge,” Keller said. “Not one model, but one gun. Period. This will be number two. It’s a Damascus barrel, so you can’t really shoot modern 16-gauge shells in it, but with barrel liners in it, you can shoot modern 28-gauge shells.”

Guns are made to be used after all, and owners will obviously pay to keep them in service. This why a gun shop owner should have a gunsmith in his back pocket — if not in his back room. **SI**

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By Jenna Buckley



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ATN Corp. introduces its Blaze Series of thermal monoculars. The **BLAZESEEKER** is ideal for entry-level thermal imaging and includes built-in Wi-Fi, still image and video capabilities, five dynamic color palettes, low power consumption and 256x192 resolution. Coupled with a 7/10mm lens, it achieves a detection range of up to 625 meters. The **BLAZETREK** is comprised of four models: BlazeTrek-319, BlazeTrek-325, BlazeTrek-619 and BlazeTrek-625. It offers up to 9 hours of continuous operation, a rugged design, IP67 rating and compact size. Built-in Wi-Fi and app compatibility allows real-time streaming, gallery access and intuitive controls. BlazeTrek also provides a customizable viewing experience with five color palettes.



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M3 TANKER HOLSTER

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From Badlands, the **UV HOODIE** features a UPF 50 UV protection rating, as well as lightweight, moisture-wicking synthetic fabric construction to keep users cool and comfortable. It is available in two versatile colors, black and olive green, in sizes S-3XL.

## Continued from p. 46

Barrels. Due to their proximity in New Hampshire, T/C Arms and Green Mountain Barrels worked hand in hand during Ritz's first tenure with the company, and they're working together again.

"This is just one example of how the community has rallied behind relaunching the brand," Ritz said. "We're going back to our roots, using the same people who made T/C Arms great — not just those internally, but the external suppliers, vendors and partners who care about the brand and making the quality of part they used to make in the past."

Ritz noted new dealers, wholesalers and international vendors contact T/C Arms daily to connect and see how they can partner with the brand.

"When we're talking to these companies, it helps us understand demand in the marketplace," Ritz said. "We want to build product people are going to buy, not build products we push through the distribution channel."

## OPPORTUNITIES

Back as a family-owned company, T/C Arms doesn't have to appease shareholders like it did as a public entity. As a result, certain "passion projects" — such as .410 turkey barrels, mentioned earlier — may not result in instant profits, but could carve a niche in the market.

"For the .410 barrels, we're not going to sell 10,000 of them, but you don't know if something is going to grow unless you experiment — which is what we're going to do," Ritz said.

He continued, "The whole company is built around a DNA of modularity and interchangeability. It gives us the flexibility to experiment with barrel lengths, configurations and cartridges to find out which ones are popular in which areas. We're going to be like a Baskin-Robbins for guns."

One of the new owners of T/C Arms is uniquely positioned to understand what dealers (and customers) are looking for in a firearms company — as he's a dealer himself. Glenn Butcher, owner of Bass and Bucks in Wabash, Ind., is in the process of adding a walk-in warranty repair center for T/C Arms



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customers at his facility.

"Customers are going to get personalized, walk-in service from a gun company," Ritz said. "That's pretty special."

## HEADWINDS

By the time this article is published, just over 125 days will have lapsed since Ritz and his team acquired T/C Arms from Smith & Wesson. The logistics alone involved in this acquisition are mind-boggling.

"There are literally millions — *millions* — of parts and pieces being relocated, not to mention we're moving all the CAD drawings," Ritz said. "There are over 200,000 files that are being transferred — and we have to ensure everything transfers over correctly."

As you know, a firearm has many parts to it. But what does this mean for *actually* producing it? Ritz shared there's a model in the Compass lineup that features 31,000 lines of data alone.

"We're trying to absorb all of this data at once, while making a finished product on the other side," he said. "We're taking a disciplined approach, which is why we're introducing the Encore and rifle barrels first, then the pistol barrels and so on."

But Ritz doesn't see the logistics as the biggest challenge facing T/C Arms — his value of company culture comes first. Ritz shared his team is focused on hiring passionate enthusiasts — those who share

the latest game camera finds, discuss group size and more — who embody the T/C Arms brand.

"Those conversations spur an interaction with the brand the customer can feel," he said.

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

While everything above sounds well and good, what does all this mean for *you*, the dealer? What Ritz shared will likely be music to weary storefront dealers' ears.

"Dealers are the lifeblood of our community. Therefore, we're going to have some form of protected pricing. We don't want people who are not dedicated to the space with storefronts to undermine the profitability of the line," he said. "We're working on programs that have levels of protections and incentives so the retailer can actually sell the product and make a reasonable, fair living."

Ritz recognizes the power of the salesperson behind the counter.

"He has influence — an opinion — and we value that. Salespeople love the sport/lifestyle and we're going to find ways to educate and incentivize those guys behind the counter. They're the 'Super Users,' who can carry our message and support the product and the customer in the whole process."

There's no question: T/C Arms is certainly *back*, and ready to once again make an impact in the market. **SI**

[/ tcarms.com](http://tcarms.com)



BY JADE MOLDAE

## T/C ARMS IS BACK, READY TO INNOVATE

Seventeen years on from being the last independent owner of Thompson/Center Arms, Gregg Ritz finds himself back in a familiar setting — returning to the iconic firearms brand as its new owner.

April 30, Ritz announced he and a team of investors had acquired T/C Arms from Smith & Wesson. T/C Arms will once again have a presence in Rochester, N.H., relocating key components and machinery from Smith & Wesson's Springfield, Mass., facility. In addition, T/C Arms will be operating out of a facility in Wabash, Ind.

Ritz's leadership team is already revitalizing the T/C Arms brand. Later this fall, the T/C Encore is returning to the market, and more introductions are planned in short order.

Ritz sat down with *SI* to share how T/C Arms is "back" and what dealers can expect from the reborn company.

### FOCUS ON INNOVATION

Ritz is determined to reestablish T/C Arms as an innovation leader in the industry.

"We want to revitalize handgun and muzzleloader hunting," he said. "Years ago, we were the driver in the market."

Interchangeability is a hallmark of T/C Arms, and Ritz sees this as key to encourage handgun and muzzleloader hunting.

"If someone wants to take a handgun and target shoot, then turkey hunt and later take it out to pursue larger game at greater ranges, they can have the ability to do so with interchangeable barrels," he said. "We're going to preserve the interchangeable platforms, so users can take an older frame and pair it with a newer barrel, and vice versa."

The Encore will relaunch T/C Arms this fall, bringing some unique features never before seen on T/C barrels, according to Ritz. The new Encores, sporting stainless steel barrels with 5R rifling, will be available in a variety of calibers (including straight wall cartridges). They'll also be threaded for brakes and suppressors — a first for T/C.

Following the Encore, the Contender will return in early 2025.

In spring 2025, T/C Arms handguns will arrive in showcases. Ritz shared Encore and Contender handguns will be available. Thanks to the potency of modern .410 loads, Ritz is advocating for turkey hunters to take T/C Arms handguns into the field.

"A goal for us from a new product standpoint: developing .410 turkey barrels. We want hunters going turkey hunting with a handgun," he said. "The loads today — with the TSS rounds — are so good in .410. We know this because we've seen it, our team was out in the field this spring with some of the original

◀ T/C Arms' Gregg Ritz during a recent range session testing the Encore — which will make its return to the market later this fall.

.45/.410 Contenders taking turkeys with a pistol."

Ritz previewed other upcoming product launches. By late spring/early summer 2025, the Icon bolt-action rifle will return to the market — which will be available in a number of different configurations. In fall 2025, the Triumph muzzleloader (a non-FFL item) will make its return, and the Firestick will be available in the Encore platform, as well.

And, it's just the start. Ritz shared T/C Arms is evaluating new barrel materials, other straight-wall cartridges, refined triggers and more — which will continue to drive the market forward.



**The whole company is built around a DNA of modularity and interchangeability. We're going to be like a Baskin-Robbins for guns."**

**Gregg Ritz - Owner**  
*Thompson/Center Arms*

### INDUSTRY RESPONSE, SUPPORT

The early support T/C Arms received from around the firearms industry blew Ritz and his team away. Several relationships with vendors spanning his first stint as owner have been rekindled — which has played a helping hand in facilitating T/C Arms' swift return to the market.

"We're working with a lot of old T/C suppliers. Whether it was injection molders, metal finishers or those who produced fasteners for us, these companies came back, asking us what we need and how they can help," Ritz said. "It's been amazing — our team has expanded from just a few people to an army of partners working with us once again."

Ritz highlighted T/C Arms' partnership with Green Mountain

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