

Blowing Away the Myths with Some Straight Shootin’



The role of the club is to provide a sporting facility for the whole of the community and to educate people on the validity and safety of the sport.

Mary Bingham, dynamo administrator of some of the sub-clubs of the Springvale branch of the Sporting Shooters Association, helps dispel the myths.

“It is amazing how many people are attracted to shooting. Lots of people ring up and say their kids are playing shooting computer games and they think they are going to be champion shooters. I say ‘great, bring them down and we will show them how hard it is!’. Or they say, ‘The wife would like to have a go at shooting, can she come and have a look?’. Shooting is fine and good clean fun. Everyone can do it.”

Julie Allan, former sport development officer at the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Victoria), concurs with Mary. “People who have a licence and shoot at a gun club are not the sort of people who are going to crack and go off and shoot people. People don’t realise that when you become a member of a gun club there are a lot of things that happen before you are allowed to pull the trigger.”

The SSAA (Vic) is the peak body for Victorian sporting shooters and has 21 branches across the state, with various sub-clubs and disciplines. The association has just over 25,000 members. The sport is highly regulated. All firearm users are required to complete a firearm safety course before applying for their firearm licence. Safety courses are run by Victoria Police.

“Shooting is a very safe sport”, Julie explains. “It is not dangerous, it is done in a controlled environment, and anyone of any ability can become involved.”

Participation rates for shooting have increased, largely due to SSAA (Vic) programs such as Shooting For All, which has targeted people with disabilities and included an introductory course for women. Most people with a physical disability can compete on par with able-bodied shooters.

Even though shooting has long been a recognised international sport and featured at the first modern Olympics in Athens in 1896, the words ‘guns’ and ‘sport’ often evoke passionate responses.

Sporting shooters say they have heard it all – that they are rednecks, time bombs waiting to go off, and people on the fringes of society who can’t seem to ‘fit’ in with the rest of us.

So who are these people who chose shooting as a leisure activity?

Sporting Shooters Association – Springvale Branch

“The women’s program hosted at Springvale has been really successful. When the women sign up we ask them why they are here. The reasons are varied. One woman, for example, grew up on a farm and was involved in a shooting accident; she joined up to get rid of her fear of guns. For some women, their husband might be a sporting shooter and they want to learn about guns so it is safe for their kids”, Julie explains.

Mary and her husband, Allen, devote a lot of time to help run the club in areas such as administration, coaching, program development and maintenance. Their commitment, which often extends to 40 unpaid hours a week, has resulted in a vibrant club with upgraded facilities in the dining room and bar, which have become the social hub for many members on a weekly basis.

Shooters have told Mary that the club is a haven for them because "this is where we can come anytime and talk about our sport without anyone giving us a hard time".

The Springvale Club has received accolades for its community spirit and for its success in the juniors program and for the integration of wheelchair shooters.

“The junior program is a great program. I am really proud of that”, Mary says. “We have one shoot a month for the juniors. There are 80 kids aged between 12 and 21 years on our mailing list who want to have a go. About 50 come and shoot regularly.”

Safety messages are reinforced every time they meet. Juniors are also required to shoot under the supervision of a licensed adult at all times.

The Springvale Range is a small calibre range of 50 metres and is open to the public. Many sub-groups shoot at the range – disciplines include air rifle and pistol, practical rifle, field rifle, running target and a variety of pistol disciplines.

A small group of passionate club members has worked hard over the years to turn the club into an inclusive, non-intimidating community organisation.

“All the sub-clubs talk to each other now; they are not all separate groups. The club used to be a bit unloved but now we have cooling, heating and the floors look great because we had a working bee. It is great that it is a lot louder and happier and that there are more women here. We hosted a disabled shooting event and I was asked to present the prizes – I got a real buzz out of that. People at the club have been great looking out for the wheelchair shooters. I am really proud of how people are integrated into the club”, Mary says.

Mary firmly sees the role of the club as providing a sporting facility for the whole of the community and educating people on the validity of the sport.

“Hopefully the community will see that shooting is a legitimate sport. It is an Olympic sport. We don’t have weapons, we have firearms. I know that we help families dispel the idea that shooting is glamorous, like people see in the movies. There is so much more to it. It is a fun thing to do. You can travel and get badges. We probably have the lowest injury rate of any sport in the country. People don’t fall off their rifles – they don’t get tackled! It’s like golf; you are really playing against yourself.”

More Information

For more information on Sporting Shooters go to www.ssaavic.com.au

Through its *Partnerships for Health Scheme*, VicHealth is supporting 49 State Sporting Associations and their affiliated clubs to create healthy environments and promote the physical and social benefits of belonging to a sporting club.

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