

George Wittorff is “Special Advisor” to the Board of the NRAA, given the task of addressing membership issues facing the movement at a national level, and developing and investigating strategies that State Associations and local clubs could gainfully use in a concerted effort to attract and retain members.

This is the third of a series of articles aimed at achieving that goal

ASAPS

Advancing Shooting as A Positive Sport

Following the first couple of articles on Membership, I have received a number of phone calls and emails on the subject. A few of these are from older members who look back fondly and yearn for the ‘old days’ when we shot .303s and received cheap ammo. The reality is that those days are well and truly in the past, and a forward-looking vision is essential if we are to invigorate our sport. This includes all disciplines.

Some simply bemoan the fact that numbers are declining and ask the question “What is our future?” The answer to that question is that the future is what we make of it and is determined by what each of us is prepared to do to translate words and wishes into positive actions and results.

HOW ONE CLUB QUADRUPLED ITS MEMBERSHIP

(Advancing Shooting as A Positive Sport Brings Positive Results)

For those clubs who are looking for a model to increase membership and also the scope and breadth of their club activities, no better example can be given than the Busselton Rifle Club, situated in the South West of Western Australia.

Busselton, like Bunbury Rifle Club, shoots on the Coolilup Range that is situated half way between the two towns, meaning that members travel around 30km each way to shoot. Like many clubs that have been relocated beyond the town boundaries, attracting new members is sometimes hampered by distance.

In 2005 a couple of Busselton members decided to do something about it. They probably weren’t motivated by the sole idea of increasing membership, but rather by the desire to enjoy their shooting to the full by expanding the range and type of shooting available to them under the SSRs.

What resulted was the drawing up of a program whereby Target and F Class shooting by Bunbury and Busselton clubs continued on Sundays, while a mixture of Field and Service Rifle competition began on Saturdays.

The result in terms of Membership? At the beginning of 2005, club membership totalled 21. *New members, attracted by the diverse program began joining immediately, and by the end of 2015 Busselton’s membership was a very healthy 90 – a more than quadrupling of membership due almost entirely to the introduction of two additional disciplines.*

What exactly happened? First of all it is important to remember that the key to these extra disciplines is the NRAA’s SSRs. Nothing new or outside the rules has been used. It follows then, that a formula for expanding a club’s scope and program has been sitting there in the SSRs all the time, and it’s not the NRAA who hasn’t shown

leadership in providing opportunities; rather it's lack of initiative at the club level that needs to be addressed. Point taken?

Field Rifle Competition – How it works for Busselton
[Details of operation etc are contained in Chapter 17 of SSRs].

The Field Rifle program has attracted 30 additional members to Busselton Rifle Club.

Field Rifle shooting competition is held on Saturdays once a month, and is conducted in rotation from 100 – 300m. Manual targets are used with a 400m centre. The course of fire is:

First month: 100m standing unsupported. It's also worth noting that the club actively invites partners and their children to this shoot, which usually also involves a club-supported barbeque. Partners and appropriately aged children are allowed to fire, under one on one supervision, with club-provided .22 rimfire rifles.

Second month: 200m Sitting or Kneeling.

Third month: 300m Prone.

There are one or two shooters with disabilities who compete, and they are allowed to use either a chair or chair/table, depending on the format for that week.

The course of fire for each of the above is: 5 sighters followed by 4 repetitions of 5 shots.

Interest has led to unexpected support from new members, including the donation of a new Tikka 223 with 3-9 variable scope club rifle for use by members and visitors who do not as yet own a suitable firearm.

Service Rifle Competition
[Competition details are found at Chapter 16 of SSRs]

Once Field Rifle Competition proved a success, another club member armed himself with SSRs and a bundle of Figure 11 targets scrounged from the local army unit, and instigated the Service competition.

This is held on Saturdays with a frequency of once per month.

The competition is over 100-300m in rotation and is regularly attended by around 25 members. Part of the attraction of this discipline seems to be a liking for military style shooting and organisation on the firing point, plus the fact that each day's shooting involves up to 60 rounds for some events – perfect for the keen shooter.

The Service rifle is maturing and evolving to the point that by popular request it is now planned to add a 600m sniper match to the program. This allows for either the regular sights, or the addition of a scope up to 4x power.

Catering for Service Shooters

Because of the enthusiasm, interest and persuasiveness of the Service shooters, the South West DRA has for the last five or six years incorporated this discipline into its Annual Prize Meeting. This is a three day competition: Day one is over 300, 500 and 600m; Day 2 over 300, 400, 500 and 600m while Day 3 is over 700, 800 and 900m.

The Service Rifle Championship covers Days 1 and 2, i.e., all ranges up to and including 600m. These Service shooters compete on manual targets alongside the rest

of the competitors. This is a popular event for the Service Rifle Community including those from across the state.

In addition, Busselton holds a 'Picnic Shoot' over two days in November each year. The competition is called a 'Picnic' in order to allow non-WARA members to also compete. By negotiation, the necessary NRAA insurance compliance is met by an additional \$10 fee for non-members.

This event is attended by up to 60 shooters who relish the opportunity to shoot for two days over 100 – 300m plus 600m Sniper matches. Apart from enthusiastic attendance, local Gun Shops and businesses (whose Principals also compete) have made very generous donations for trophies, plus cash donations of \$5000.

New members, equipment and valuable donations are the result of providing a variety of disciplines and 'padding out' the programs available to members.

More to Come – 1000yd International Bench Rest

[See SSRs Chapter 22]

Success usually breeds success, and high expectations lead to higher achievements. To that end, the very healthy F Class section of the club negotiated with the SWDRA and our DoD landlords to allow members to construct four 1000yd benches complete with overhead cover, situated centrally behind the 900m mound. This enables shooters to compete in 1000yd International Bench Rest shooting on a regular basis.

Conclusion

As a result of club members showing initiative, working together and more importantly, putting ideas into action, Busselton Rifle club has grown from having 21 members in 2005 to having 90 members at the end of 2015.

Of these, 30 new members have grown out of Field Rifle, and 25 from Service. Force of numbers, word of mouth, local publicity and a positive club culture has accounted for the remaining new members.

Of note is the fact that the new membership included a number of young farmers/hunters who had firearms but nowhere to accurately try them out. In addition, there was a large group of SSAA members who didn't have access to a rifle range, and who accepted that in order to shoot competition under NRAA SSRs, Busselton club membership was a prerequisite.

Interestingly, there is a robust cross-over between disciplines with Target Rifle and F Class shooters now participating in either Service or Field, or both, and the converse applying to a number of Field and Service shooters.

A huge win for the club, whichever way the program is viewed.

Here is a challenge to forward looking members in clubs around the traps to take the above example as an indication of what can be achieved, and determine to make their own club healthier, stronger and more vibrant.

Please, get on board, and contribute to advancing shooting as a positive sport.
