

The Inter-Mountain

Local muzzleloaders group reaching out to new members



Kenny Ryan, left, presents Jim Cost with a special plaque from the Tygart Valley Muzzleloaders Association, making Cost 'president for life' of the club he helped create.

BEVERLY — A local group brings the history of the American frontier to life through the tradition of muzzleloader shooting, and more members

are welcome to experience the sport firsthand.

Safety and family fun are the main priorities of the Tygart Valley Muzzleloaders Association, said Darrell Serrett, club president. Sharing the history of traditional black powder guns also is a big club focus.

Serrett said it's a family sport for men, women and children. It not only involves shooting targets and taking part in friendly competitions, but there is a social aspect to the hobby, with everything from meals to primitive camping.

His wife, Bonnie Serrett, serves as the club's secretary and treasurer. She said the club was formed in 1972, noting for many years it enjoyed a very active membership, with folks taking part in regular shooting competitions, picnics and gatherings both locally as well as throughout the region and at national competitions.

"It was started to preserve the tradition of the long rifle," she said, explaining she got hooked by the sport thanks to her husband's interest in the hobby.

"I've shot muzzleloaders myself close to 20 years. ... I would love to see more women get involved," she added. *"For a long time there was a lot of interest, and we're working very hard to get that interest back."*

Her husband said he used to take part in shooting events nearly every weekend, with he and his buddies winning several events. Eventually he asked his wife to come along so they could spend time together. Once she started getting more involved, she eventually started winning competitions herself.

Bonnie Serrett was the women's state offhand champion in 2000, and she was top shooter in a national competition in 2010.

“That’s a pretty big honor,” Darrell Serrett said of his wife’s accomplishments.

He noted there are many different types of muzzleloaders that can be purchased or made by hand. There’s even a class of *“bench guns”* that weigh 14 pounds or more.

“They shoot these things at 100 yards, and they can hit a gnat,” he said.

The sport also includes more than rifles and pistols — Darrell Serrett said the club’s members have got back into tomahawk and knife throwing.

“We got that going again this year,” he said. *“It looks fairly easy, but it’s not as easy as it looks.”*

New members are welcome to join any time, with club meetings taking place at 7 p.m. the last Wednesday of each month at the Izaak Walton League’s Clubhouse near Beverly. The Tygart Valley Muzzleloaders group also hosts regular shoots at 10 a.m. the second Saturday of each month from April to September at the club’s range, which is located on the Izaak Walton League property on Files Creek Road, near Beverly.

The club’s vice president, Kenny Ryan, visited recently with Jim Cost, one of the club’s founding members. Ryan said the club wanted to honor Cost by making him the *“president for life”* and creating a special plaque.

“We’ve had a lot of good times together,” Ryan said while visiting with Cost at the Elkins Rehabilitation & Care Center, noting Cost also won several events over the years.

At 85, Cost said he hasn’t been able to attend many shoots recently, but has many fond memories of traveling to muzzleloader gatherings all over West Virginia and some out-of-state events.

“I started shooting guns when I was a kid, still in grade school,” he said,

explaining he later became interested in muzzleloaders when a friend found an old handmade muzzleloader in an attic.

“It was hard to tell how old it was,” Cost said. “We got to shooting it, and we went on and on.”

He said he not only enjoyed purchasing or building his own guns, he also enjoyed hunting — sometimes with regular rifles, but mainly with muzzleloaders.

“In the ’50s I got into it big time. Everybody was building them. Everyone was shooting them,” he said, adding he’s always enjoyed the comradery and fellowship. *“That’s what makes it fun.”*

He also would dress in buckskin clothing and take part in primitive camping. In fact, he said he was one of the first people to start the primitive campsites at the Mountain State Forest Festival, and he often walked through the Mountain State Forest Festival parades with a muzzleloader.

Bonnie Serrett said Cost has helped many people become more experienced shooters over the years, including herself.

“You meet the best people,” she said. *“Mr. Cost has been instrumental in the club. He was very much involved for many years.”*

Cost said he’s glad there seems to be a growing interest in the hobby once again, and he’s proud that the club plans to create scholarships for local high school students in the coming year.

“I’d like to see it the way it used to be,” he said. *“Back then, we could have a match every weekend, with 25 or 30 match shooters.”*

“We do hope to rebuild,” Bonnie Serrett added. *“We have around 40 members, and at one time, we had over 100. ... I think we will rebuild*

again, because we've had more interest."

More information about the Tygart Valley Muzzleloaders Association is available by calling the Serretts at 304-335-2305.

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