

## Firearms Students Learn To 'Think Safety'

BY SUSAN USHER

Taking up his handgun, Sgt. Carl Pearson turned to the attentive group with a stern reminder, "You've got to remember, people, these are made to kill."

Pausing, he added, "They are also a good thing, in my opinion. But you have to think safety."

Throughout the morning Saturday, "think safety" was the motto for students in a firearms safety course conducted by Brunswick County Sheriff's Detective Pearson and other members of the Brunswick County Law Enforcement Association at its firing range.

Aimed primarily at women, the course introduced participants to firearms selection, handling and cleaning, as well as their safe usage.

Between January and March, in the wake of a series of three murders across the county, the number of applications for gun permits tripled, sheriff's department records show. Most of those seeking permits gave "personal protection" as the reason.

"There are so many things going on," said Lillian Fink, who was taking the class with her husband Phillip. "It's something we've been intending to do."

They are seasonal residents of Calabash. He was practicing with a .357 Magnum, while she chose a .22-cal. revolver because "it's a little bit lighter for a woman and deadly, but not too deadly."

Knowing how to shoot a firearm is something everyone should learn, she added.

Mrs. Fink agreed with Don Gates, crime prevention officer with the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department and organizer of the class, that owning a gun doesn't provide much self-defense if it's not used properly.

Gates pointed out, "It could be a matter of life and death."

Of the 40 persons who expressed interest in the class, 18 turned out, according to Pam Hewett of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department. Most were a little nervous, but plunged ahead determinedly.

"I didn't know anything about a gun. It teaches you respect for it," Angela Grimar said of the class she took with fellow Ocean Forest Community Watch member Tina Hankel.

For some, learning to use a firearm was a recent decision, others, like Laurie Webb of Holden Beach and the Finks, had been intending to learn for years.

"My husband tried to teach me and we ended up in a big argument," said Webb. "I dropped the gun and that was the end of it. Apparently that's something you're never supposed to do."

So they sought a third-party instructor.

Saturday, Webb was getting better acquainted with a tiny, .22-cal. automatic she'd selected because it had practically no recoil unlike a rifle she'd fired once. She

said choosing a gun that was right for her was the hardest part.

"It's a scary thing to think about—learning to use a gun," she added.

Some of Saturday's exercises were intended to help abate that fear, replacing it with some basic skills and a deep respect for firearms.

Participants first heard classroom talks on gun safety in the home and on the firing range and had their guns checked by officers.

Simple trespassing on one's property or in one's home, Assistant District Attorney Napoleon Barefoot advised, doesn't constitute self-defense as justification for shooting someone using deadly force. Rather, the person firing has to be reasonably convinced that shooting is necessary to prevent great bodily injury or death, not

loss of property.

Afterward, class members divided into two groups of nine each, with several BCLCA members assigned to offer assistance.

Standing with legs at shoulder distance apart with their arms braced in front gripping the gun, students practiced loading, aiming and firing. Reports echoed across the field as their bullets winged toward black paper targets shaped like the human torso.

"If you can point your finger at something, you can shoot it," advised Gates earlier, demonstrating that the level where the gun is held also is where the bullet enters the target.

Members also learned that, especially when firing instinctively, bullets don't always go where you expect. Inside the home, with other family members present, Rangemaster Pearson stressed, it's especially important that bullets go where you aim. A bullet can penetrate the length of a mobile home, he noted.

For more practice, firearms owners have the option of setting up their own practice sites, joining a private firing range club or joining the Brunswick County Law Enforcement Association as associate members, with firing range privileges.



Laurie Webb squints as she squeezes off a round with her .22 automatic. Behind her, program coordinator Don Gates offers his advice.



Sheriff's Officer Mike Speck and class member Tina Hankel discuss her target results.



Lillian Fink loads her .22 revolver with the help of Charlotte Police Chief Don Stovall.

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