

## Taking Aim

Area women find target shooting 'exhilarating and exciting'

By **KATHLEEN D. BAILEY**

Connie Barton of Rochester laughed when she recalled how she got into target shooting. "My husband convinced me to come to a basic pistol course," she said. "He was taking it, and he thought it was something we could do together. Now I own more guns than he does!"

Barton spends Wednesday nights – sans hubby – at the Major Waldron Sportsmen's Association firing range in Barrington. She's one of several area women who have added firearm skills to their portfolios – for fun, skill-sharpening and the rare chance they may have to defend themselves.

### SHOOTING FOR SKILL

Sarah Blanchette of Somersworth practices target shooting on Wednesdays with Barton, April Wolf of Massachusetts and several men. She shot a little when she was younger, hunting with uncles, and got back into it a year ago. The systems analyst said, "I remembered how much fun it is."

Blanchette belongs to a league where she competes in small-caliber pistol shooting with a target. She also enrolled in the National Rifle Association's Basic Rifle Course.

While Blanchette said she enjoys the technical aspects of taking aim and making a bullseye, there's also a social piece: "It's a night out. You meet a lot of friendly people."

Wolf, a former Dover resident, kept her Major Waldron membership when she moved to Hingham, Mass.

"I couldn't give up my friends," she said. She first handled a .22 rifle while on vacation in Las Vegas. "They had a 'gun shoot' on a dry lake bed," she said. "I tried it and thought, 'I think I want to do this.'"

Her friend Gary Thomas, also a Major Waldron member, bought Wolf her first pistol as a birthday gift and taught her to use it. She took the Basic Pistol course and joined the Wednesday night sessions.

Blanchette has seen more women joining the club, and showing interest in everything from pistol target shooting to clay pigeons to self-defense.

"They join for the same reasons I did," she said. "It's the challenge, the camaraderie, learning about something you've never been exposed to."

Wolf enjoys competing with herself and enjoys owning guns. She has a Smith and Wesson .41, a .357 and three .22s. Barton owns "a couple .22s, a couple .45s and one 9 mm."

"It's like an addiction," Wolf said, while Blanchette observed, "Different areas of shooting require different equipment."

Barton, a Major Waldron instructor and high shooter for her league, summed up her hobby by saying, "It's exhilarating and empowering."

## WEDNESDAY NIGHTS

Ron Thomas, membership director for the club, runs the Wednesday night pistol practices. Barton said they practice for a half-hour with a blank piece of paper set up on the opposite wall.

"That helps us with our point of aim," she said. "You have to get two sets of 10 shots inside a 3-inch circle. Once you've done that, you can move on to targets."



*NH Mirror/Kathleen D. Bailey*

**April Wolf of Massachusetts**

At Thomas' command, they alternate between "slow" (10 shots in 10 minutes), "timed" (five shots in 20 seconds) and "rapid" (five shots in 10 seconds).

While Thomas doesn't have statistics at his fingertips, he has seen more women joining the club and other shooting clubs he belongs to, the Nashua Fish and Game Club and the Farmington Fish and Game Club.

There are a variety of reasons, according to Thomas. Several young women practice at Barrington because they're members of the University of New Hampshire Shooting Club, a little-known extracurricular activity with 28 members last year. Three UNH women shot on the Major Waldron bullseye pistol team.

Other women shoot for enjoyment and relaxation, he said. Others simply want to learn to defend themselves. "It's hard to generalize," Thomas said.

Six women recently completed the Basic Pistol course, at \$60 each, with Major Waldron supplying the guns, ammunition and textbooks. The class is offered in January, May and September.

According to Thomas, women who take Basic Pistol do better than men.

"The women listen better," he said. "The men's egos get in the way." While again it's hard to generalize, a beginning woman usually learns better than a beginning man, he said.



*NH Mirror/Kathleen D. Bailey*

**Sarah Blanchette of Somersworth**

## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

The three Wednesday night target shooters are mostly interested in improving their skills, and, as Wolf said, "Guns are a beautiful piece of machinery. I like the shape, the look of guns." Though they could defend themselves if needed, self-protection is only one of the pieces for them.

For others, self-protection is the whole piece. Wolf said many women focus more on "tactical" shooting, which is defensive handgun shooting.

Barton recommends two introductory courses to women – a Home, Firearms and Safety course followed by one on how to load and unload a gun. After that they should take Basic Pistol, and then Personal Protection in the Home, one of the "tactical" classes.

"It's important for women to know how to defend themselves," Barton said. "If you don't want to shoot, in the end, at least you'll know how."

And for Wolf, that's important. She had considered learning a martial art, but decided, "I'd never get 'off the ground' with that. Besides, it's no good if you're up against more than two people."

The women will continue to practice and shoot, competing against others and themselves. And they will continue to fight the stereotypes both men and women shooters face.

"I have a niece who said, 'You mean you're going to shoot Bambi?'" Wolf said, mimicking a wide-eyed stare. "And I told her, 'I shoot at paper!'"

For more information on classes for women, call the Sportsmen's Association at 742-6866 or visit [www.majorwaldron.com](http://www.majorwaldron.com).

*Kathleen D. Bailey is a freelance writer from Raymond.*



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Connie Barton of Rochester