

★ Wall Township ★

High-caliber marksmen come to Wall High for summer practices

By Jamie Biesiada

This week, the sounds of pellets hitting targets in Wall High School is a common one as experienced, college-age marksmen are visiting the school to teach Wall students, and students from around the state, to fine tune their skills as competitive shooters.

The program is run by the Civilian Marksmanship Program [CMP], which frequently holds clinics at its two ranges in Anniston, Ala., and Camp Perry, Ohio.

For the first year, instructors from the CMP came to Wall Township, running a three-day clinic for students.

According to Senior Naval Science Instructor Capt. James Steinbaugh, he was approached by the CMP to hold the program at Wall. With the go-ahead from the school and administration, the program began Tuesday and will run through today.

"Kids go to basketball or lacrosse camp — they get focused on the fundamentals," he said. Similarly, at the CMP program, they will work on their shooting skills. "It's run by people who shoot competitively" in college.

Among other aspects of shooting, he said, the instructors will work on helping the students prepare mentally and emotionally to get that perfect shot.

Competitive shooters use two kinds of rifles, the captain explained, which shoot .177 caliber pellets — not bullets — powered by compressed air or carbon dioxide. Many of the rifles used are "pumped" up to shoot using a hand pump.

The first kind of rifle is in the "shooter" category, a less expensive type of rifle meant to get interested parties involved in shooting without costing a great deal of money. The second type, Capt. Steinbaugh said, are precision rifles, or "top of the line" rifles that can cost several thousand dollars once they are fully outfitted.

Students aim at mounted, paper targets with 12 circles on them, arranged in a 3-by-4 format. The middle two are used for practice, while the outside circles count for scoring — a perfect 10 would represent the pellet going straight through the center of the circle. The black area of the circle means the highest points, and is just slightly larger than a quarter, but smaller than a half-dollar, the captain explained. One target has 300 points available on it, if a shooter received a perfect score.

Capt. Steinbaugh said at least one of Wall's marksmen — Cadet Tracy Cahill — consistently shoots in the 270s range.

"We're the best in the state," he said, of the students that competitively shoot from Wall High School. "I really marvel at what these kids have done in the last 5 or 6 years."

Wall's competitive marksmen participating are all members of the school's Naval Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps [NJROTC]. On Tuesday, Capt. Steinbaugh reflected how far the competitive marksmen have come since he started at the school in 2003. At that point, the team was not overly competitive, and the captain did not have much experience with shooting teams.

"I had to study harder than they had to practice," he laughed.

However, the Wall team has boasted nationally-ranked shooters in recent years, and has come a long way from its earlier years. Students have participated in CMP programs before, visiting its Alabama range, and this week's program will help them become even more competitive.

"They [the CMP] come to us ... to teach kids the fine art of marksmanship," Sr. Chief Stanley Baxter, a Naval Science instructor at the high school, explained.

Students from Linden, Riverside and as far as Virginia attended the clinic at Wall this week, Capt. Steinbaugh explained. He likened it to any other summer sport clinic.

Competitors shoot at three targets in competition: one from a prone position, on the ground, one kneeling and one standing, all 33 feet away from the targets. Scopes are not used during the shooting, but only so the shooter can see where his or her shot landed on the target afterward.

"It's an exemplary program for kids," the captain said, noting they use lessons learned in shooting — such as calming themselves and mentally preparing for a shot — in the classroom, and in life. "It's a very maturing type of sport."

Three Wall NJROTC students attended the CMP clinic on Tuesday — sophomores Louie Freda and Christian Nelson, and junior Emilie Luttman.

Emilie started shooting in her freshman year.

"Before I did rifle, it was very hard for me to keep still," she explained, but the sport has taught her to just relax and take the shot.

Christian, too, started shooting in his freshman year.

"I like the sport of it," he explained, as well as the competition.

"It's really just — it's nothing like any other sport," Louie, a second-year shooter, added. "It's more of, you're out there by yourself, and it's all up to you."

They were being coached by University of Kentucky junior and New Hampshire native Heather Greathouse who, in April, placed third in the NCAA smallbore competition.

"It's an individual sport," Ms. Greathouse said. "You have to be accountable."

She estimated she has participated in at least 100 competition. While winning the NCAA competition was her favorite memory, she recalled one competition when she wasn't so confident. She lined up, and took a shot — "I actually shot the wall," she laughed.

Later, Ms. Greathouse discovered a problem with her rifle's trigger.

Safety is key in the sport of shooting, Capt. Steinbaugh said, something stressed to Wall students. For instance, rifles should always be pointing down-range. When the students carry their rifles to the range, a piece of red tape on the rifle case indicates where the muzzle is.

That way, Capt. Steinbaugh said, even when they are just removing the rifle from the case, it is always pointed down range.

Multiple individuals also monitor shooters, he explained. One is right near the students, monitoring individual lanes, while another stands further back.

Despite rifles being involved, Ms. Greathouse said,

"I think it's the safest sport."



JAMIE BIESIADA, The Coast Star
Competitive shooters with the Civilian Marksmanship Program taught students the finer points of marksmanship at Wall High School this week.



JAMIE BIESIADA, The Coast Star
In competitive shooting, the black circle on a target — which carries the highest point value — is just larger than a quarter. Students from Wall trained with high-caliber shooters this week.