

# Invigorate interest in outdoor sports by passing on tradition to youths

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One of the main reasons for declining numbers of hunters -- and participants in outdoors sports -- is that fewer young people are being introduced to hunting, fishing and shooting sports.

With that in mind, Wildlife Habitat Inc., with support from the National Rifle Association, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Delaware 4-H Shooting Sports Program, and other local sporting organizations, hosted its annual Melvin Rust's Kids Day & NRA Shooting Sports Fest Camp last Sunday.

The camp, held at Lake Melvin in Dagsboro, provided an alcohol-free, family-oriented event where nearly 400 families received instruction and hands-on experience in freshwater fishing, archery, rifle shooting and shotgun shooting.

Wildlife Habitat Inc., created as an organization devoted to wildlife conservation, worked with William Crewe and camp owner Melvin Rust to establish Melvin Rust's Kids Day nearly 15 years ago.

"It's nice because I know a lot of kids ... got nowhere to go," said Rust, who lives in Dagsboro. "They get a day out to go fishing. [The camp] keeps them out of trouble, and they learn a lot because today there's so much stuff out here that kids get [into] drugs and all that mess. It's terrible."

Staffed by volunteers, the event's main goal is to safely introduce children to the shooting sports, but not necessarily hunting.

"We look at it as a training session," volunteer Alan Joseph of Bridgeville said. "We're not trying to make professional shooters and professional hunters. We don't even care if a kid hunts. Our goal is to show that you can have fun with firearms without injuring something. The goal really is to get families together in the shooting sports."

While many view shooting, fishing, and hunting as male sports, according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, there are



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Jim Kemble (center), of the Delaware 4-H Shooting Sports Program, teaches (from left) Dakota Murray, 11, Gabriella Kendus, 9, and Joel Evans, 5, how to handle an air rifle at Sunday's Melvin Rust Kid's Day.

more than three million female hunters in the United States.

Dominique Henson, 11, of Seaford enjoyed her introduction to archery at Melvin Rust's Kids Day.

"It's fun," she said. "It's going to take me far if I ever need to know about shooting my own food."

Jillian Campanella, a 10-year-old from Wilmington, said she enjoyed trying archery.

"I learned how to handle guns and bows and arrows safely, and I saw a lot of other kids who liked fishing and shooting, too," she said. "My favorite thing was learning to shoot the bow and arrow. I turned back around and went up to shoot several times. Now I told my dad I want to buy my own bow and arrow and practice with him."

Using Melvin Rust's Kids Day as an example, we should all move to preserve and pass on the tradition of shooting, hunting, and fishing to interested children.