

Young hunters add new life to an aging hunting community

Peter Sarr

Every time the Marbletown Sportsmen's Club hosts a DEC hunter safety course I go up to help them out, and Saturday and Sunday, March 5 and 6 was no exception. I'm initially there to go over the particulars of turkey hunting, but I am always interested in helping with the younger kids that are there to become eligible to get there hunting licenses. New York State, as well many other states across the country require people who want to get a hunting license to take a hunter safety course. Helping the younger students is very important to me, because as you may know, the amount of young kids getting into hunting has been steadily decreasing over the years, and the median age of hunters has gotten older and older. There are many reasons for this trend.



- Parents are often too busy. Often mom and dad both work to pay for the mortgage, the cars, education and more, leaving little time or energy for hunting.
- America has become more urbanized. They no longer live in rural areas where hunting is more normal and natural. And if they do, they are likely to have many distractions.
- There are organized sports, video games, social networking and more, leaving little time to go hunting for rabbits or deer on the weekends.
- The costs associated with hunting, such as license fees seem to go up every year, as do taxes on hunting and fishing supplies.

- Accessibility of public and private hunting lands. Although there is a lot of state land available to hunters, it can often be crowded, difficult to get to, and hard to hunt. Private property has become harder to access due to owners not allowing hunting, and more land is going to private hunting leases. Stepping out your back door to go hunting has become a thing of the past.

Fortunately, it's not all doom and gloom for the local hunting community. From what I've been seeing, there seems to be more and more young people getting into hunting, and looking around at the people in this class the trend is continuing. I don't know for sure what is driving this, but I have a few ideas.

- Hunting has become more main stream. The hunting supply industry has become huge and has spawned thousands of TV shows and videos, along with tons of trade-marked clothing and gear. Kids that don't even hunt can be seen wearing "designer camo." Professional hunters have developed a large fan base making them and their sponsors very recognizable. All this brings hunting more into the public consciousness.
- Youth programs created by the DEC (Department of Environmental Conservation). In 2008 Governor Patterson signed the Youth Hunting Bill, Sponsored by Assemblywomen Francine DelMonte (D-138). This bill allows kids 14-15 yrs. old to hunt deer and bear with a firearm under specified conditions and only while supervised by a parent, guardian or adult over 18 with a legal license (30 states have no limit on a hunter's age. These states have a better safety record collectively than the 20 states with a minimum age). In addition The DEC allows young hunters to hunt Turkey and Peasant prior to the start of their respected seasons. This gives them a chance in the field without any other

hunters. Adults escorting them are not allowed to take game, or even carry a weapon.

- Youth programs sponsored by gun clubs and other organizations. Most local hunting clubs have youth programs that help introduce and mentor kids that want to get into hunting. The Junior Sportsman's program at the Marbletown Sportsman's Club has grown every year. Rondout Valley Rod and Gun Club is sponsoring a Youth Day on June 4 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Kelder's Farm in Accord, (where kids will have the opportunity to shoot BB guns and bows, catch trout, build bird houses and more). In addition, the NRA, Buckmasters, The Boy and Cub Scouts and many other national organizations have programs geared toward introducing kids to hunting and shooting.

On this particular weekend I was happy to see over 30 people there to get their hunter safety certificate, and even happier to see that more than half were teenagers or younger. It confirms to me that there is a resurgence of young people getting into hunting. After the class was over and the test taken, I asked 16 year old Shayalyn Dambois of Pine Bush why she was here

to take the course. "I was introduced to hunting by my Uncle Gerry Fornino, (one of the DEC Hunter Safety Course instructors), and wanted to learn to



hunt legally and safely," she said. I asked

what she will most likely be hunting. "Deer hunting will probably be my favorite." When I wondered if she would be able to field dress a deer after it's down, she replied, "I'm not afraid of that part of hunting, it's as important as the rest of the hunt."

Another young future hunter 12 year old Michel Tresch of Middletown was there and I asked him why he was taking the class. "I got interested in hunting by going with



my father when he went out rabbit and deer hunting," he said. "After I get my license I plan to hunt all the legal game that I can." When I asked Tresch how he liked the course he said, "It was a little boring at times, but a lot of the course was very interesting and I learned a lot of important information. I especially liked shooting the guns." The class included shooting small caliber rifles, and shot guns so the instructors can better teach fire arm safety and range rules.

All the kids that came to the club for the course passed the test (as did everyone), ensuring that the tradition of safe, ethical, and lawful hunting will continue through this new group hunters long into the future.

For information on Hunter Safety Courses, go to www.dec.ny.gov. For more on the Youth Day, contact Kelder's Farm at 626-7137 and to learn more about the Marbletown Sportsman's Club's youth program, visit <http://www.marbletownsportsmensclub.com>.