

# Main goal of Shooting Sports program: Safety

By David Lias

david.lias@plaintalk.net

There's all sorts of things for a young person to remember as they take aim at target with a bow and arrow or a BB gun – proper stance, the best way to hold the bow or gun, how to take a steady aim, even how to control one's breathing.

One thing, however, trumps everything else in the instruction offered by volunteers to the members of the Clay County Flyers 4-H club – safety.

"We have a terrific program of kids who are involved with their parents. Parental involvement is huge," said Randy Hout. "This is a good opportunity for parents and kids to do things together. Safety is our number one concern. Safety is always first, and that is something that we stress, no matter what."

Hout appeared to be the person in charge during Sunday's activities at the Clay County Extension building, where local youth were practicing their archery and BB gun shooting skills. He noted that he is just one of several volunteer leaders active in the club.

"I guess you could say I've been around the longest," he said.

For some archery participants, Sunday afternoon was more than a time of leisurely practice. They were taking their best shots at scoring high enough to qualify for state competition.

"Things are a little more serious when you're trying to qualify for state," Hout said.

The Shooting Sports program is offered nationwide through 4-H.

"We are a 4-H program sponsored through the Extension program. We are

a regular 4-H club, and right now we meet every Sunday afternoon. We offer archery, BB gun, shotgun, .22 (caliber rifle), and there are opportunities for pistols," Hout said.

The club is able to offer such a diverse program of shooting instruction thanks to its seven volunteer club leaders.

"Safety is the very first thing that we teach, and a common phrase that may be yelled out by anyone at any time is 'Cease fire.' When anybody hears that, you shut down, no matter what," he said. "Everything is set down and put in a safe situation so nobody gets hurt. We want kids to learn safety, and to handle things correctly and properly."

The Clay County Flyers currently have enough leaders to be able to offer shooting instruction year-round. The Clay County Sportsmen's Club allows the 4-H'ers to use its facilities near the Clay County Park during the summer for training with shotguns and .22 caliber rifles.

"We use the 4-H building here in town for BB guns and archery. We started with the BB guns and archery during the end of November, and just got things going again here this year," Hout said.

The Shooting Sports program involves much more than simply teaching young people how to shoot a gun or bow and arrow. Heavy emphasis is also placed on teaching participants everything they need to know about bows, arrows, shotguns, and BB guns.

"In archery, for example, we teach them about understanding their bow, understanding the arrow, understanding every part of what they're doing. When they step to the line, they



Emily Rolfes takes aim as she and other members of the Clay County Flyers 4-H club practice archery Sunday in the Extension building in Vermillion.

(Photo by David Lias)

should be able to tell you what part of the bow is where; they should be able to tell you different areas of safety, and the proper way to treat their bow," Hout said. "Before they ever get to shoot an arrow, that's one of the first things they've got to know – proper handling of the equipment and proper knowledge of the things they are doing."

Hout has been involved in teaching Shooting Sports for seven years. His involvement began when his son desired to participate in the program, but there was no full-time leader.

"A few of the other 4-H leaders from other clubs asked if I'd be interested in doing it," he said, "so a friend of mine and I went through the courses and got started."

The club was already active in the Vermillion community, Hout added, when he became involved.

"Shooting sports for 4-H had been here a lot of years," he said. "It's a volunteer thing, and for us to have seven leaders means that many people have stepped up to do it."

One sign of the program's success: Kids

from Vermillion have participated in state shooting competitions every year.

"The state competition takes place every year in Ft. Pierre," Hout said. "It's

usually a three-day event."

The club operates on a limited budget, but does own a few bows and BB guns so that kids who can't afford such equipment will still have the opportunity to learn how to shoot.

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