

The following is an article published in the SASS (Single Action Shooting Society) monthly newsletter "The Cowboy Chronicle" in October 2007.

We closed a door . . . and a HUGE window opened.

Awesome! Amazing! Unbelievable! These are but a few of the words used to describe the new home of the Sheyenne Valley Peacekeepers near Enderlin, North Dakota.

Earlier this spring when the Peacekeepers met to gear up for the 2007 shooting season the mood was a somber one. We had a hard decision to make. Do we continue the ongoing battle for the right to shoot at the present site or do we give up the frustrating struggle and begin searching for a new location?

To give you a little background - In 2003 a small group gathered in the Jones' dining room to discuss the possibility of making some props so that we could practice cowboy action shooting – a sport introduced to us a couple years before in East Grand Forks, MN. The seven men and six women sitting around the table decided to each put \$50.00 into the pot to purchase building supplies. It wasn't long and prop construction soon began at Dakota Rody's cabinet shop. Doc Neilson spent countless hours cutting out and grinding targets. And several of the guys put together target stands.

As members of the local Wildlife Club near Kindred, ND, we were able to set up the props for practice and eventually hosted our first Cowboy Action Match with 21 shooters attending. We became a SASS affiliated Cowboy Action group and hosted a total of three matches that summer – increasing the number attending by seven shooters each month. The range, we felt, was a perfect place for Cowboy Action. The club owned thirty acres next to the Sheyenne River, surrounded by trees and farmland. There was a newly constructed clubhouse, with kitchen, restroom, fireplace and a meeting room large enough to seat sixty plus people. Absolutely perfect!

The shooting line was out in the open so canopies were often set up for protection from rain or too much sun. All props, targets, stands and any additional equipment needed to be set up and taken down before and after each match. Our monthly matches were held on Saturday afternoon, running five or six stages and we finished the day with an evening meal which was included in the registration fee. We started putting on a free New Shooter Clinic every April to introduce people to the sport and give them a chance to try it out using our guns and ammo. In 2005 we were honored to host the first annual "Peace in the Valley" – the SASS North Dakota State Championship with 69 shooters participating. The following year "Peace in the Valley" brought 89 shooters from across the US and Canada to this small southeastern North Dakota community and our regular matches increased to around 50 shooters each month. Sounds good right? Perfect location, increased participation and lots of fun - what more could a person or club ask for? Right?!

Did I mention the battle for the right to shoot? Since purchasing the property over ten years ago, the Wildlife Club has met with ongoing opposition from some of the neighboring farmers, township board members and anti gun individuals with deep pockets. Not unlike many of the ranges across the nation, tens of thousands of dollars have been spent on lawyer fees and court costs to retain the right to use the property for trap shoots, youth shooting programs including hunter safety, sighting in hunting rifles, cowboy matches and various other shooting events. There were those who had no problem sending their children to our free hunter education classes yet felt the need to place signs of opposition in the church yard near the club gate when we hosted our first SASS State Championship. They even went so

far as to move the road signs directing people to the range resulting in several guests traveling ten or more miles out of their way.

There were also problems within the Wildlife Club itself. Some vocal members felt that if the Cowboy shooters went away, their problems with the lawsuits would be over. There were also those who had no problem accepting the funds generated by the monthly matches yet provided little or no moral support and no physical help whatsoeveras you may recall the same problem was shared by the Little Red Hen.

To many of you, this may be a very familiar story. The thing that kept going through my mind as we struggled month after month was – “This makes no sense. It should not be this difficult to have a good time! It should not be this difficult to bring good people together to participate in the safest shooting sport you will ever see. A wonderful sport the entire family can enjoy.”

So when we met that Wednesday night, a decision had to be made. Do we continue to fight? Do we give up and the Sheyenne Valley Peacekeepers disband? Or do we come up with another plan? It was not an easy decision because, like many clubs, each member had put a lot of heart into everything we had accomplished and the thought of giving up was not easy. We decided we had been beat down once too often and would not hold another match at the wildlife club – even if we couldn’t find a new place to shoot. We still wanted to promote the sport so the New Shooter Seminar scheduled for Saturday would be held in our garage instead of the Wildlife club clubhouse. We planned to go to the club the following evening and remove all the props, targets and stands owned by individuals in our small group.

Then from the corner of the room, our tall quiet ‘Lodgepole’ softly mentioned – “We could maybe shoot on our land”.

Doing a double take – all ears perked up and I remember the words “You’re land?” coming from more than one pair of lips. He explained that he owned a quarter-section with an abandoned farmstead near Enderlin and said we could take a look at it to see if we’d be interested. We made a plan to meet for breakfast a week from Saturday then go to check the place out. In the meantime someone would check on any business related things to consider. We left the meeting with a feeling of hope and renewed excitement.

The next day, our website was updated to announce that all matches were canceled until further notice and the emails were forwarded to all the shooters we could think of. Emails came pouring back – “What’s going on?” “How can we help?” “Good luck finding a new place – we’re behind you.” “Please let us know when you get up and running again” and my favorite from a South Dakota pard – “Sometimes what we first think is a real disaster ends up being a blessing – we really are a family.”

The following Saturday, after a brief breakfast meeting, we drove to Lodgepole and Peggy’s property. It hadn’t been occupied for many, many years. Vandals had burned down the house and a few out buildings. The remaining buildings, with the exception of the small red barn, were beyond repair. The property was overgrown with trees, bushes and long grass and home to over a hundred old cars that had been vandalized also, leaving piles of scattered glass and debris. As we left our cars in the driveway and walked along the overgrown trail – we just took it all in – not saying a word. I don’t know who spoke first, but it wasn’t long before phrases like “This would be a great place for the berm.” “The shooting line could go here” “Won’t this shade be great!” “Look at all the room for

campers” “We could do a long range shoot!” “We could build permanent props so we wouldn’t have to set up and take down every time we have a match.” “Wouldn’t this be a great place for a fire ring?”

Renewed enthusiasm – renewed hope – renewed excitement - it felt wonderful.

The next step was to come up with a plan and put it into action. Once again, the core group – 14 this time, put starter money in the pot to get things off the ground. Quackr met with the Enderlin City Council to explain who we were and what we would like to do. The Council members thought it sounded like a great plan and that we would be a valuable addition to the community. We elected officers, wrote and adopted our bylaws, incorporated and secured insurance under our own name.

On May 5, 2007 work began and every Saturday, some Sundays, a few days off during the week and some evenings - rain or shine were spent cutting and burning trees and brush, removing stumps, building a berm, moving old cars, taking down buildings, clearing space, moving and removing fences. We patronized the local businesses, introducing ourselves and gaining their support. Members borrowed or provided whatever equipment they could lay their hands on and support poured in from shooting friends who were unable to physically be with us. Well over 800 man (and woman) hours were put in by the charter members and a handful of good friends so that on Saturday, July 21, 2007 we would be ready to host the first monthly match at our new home range. Fifty two shooters helped us celebrate that memorable day.

In 13 weeks the Sheyenne Valley Peacekeepers went from “We got nothin’ to lookie what we got!”. I am extremely proud to be a part of this wonderful group of people who are the Sheyenne Valley Peacekeepers charter members. And from the bottom of my heart thank Lodgepole and Peggy, Calico Cara and Loyel Manning, Cousin Roy and Gall Dixie, Dakota Rody, Duckota Quackr and Sassy Cat Sue, Helena Handcart and Wyatt Hurtz, my husband Doc Neilson and son, Johnny Otter for helping build a dream come true.

Thank you also to Chance Calhoun, Buck Skunk, Amp R Sand, BB Gunner, Obsessive Annie, Austa La Vista, Samantha Burkett, Avery Dockter, Colt Lancaster, Deadly Dale, Steph Miller, and Craig Huseby for your tremendous help. To my parents, Don and Lois Schmit for running errands and coming out to check on the progress of the range with fresh baked goodies or coolers of ice water in hand. And thank you to all our shooting pards, far and wide, for your words of support and continued encouragement.

“Sometimes what we first think is a real disaster ends up being a blessing – we really are a family.”

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Sheyenne Valley Peacekeepers, President

For more information, go to www.sheyennevalleypeacekeepers.com - come visit us sometime – we’ve only just begun – the best is yet to come!