

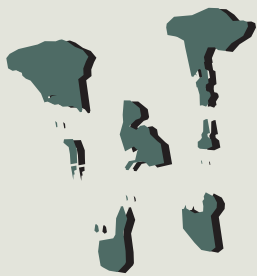


ON TARGET

The Archery in the Schools Program



By Steve LeMaster



West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) biologist Scott Warner can't help but get excited when he talks about the agency's Archery in the Schools Program.

Warner has had a helping hand in the popular program that now allows West Virginia middle school

and high school students—some of whom may have difficulty succeeding in other physical activities—to learn archery as part of their physical education.

In 2004, as part of a pilot program, WVDNR implemented Archery in the Schools in 20 public schools. WVDNR officials Warner and Dave McClung, along with Randy Eppling of the West Virginia Bowhunters Association, were trained by the National Archery Association as Level II instructors.

The trio in turn trained West Virginia physical education (P. E.) instructors from participating schools in archery history, safety, and shooting form. The P. E. teachers were required to attend a two-day training course that included 12 hours of instruction that qualified them for a Level I National Archery Association certification. Afterwards, each of the schools received an archery kit that consisted of 10

bows, five targets, safety netting, arrows, and related equipment. The kits cost \$2,000 a piece and provided students and teachers with top-quality equipment and safety gear.

Thanks to the Archery in the Schools Program, many West Virginia students who once dreaded P. E. class now look forward to getting off the bleachers and competing in a physical activity. Archery is accessible to people of all athletic abilities, including disabled students and those with physical limitations. And the star basketball or football players aren't always the best archers. Warner also stresses that students don't have to be hunters to enjoy archery.

WVDNR points to Kentucky, the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) founding state, as inspiration for the program. "The reason we got started had to do a lot with our neighboring state Kentucky," explains Warner. "Demographically, people in our states are about the same. Kentucky had great success with the program and we felt we could do the same." The Archery in the Schools Program first started in 22 Kentucky schools in 2002, under the name Archery: On Target for Life.

Kentucky now has more than 322 schools enrolled in the program, and 24 other states have also introduced NASP into their P. E. curriculums. NASP, which offers Olympic-style target archery in accordance with National Physical

Education Standards for 4th- through 12th-grade students, has received inquiries from 14 different countries interested in importing the archery program.


Archery is a life skill that offers excellent sport, scholarship, and recreational opportunities, Warner says. "There are so many different avenues you can take with the sport of archery," he adds. "Just look around at the number of archery tournaments. Who knows? The next Olympic archer may come from West Virginia." Warner says that archery target practice gives many students a constructive after-school outlet. Since the introduction of the archery program in Kentucky, school attendance rates have risen. Warner believes that WVDNR's archery program will benefit not only students but also teachers, program sponsors, and whole communities.

In March 2005, the third annual NASP tournament was held in Louisville, Kentucky. The event attracted more than 1,800 students and is considered the largest student archery event in United States history. Since the tournament's debut in 2003, participation has tripled. "The tremendous growth and popularity of this program is astounding," says Roy Grimes, an aide to Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Tom Bennett and national coordinator for NASP.

The program has also received strong support from national organizations, including the National Wild Turkey Federation, and from archery experts like Matt McPherson, founder and CEO of

Matthews Inc. and inventor of the Genesis bow. The Genesis is the first one-size-fits-all bow that automatically covers draw lengths from 15 to 30 inches. The bow enables beginners of all ages and sizes to learn the sport in a precise and safe fashion. Weighing only 20 pounds, the Genesis bow eliminates let-off and offers light draw weights of 10 to 20 pounds.

At the 2004 Archery Trade Association Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana, McPherson personally matched the National Wild Turkey Federation's \$100,000 donation to NASP. WVDNR's Archery in the Schools Program, as well as the archery clubs it has inspired in schools around the state, has had no shortage of local support. Sponsors include (but are not limited to) Gary's Sporting Goods, the International Bowhunting Organization, Parker Bows, Stateline Hunt Club, Warner Law Offices, the West Virginia Bowhunters Association, the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts, and WVDNR.

WVDNR held additional training sessions for P. E. teachers in March and May of 2005 and is planning the first statewide Archery in the Schools tournament next year. The tournament, with divisions for both middle school and high school students, will be held in January or February. In terms of popularity, positive impact on students, and community support, WVDNR's Archery in the Schools Program has hit a bull's-eye. For more information, visit www.wvdnr.gov and click on the Archery in the Schools subheader. 

Steve LeMaster is sports editor of the Floyd County Times. He has covered the NASCAR Nextel Cup Series and appreciates outdoor activities and auto racing as much as any other sports. LeMaster also contributes to Kentucky Monthly, Kentucky Living, and The Cats' Pause. He has also worked as a radio commentator and sports talk show cohost.

WVDNR's Archery in the Schools Program is popular with both physical education teachers and students.

