

*George Wittorff was appointed to the position of "Special Advisor" to the Board of the NRAA at its May meeting. He was given the goal of reviewing the membership issues facing the movement at a national level, and developing and investigating strategies that State Associations and local clubs could gainfully use in a concerted effort to attract and retain members.*

*This is the second of a series of articles aimed at achieving that goal*

## **ASAPS**

*Advancing Shooting as A Positive Sport*

### **An Example of What a Positive Approach Can Achieve**

Following the initial article in this series, I was pleasantly surprised at the number of fellow shooters who took time to contact me directly to offer their thoughts and ideas on the subject of Membership. I have undertaken to collate these responses, particularly those with a positive approach to the issue and present them at a later stage as an article that other clubs and members may see as worthwhile, and worthy of trying at the local level.

The majority of responses offered ideas that work to a greater or lesser extent while some others identified issues they believe contribute to declining membership, but other than expressing the opinion that "they" should be doing something about it fail to offer solutions.

I am concentrating on the approaches that address the issue and offer positive solutions.

One such success story is the CATTS (Come And Try Target Shooting).

This program is currently operating out of the QRA, and is coordinated by David Gardiner, who while being employed by the QRA as an Admin and Ground Maintenance Officer does much of the CATTS work in a discretionary role, as does other staff who field queries and ensure a consistent message is given to the public on first contact. An indicator of the program's success is that a 'graduate' has now begun helping with the initial CATTS sessions.

The following description of the program is the result of an interview I conducted with David.

The CATTS program is simple. It is designed to offer an introduction to members of the public who are interested in trying target shooting, and then following up with further coaching/support which leads to the new arrivals being placed in clubs under the guidance of a club mentor.

Simple doesn't necessarily equate to easy. David and his team have put a great deal of time into preparation for this program to succeed.

It begins with an initial letter drop. At a local level this can be done via something like having a brochure included in the local 'free' newspaper. It can also be done by producing a brochure/pamphlet and placing in sports stores, barber shops, newsagencies, etc.

Now that the program is established, it is self-propelling, with word of mouth referrals filling newcomers' places.

The QRA have also placed a spot on their excellent website.

A click on one section of the article gives a description of Target Shooting and various disciplines that are accessible, plus other general information for beginners. A click on another section of the article gives a form that the beginner can fill out and send as an email to the QRA, expressing an interest in having a try. They are also given the choice of a phone number to make direct contact.

In both cases, the contact is followed up with a reply, with information as to when the shoot will take place; usually once per month with a limit of 8 per session.

Day 1 begins with the participants arriving at the QRA Office, where they are met by the organiser and told of the day's proceedings. They also fill in Form 33, which is a Queensland requirement to cover legal issues and insurance.

They then proceed to the shooting area at 300m where they are introduced to the safety rules and day's format they will be required to follow.

The QRA program offers an introduction to both TR and F Class. Two targets are used; one for TR and the other for F Class. Each target has an experienced coach, while a third volunteer oversees both targets as well as offering a commentary to the waiting shooter. Each rifle is supported by a front rest, and 10 shots are fired by each participant on each target.

At the end of the day, the participants are taken to the butts to examine the target at close range, and if manual targets, see how marking is carried out. Question time also takes place at this time.

The day is completed with a hot drink or similar back at the clubhouse along with a debrief. At this stage, those involved are invited back, and according to David Gardiner, 90%+ sign up for the second session.

Initially the program then followed with a class-room session of 1-1½ hours which covered basic issues such as position, hold etc., followed by a session at the zero range. While beneficial, David Gardiner explained that this session has been discontinued due principally to the lack of volunteers available.

Typically now, the next session occurs on normal range days. The new shooters arrive at the QRA office an hour before shooting where procedures are gone over again before being allocated 1 or 2 per club. From there the newbies are dispersed to clubs and to people within the club that have indicated they are prepared to mentor a new shooter. David reports that the response from club members has been wonderful, and has met the needs of the new shooters.

David says the new shooters are told that the CATTs program will continue to be available to them should they have any questions or concerns regarding their experiences so far.

From this stage, the clubs and in particular, the mentor follows and supports the new shooter. According to David Gardiner, *"the resultant success of the program is*

*entirely dependent on support and follow-up by the clubs.”* QRA staff also ensure that participants are contacted after the initial session and subsequent club Range Days. This continues until the participants build up a relationship with their club.

Of the approximately 50 people who took part in a twelve month period, there has been a retention rate of close to 50%. An excellent result. However, the program's experience to date shows that while the age range is from 12 – 80 yrs of age, the best age to target in terms of 'stickability' is those in their 40s or plus.

Costs:

The QRA subsidises this program. In addition, the QRA has secured a grant from the Queensland Dept of Sport and Recreation within a program to get more members of the community active through sport and recreation.

The QRA also has supplied equipment, and various shooting members of the association have also donated equipment to assist in the running of this program.

During the initial stages, rifles and ammunition are provided. In addition to donated quality rifles, QRA has purchased 3 rifles which eventually will be on-sold to new members. Also available are 12 shooting coats, spotting scopes and earmuffs, etc.

The participants are required to pay \$20 for the first session and \$25 for each of the range days until they join the club. This is seen as important in creating a sense of value to those participating.

David Gardiner reports that the continued success of this program will depend on ensuring that enough regular shooters commit to mentoring and supporting the program. He is adamant that this should not mean that mentors should have to forego their own shooting, hence the need for one mentor per new member.

He also re-emphasises that encouragement, follow-up and a welcoming club environment all contribute to what is a positive and successful recruiting tool that can be used, or modified by any club or association committed to increasing our membership.

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No doubt some clubs have tried similar programs. However, if you have had success with a membership scheme that radically differs from the CATTs model, I would be pleased to hear of it so that it may be shared.

If you wish to contact me by email, my address is: [wittorff@bigpond.net.au](mailto:wittorff@bigpond.net.au)