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IN SPORTS
PHELPS ADDS 18TH GOLD TO COLLECTION

THEIR CIVIC DUTY

Those who plan to vote take it seriously



Fernando Salazar/The Wichita Eagle
Laurie Pivonka comes from a long line of voters.



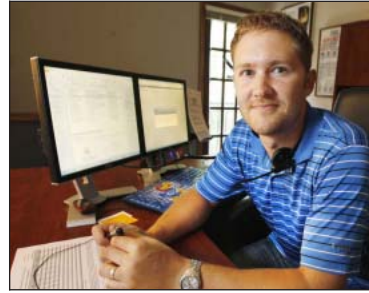
Jaime Green/The Wichita Eagle
Ciara Hernandez said she sees how votes have consequences.



Bo Rader/The Wichita Eagle
52-year-old Patrick Sanchez is an Iraq veteran and a voter.



Mike Hutmacher/File photo



Fernando Salazar/The Wichita Eagle
Stockbroker Tim Penner says you can't gripe if you don't vote.



Brian Corn/The Wichita Eagle
Jennifer Baysinger thinks change starts at the local level.



Travis Heying/The Wichita Eagle
Phil Dagnault said he feels it's a patriotic obligation to vote.

BY FRED MANN
The Wichita Eagle

Back in her school days, she looked forward to the time she could vote because it meant she would get one of those "I voted" stickers.

Ciara Hernandez, 24, takes voting more seriously now. She is reading and talking about issues, learning how to become a well-educated voter.

Like others her age, she said, she's starting to realize that decisions made at the polls have consequences.

"It's not a fun thing to do to get a sticker anymore, it's something that's going to affect the next



four years of our life," she said. Hernandez, an independent, said she hasn't decided whether she will vote in Tuesday's

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LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING FACILITY

County rethinks funding for center

BY DEB GRUVER
The Wichita Eagle

Some Sedgwick County commissioners say they are hesitant to go forward with their piece of the Heartland Preparedness Center, going up at I-135 and K-96, because of the county's financial crunch.

The city and county agreed to build a law enforcement training facility at the center, joining the Kansas National Guard at what would be the nation's first homeland defense center merging city and county public safety and the military. The National Guard's part of the center is under construction.

The city approved a long-term capital improvement plan in March that includes money for the training center. Commissioners will vote Aug. 15 on the county's budget

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HANDGUN CLASSES CATER TO WOMEN



Fernando Salazar/The Wichita Eagle
Kristie Wichert attends a women-only class at Bullseye Shooting Range.

More women learning to shoot guns

BY SARAH TUCKER
The Wichita Eagle

Becky Blackburn and Kristie Wichert have never shot a gun before. But on a Thursday evening, they were sitting in a classroom at Bullseye Shooting Range in Wichita with four other women to learn how to shoot handguns.

"The reason why I'm here tonight is so I don't feel foolish if I went to a firing range on my own and looked like a newbie," Blackburn said. "I want a good education tonight so I feel comfortable if I go someplace else and do it and not have a man looking at me like, 'What are you doing?'"

The two friends had driven from Hutchinson to learn how to shoot a gun. They chose Bullseye because of the women-only handgun class.

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AT LEAST 10 WILDFIRES BURNING IN OKLAHOMA

Residents find little left in burned Oklahoma town

BY TIM TALLEY
Associated Press

LUTHER, Okla. — While residents of one Oklahoma town sifted through their charred belongings Saturday to salvage what they could after a roaring wildfire that may have been deliberately set, residents in several other towns were being ordered to evac-

uate.

The fire near Luther, about 25 miles northeast of Oklahoma City, destroyed nearly five dozen homes and other buildings before firefighters were able to gain some measure of control Saturday.

The Luther fire was one of at

Please see **OKLAHOMA**, Page 14A



Rebecca Kolar stands at the entrance to the house where she and her husband, Douglas, lived with their two children for 13 years before fire destroyed it Saturday in Luther, Okla.

Jim Beckel/Associated Press

Matthew T. Voth, MD

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WOMEN

From Page 1A

Blackburn and Wichert said they intend to use their guns not just for protection but for fun, too.

"I don't buy purses; I don't buy shoes," Blackburn said. "So, this is my new little hobby."

The pair are examples of a growing trend: More and more women are becoming interested in guns and learning how to shoot.

Numbers rising

According to statistics from the Kansas Attorney General, 2,491 women submitted concealed-carry applications in fiscal 2012. That represents more than a 57 percent increase in applicants from the previous year.

In Sedgwick County, 512 women applied for concealed-carry licenses in fiscal 2012, a 43.8 percent increase from the previous year.

Patricia Stoneking, owner and instructor at Target Master Shooting Academy in Bonner Springs, says she's seeing more women in her beginner classes and on the range.

"One or two years ago, there would be one or two women and six men in a class," she said.

Now the ratio is reversed. "When you're dealing with it every day, it's obvious to see the increase of women shooting," she said.

Stoneking, who is also the president of the Kansas State Rifle Association, attributes the growing numbers of women and guns to a "concerted effort" by the National Rifle Association and state associations to help women become more comfortable and welcome on a shooting range.

One way for women to learn about guns is Women on Target, an instructional gun clinic for women sponsored by the NRA and its state affiliates.

"Instructors walk (women) through, and give them a taste of what it's like to shoot," Stoneking said. "They meet other women and get to explore and enjoy the sport of shooting safely and comfortably."

Maria Brock attended Bullseye's women-only handgun class to learn how to shoot different guns. Although she is afraid of guns, Brock said she chose Bullseye because of the shooting options the class offered.

"It said you could try out different weapons, which is something I wanted to do," Brock said. "I know nothing about guns."

Guns and the outdoors

Women are becoming interested in more than handguns and concealed carry. Numbers also are up in shooting sports and hunting.

According to data from the National Sporting Goods Association, female participation in target shooting increased about 50 percent or from 3.3 million to 5 million nationally from 2001 to 2011, and female participation in hunting increased from 1.8 million to 2.6 million during the same time span.

Women also are purchasing more hunting licenses.

In Kansas, the number of resident women purchasing hunting licenses has grown 178 percent between 2006 and 2010, according to data from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.



Fernando Salazar/The Wichita Eagle

Before they get to shoot, the women in a class at Bullseye Shooting Range practice their shooting stance, grip and aim with plastic pistols.

ism.

Jami McCabe coordinates Kansas' Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program in the spring and fall. She said all the classes – sponsored by Wildlife, Parks and Tourism – are popular and fill up quickly, especially the shooting classes.

Shooting "is something more and more women are doing," McCabe said.

McCabe, who has been the program's state coordinator for the past 11 years, said she's heard of more women-only sporting clay shoots, hunter education classes and concealed-carry classes.

"That leads me to think a lot more women are getting interested and involved," McCabe said.

A new target

Wichita's three indoor ranges have seen more women in their stores for a couple of years now.

Mike Relihan, owner of Bullseye Shooting Range, said he's seen a "dramatic explosion" of female customers. Business is up 60 percent since he bought the store more than two years ago, and half the increase is female, he said.

At Gander Mountain Academy, instructor Randy Pugh said they're also seeing more women in their classes, as well as on the range and in shooting sports in general.

"Just based on what we see here, probably one-third of our clientele are female," Pugh said.

Pugh thinks the increase of female shooters is due to better education about guns, as well as a changing climate toward guns and more interest in home defense. It also doesn't hurt that stores and gun manufacturers are targeting their newest demographic.

"Marketing for women has increased drastically over the

last couple years," Pugh said. Gander Mountain sells more "pretty guns" and hosts women-only classes, ladies' night

at its shooting range and even Mother's Day specials, Pugh said. Bullseye sells more pink

guns and accessories than before, and Relihan said he's made an effort to "soften" up the store to make women feel comfortable.

"When I bought this place it was like an old white guy's club," Relihan said.

He changed the targets that greeted customers at the front door to targets of zombies and monsters and made purchases he never expected.

"We sell purses now," Relihan said.

Don Holman, owner of The Bullet Stop, also has seen an increase in the number of women in his store but takes a different approach: "Everyone has to learn together," Holman said. "Women need to compete with men."

To Holman, women-only classes encourage the "weaker sex" mentality.

Still, The Bullet Stop does sell purses and pink ear protectors and hosts a ladies' day for members every Wednesday. Women-only classes are offered only if there's enough interest, he said.

No longer a boys club

By the end of the Bullseye

class, each woman knew the proper shooting stance, how to grip and shoot a gun, and had gotten to practice with different weapons on the range.

Sarah Sotomayor and her mother, Katy, enjoyed themselves, though they almost skipped the class to go shopping.

Katy said she was learning how to shoot because her husband bought her a gun. Sarah said she was attending the class to prove to her father she could shoot well enough to get a gun, preferably a pink one.

"He gives me a hard time because I'm a girl," Sarah said. "I'm his daughter; I'm his baby."

Although she was initially nervous, almost all of Sarah's shots were in the bull's-eye on her target sheet.

"It's pretty impressive," Sarah said. "I'm really proud of myself for that, too."

"I definitely want to come back and shoot some more."

Reach Sarah Tucker at 316-268-6514 or stucker@wichitaeagle.com.

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