

THE OUTDOORS REPORT

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Gunning for fun

First-ever Hunter Appreciation Day a hit

THE Manitoba Wildlife Federation's (MWF) Reg Wiebe is one of Manitoba's most dedicated, driven and enthusiastic hunters. And in addition to administering Manitoba's hunter education program, Wiebe took on the extra task of co-ordinating the first-ever Hunting Appreciation Day. Held in Winnipeg at Whittier Park on Saturday, Sept. 26, the event attracted over 300 people and Wiebe estimates that about half



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were non-hunters. And by happy circumstance, this event coincided with the province's declaration of Sept. 26 as Provincial Hunting Day.

"I was especially taken by the two young dads who each had three youngsters with them plus their wives," said Wiebe. "Both gentlemen were introduced to hunting on one of the MWF's mentored deer hunts and now wanted to show their families what this hunting 'thing' was all about. It was pretty cool!"

Wiebe went on to note that these gentlemen, and many of the other hunters in the crowd, could all have been in the field that day yet all chose to introduce friends and family members to hunting.



Trained retrievers in action at Manitoba's first Hunting Appreciation Day at Whittier Park.

The events were wide and varied and worked well to illustrate the finer points of hunting.

"The hunting retriever demonstrations were fabulous and a definite crowd-pleaser," noted Wiebe. "People were amazed at what those highly trained dogs could do and developed an appreciation of the work that goes into making a good hunting dog."

According to Wiebe, the archery demonstrations were a big hit and there was even an opportunity for attendees to try their hand at shooting a bow. And Wiebe noted that, "Some of these non-hunters were amazingly accurate for their first time shooting a bow. Some even said they'd like to try bowhunting."

The muzzle-loading demonstrations were a big hit and not the least of which were the fancy "pioneer" outfits worn by some of the muzzle-loading instructors. Wiebe hastened to add that the muzzle-loaders only shot "blanks," which only resulted in loud noises and lots of smoke. A sidebar was that a wedding was going on at nearby Fort Gibraltar and the muzzle-loading noise drew some interested onlookers from that event. The enterprising groom then arranged for a muzzle-loading tribute to his new bride. The "mountain men" were only too happy to oblige and, to the delight of the bride and her guests, a "three-gun salute" greeted them as they left the fort. That will be a wedding to remember!

The MWF had arranged for Newfoundland's Shane Mahoney to be the guest speaker. Mahoney, who is with the Newfoundland Wildlife Department, is a renowned lecturer on the ethics and meaning of hunting and is in demand all across North America. Mahoney delivered a very moving talk on hunting, with emphasis on the spirituality of the hunt and explained in great detail why we were "born to hunt." Mahoney, according to Wiebe, said that "We hunt because we enjoy it; it is in us a species." Amen, brother. A wild game tasting "completed the circle."

"We had all manner of wild game prepared in a variety of ways," said Wiebe. "This was a big hit with our

guests, many of whom had never tasted wild meat before."

Given the concern over public health these days, Wiebe took pains to point out to me that the MWF had obtained a permit to serve the food and that all the people who handled the food had their food-handling permits from the relevant authorities. Talk about attention to detail!

"We started out to inform the general public about hunting and we exceeded beyond our wildest expectations," said Wiebe. "We'll definitely be doing this again next year!"