

Barb Woods gets some pointers on shotgun shooting techniques at the Becoming an Outdoorswoman event last weekend



Women's event gets a big BOW

Darlene Garnham of the Manitoba Wildlife Federation could barely contain her excitement as she described the incredible success of the 2009 Becoming an Outdoorswoman (BOW) event. Held over the Mother's Day weekend and hosted by the Circle Square Ranch near Austin, the event drew 53 participants and 22 instructors. The concept for the BOW weekends originated in the United States as an effort to encourage more women to participate in outdoor activities and correct a hunting and fishing gender imbalance greatly skewed towards men.



ROBERT SOPUCK

"I'm very proud that Manitoba was the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement the BOW program," said Garnham, "and that the Manitoba Wildlife Federation was the first NGO in North America to sponsor this event. I still can't believe it's been 16 years of teaching outdoors skills to women."

Garnham waxed rhapsodic about this year's weekend. "The enthusiasm, energy, and camaraderie were difficult to describe. You could feel it in the air."

The event's organizers aim for a course mix of

one-third hunting, one-third fishing and one-third devoted to other outdoor activities. Garnham took special pride in the fact that a number of former students are now returning as instructors. One of those former students flies back to Manitoba every year from New Jersey to provide instruction in fly-fishing techniques.

In addition to fly fishing, instruction was provided in archery/bowhunting, rifle shooting, shotgunning, survival skills, outdoor mechanics, map and compass techniques, birding, cooking outdoors with wild game, GPS, wildlife photography, fly tying, and shooting a muzzleloader. Participants who had completed the new Hunter Education course online could also take their written practical tests to obtain their Hunter Safety Certificate.

There's also a course with the intriguing title, Knotty Girls, that's all about knot tying. Garnham noted that the Manitoba BOW course is always seeking to expand the course list and is thinking of offering a wild turkey hunting seminar in 2010. Garnham said while they don't push the hunting and firearms aspects, the majority of the students take at least one of the courses in those areas.

She noted that the introduction to white-tailed deer hunting seminar was very popular.

"I'm so exhausted after it's all over," said Garnham. "But the enthusiasm of the women makes it

all worthwhile. I'm especially partial to our take-a-kid-outdoors seminar that instructs students in the best ways to introduce youngsters to the outdoors."

Garnham takes great pride in the democratic aspect of the Manitoba BOW event.

"This year the age range of our women was from 18 to the mid-70s and included women from all walks of life. We had homemakers, nurses, teachers, bankers, food-serving people, professors, students and even one pilot. Everybody got along great and I know a lot of fast friendships were made."

It is obvious that Garnham, and by extension all of the women, had a profound experience over the BOW weekend.

I was so intrigued by her description that I meekly suggested I might have something to offer as an instructor next year — after all they do have some male instructors.

Garnham paused and said, "Well, Bob, thanks for the offer, but we are turning out such knowledgeable and skilled women that most of our instructors are now women. But if we have an opening we'll let you know." Oh well.

The Becoming an Outdoorswoman course is revolutionizing hunting in Manitoba and that is a good thing. And all I can say is, "You go, girl!"