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Honoring the Leaders Among Us

Second Amendment Sisterhood

by Katie Pavlich

A fast-growing group of women is taking the push for gun rights to a whole new level.

In an age of iPods, iPads, cell phones, computers, video games and endless electronics to keep us inside and distracted, one group is getting women back in touch with the great outdoors through the promotion of shooting sports.

Judy Rhodes is a Texas native who grew up around firearms and started shooting when she was 4 years old. She is the founder of DIVA Women Outdoors Worldwide (WOW), originally known as Texas Women's Shooting Sports. Rhodes founded the organization after seeing the legacy of the great outdoors die over two generations and decided she wasn't going to let that happen again. In 1999, she contacted 16 of her friends who were active in hunting and outdoor clubs in the Dallas area and decided to start an outdoor club that was for women only.

"It's women all across the world that we introduce to the outdoors, and we always say we help them discover their outdoor passion," Rhodes tells *Townhall*.

DIVA WOW is heavily focused on education—supporting, encouraging and teaching women and their children the positive benefits the great outdoors and firearms have to offer. Members of DIVA WOW hold clinics to teach members how to use all types of firearms, including modern sporting rifles, shotguns, pistols and black-powder rifles. But outdoors education isn't limited to just firearms; women can also participate in clinics about archery, crossbows, fly-fishing, dog training and even map orientation.

The name of the organization was changed to Women Outdoors Worldwide after women from all over the country expressed interest in joining the group but weren't keen on joining a group based solely in Texas. The acronym WOW is used because Rhodes noticed that the first thing women were saying after shooting for the first time was, "Wow." Women in the group also call themselves "divas" and use DIVA in the organization title because, well, they don't look like stereotypical hunters and outdoorsmen.

Rhodes credits the instant gratification of shooting with the



Judy Rhodes teaches the next generation of women how to shoot during a DIVA WOW clinic to promote outdoor activity. (Photo courtesy: DIVA WOW)

success of her organization, whether it's hitting a clay pigeon for the first time, forming a tight group of shots on a paper target or women simply having the gratification of knowing they are capable of protecting themselves and their families.

"It is very empowering when women take control of their own destiny and security now," Rhodes says. "We always say we don't have time to call 911. You really don't, because even all the red tape you have to get through when you're even trying to report a crime. 'Are you sure you saw this, what's your name? Give us everything.' By that time, someone has already come into your home and has created a home invasion by the time you try and get someone to come help you."

Safety and education are key components within DIVA WOW. Rhodes believes shooting should be taught not only to women but also to children so they can learn to respect firearms and use them wisely.

"Education for children is very important. The way you teach them to use a computer or teach them how to read or ride a bike, it's the same as teaching them to use a firearm," Rhodes tells *Townhall*.

Since the expansion and influence of the Internet, Rhodes has seen an increase of at least 50 members a week to the organization



Members of DIVA WOW attend this year's NRA convention and get their picture taken with legendary musician Ted Nugent. (Photos courtesy: DIVA WOW)

and has liaisons located all over the world, including South America, Europe, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, leading to thousands of members.

"For every one woman we introduce to the outdoors, they bring seven. We run in packs, and we really enjoy each other's company," Rhodes says.

And far as the liberal anti-Second Amendment women are concerned, Rhodes has run out of patience for their intolerant, anti-gun attitude and is tired of being told what to do.

"We used to be very nice, and we had let those women take over and control our space, and now we don't care. We have just as much right as they do to control our environment, to have handguns, to wear fur coats. Who's to say that these women can tell us that we can't have this?" Rhodes says. "We're just taking back our rights now after losing it for two generations of trying to be nice. We don't have to be nice anymore."

Cheryl Long, director of communications for DIVA WOW, has been by Rhodes' side since the beginning. Long saw the organization as an opportunity to do something she was just learning about after marrying a man who enjoyed shooting as a hobby. Long was in her late 40s before she really started getting into shooting when she moved to Texas. Before marrying her husband, Long was afraid of firearms but started taking lessons. Shooting has turned into one of her favorite pastimes.

"[Shooting] has opened up a huge world that I didn't know existed. It has completely changed my views of life and my values, of the outdoors, of my friendships. It has totally changed my life," Long tells *Townhall*. "I'm an outdoor girl. I'd rather be out in the yard. I'd rather be outside in the clean air, and I feel alive when I'm outside."

Like Rhodes, Long believes strongly in showing children the reality of firearms and that refusing to educate children about firearms is irresponsible.

"Show them the consequences, show them the reality. Don't make it so it's something forbidden and unknown and secretive. I think that's a big mistake," Long says. "It's just being responsible to know how to handle a gun. What if somebody had one and nobody around you knew how to

unload it and make it safe?"

According to Long, setting goals and successfully meeting them while watching the organization grow have been the greatest accomplishments throughout the years.

"We laugh, and we love, and we're each other's biggest cheerleaders in life," Long says.

Cynthia Desch, news editor for DIVA WOW, joined the organization in August 2004. Desch owned a hunting business based in Quebec, Canada, with her husband and met Rhodes and Long at a Texas Trophy Hunter show in Houston.

"I think it took me about two seconds to decide I was with the girls I wanted to be with, and I joined," Desch tells *Townhall*.

A few months later, Desch became the Pennsylvania liaison and started holding clinics to spread the organization in her state. Desch now writes the monthly newsletter for divawow.com.

"What I really saw was an organization with really an opportunity for personal growth on so many levels. The confidence of learning how to handle a firearm, getting along with likeminded women and having fun," Desch says. "I have found my niche in life."

Firearms companies have also started paying attention to the potential women can bring to the industry.

"[Women] are a whole new sales division—what I've seen with our organization and the response and respect we've been receiving and the fact that they're acknowledging that we're opening up completely new sales divisions that they previously hadn't even thought of," Desch says. "We're a huge, huge wave coming at them, and where the mom is, the kids are."

Rhodes, Long and Desch all agree that DIVA WOW is not just an affiliation or a group of people with shared interests; it's a place of healthy empowerment and lifelong friendship for women.

"We're more than just an organization, we're a sisterhood," Rhodes says. •

Katie Pavlich is news editor for Townhall.com and a contributing editor for Townhall Magazine.