

# College Ranges on the Rise

[December 2013 Features](#) — 10 December 2013 — By Shane Townsend

## Real-life examples and advice

Young people come to our shooting sports traditions in many ways. Many of us are born into families where hunting is as much a part of life as Grandma's favorite sayings. Others come later when something seizes them and sets them about punching bull's-eyes or dusting clays. Some, still with untapped potential and passion, are awaiting a chance to join us.

Colleges across the U.S. are investing in such a chance by starting programs and building ranges. Students are swarming, say officials. Young people from diverse backgrounds are gathering in clubs, varsity teams and informal shooting communities.

To learn how colleges are meeting shooter's needs, *The Range Report* recently talked to leaders from colleges in various stages of building and operating new shooting ranges. From these discussions emerged common ideas, innovative approaches and hard-won insights that can save time, worry and money for others.

## Four perspectives



Clemson University keeps adding shooting classes, and they keep filling up.

### 1. Clemson University

Rick Willey, a 4-H natural resource specialist, discussed the shooting sports facility at Clemson University, which is a four-year public research university in Clemson, S.C., with some 19,000 students.

♣ **Facilities:** Clemson's Pickens Bend Range includes a covered 100-yard rifle range with a 50-yard line and a pistol qualifying overlay; two skeet/traps overlay fields, with 5-Stand on one of them; a 1,500-square-foot building; a 1,500-square-foot pavilion; and bathrooms, office and storage area.

♣ **Cost:** estimated at \$700,000

♣ **Primary Funding:** Tuition for Clemson's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management was the primary funder. The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources contributed \$56,000 for trap and skeet machines. The range also raised \$10,000 from private contributions.

♣ **Year opened:** 2010

♣ **Unique insight:** If you build it, they will come. "We take 12 students per class to keep the quality high," said Rick Willey, "We keep adding classes thinking, 'Okay, we'll hit a threshold.' But they just keep filling up within just a few days. Right now we have 37 full classes, and I expect we'll have 40 next semester." The shooting sports curriculum started in 2004 as a single

for-credit course on Hunting & Shooting Sports Traditions and has since grown to include Hunting Traditions, Riflery, Shotgun Sports, Turkey Hunting, Women's Hunting, Women's Shotgun and Archery.



Connors State College built the first shooting facility owned by a college in Oklahoma. It serves as a great recruiting tool.

## 2. Connors State College

Biology Professor Dr. Stuart Woods, Shooting Coach Rob Holtfreter and Shotgun Team President Dalton Self discussed the shooting sports facility at Connors State College, which is a

public two-year college in Warner, Okla., with some 2,250 students.

♣ **Facilities:** Connors State's facility at Harding Ranch & Research Station includes a combination trap and skeet range and 51 shooting stations.

♣ **Cost:** \$49,000

♣ **Funding:** \$34,000 came from a grant from the Oklahoma State Regents Higher Education Gear-Up summer program; \$8,000 came from National Shooting Sports Foundation's Collegiate Shooting Sports Initiative; and \$7,000 came from the college's cattle operation.

♣ **Year opened:** 2013

♣ **Unique insight:** "We found out there was no shooting facility owned by a college in Oklahoma," said Dr. Stuart Woods. "All these young people who were shooting in high school had nowhere to go. So, we realized this was a good recruiting tool." His best recommendations: "First, look at the needs of the high schools in your service area. Are there Future Farmers of America [FFA], 4-H or any other shooting teams there already? See if you have a market. Second, look into the location; that's going to be a major part of overall costs. Then, start looking at the money."



Collegiate shooting facilities, like the one at Georgia Southern University, can serve as models for future college ranges.

## 3. Georgia Southern University

Gene Sherry, Director of Campus Recreation, discussed the shooting sports facility at Georgia Southern University, which is a four-year public research university in Statesboro, Ga., with some 20,000 students.

♣ **Facilities:** Georgia Southern's Shooting Sports Education Center will be a 30,000-square-foot multi-purpose indoor facility with sixteen 25-meter firing lanes for handgun and air rifle, sixteen 25-meter archery lanes, two classrooms and administrative and support spaces.

♣ **Cost:** estimated at \$5.8 million

♣ **Primary Funding:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources contributed \$3.3 million; Georgia Southern University contributed \$1.5 million; City of Statesboro contributed \$500,000; Easton Sports Development Foundation contributed \$500,000; and the National Shooting Sports Foundation's Collegiate Shooting Sports Initiative contributed \$25,000.

- ♣ **Year opened:** Breaking ground in 2014 to open in the spring of 2015
- ♣ **Unique insight:** “First and foremost our center will help the recruitment, retention and graduation of the Georgia Southern University students,” said Sherry. Then, he envisions it as a community center that will be an activity hub and economic engine for the region.



#### 4. Michigan State University

Michael Galella, Manager of the Demmer Center, discussed the shooting sports facility at Michigan State University, which is a four-year public university in East Lansing, Mich., with some 37,000 students.

♣ **Facilities:** Michigan State’s Demmer Center is a 24,000-square-foot facility on 4.5 acres with sixteen 50-foot firing lanes for handgun and air rifle and five archery ranges, a retail area, conference rooms and other amenities.



Michigan State University’s Demer Center attracts more than what you would think of as your typical college students.

- ♣ **Cost:** \$3.5 million
- ♣ **Primary Funding:** Edward, Laura, William, Linda and Marguerite Demmer; Bradford Breuer; Archery Trade Association; Easton Foundation; Hal Jean Glassen Memorial Foundation; Michigan National Wild Turkey Federation; Tom Cobb; Brass Pro Shops; Michigan Department of Natural Resources; MSU Department Criminal Justice; Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund; MSU Department of Fisheries and Wildlife; Safari Club International – Lansing; and the Capitol City Rifle Club.
- ♣ **Year opened:** 2009
- ♣ **Unique insight:** “Think about it as a business,” said Galella, “Define your mission; establish your standard operating procedures; think about your computer systems, contact management systems, point of sale systems, scheduling systems and all you need to effectively and efficiently run a business.”

“Your competition,” he says, “is not another shooting range. It’s movie theaters and bowling alleys. We’re vying for disposable income.”



## A Passion for Life

“The new range is amazing. It’s crazy. I’d never shot skeet in my life until I tried out for the team. I’d always dove hunted and duck hunted. But, my best friend told me I should try out. So, we went down there and tried it. And, I love it. It’ll be a hobby and a passion I’ll have for the rest of my life.” – Dalton Self, Connors State College Shotgun Team President, at a shooting station.

### 13 Lessons, Questions & Thoughts

Despite differences in their size, budgets, goals and the makeup of their communities and campuses, these ranges have some shared experiences and insights. Here are a few.

1. **Get leaders on board:** Connors State College President Tim Falgyn inspired their shooting sports facility. Elsewhere, presidents and other leaders played important roles in planning, funding, building and sustaining the range. Show leaders how the range will support the college’s mission. Involve the police chief and the school’s attorney early to navigate regulations and to ensure a safe campus.
2. **Engage diverse audiences:** A facility may focus on a particular class, club or team, but greater value may lie in its ability to appeal to and serve broader audiences. Can you partner with 4-H, FFA, schools, minority-serving organizations or others? Can you host regional or international competition?  
“We’ve reached out to the community and everyone in shooting sports to let them know we’re heading down this road,” said Georgia Southern University’s Gene Sherry, “We’re university owned, but within five years I imagine we’ll have partners that bring the shooting sports together.”
3. **Offer diverse programming:** Audience influences programming, but programming builds audience. Look at who is on campus and in the surrounding communities. What can you offer: shotgun, rifle, pistol, air gun and archery? Can you make it interesting? What partners can help you?  
“We will only be as successful as our programs,” said Georgia Southern’s Gene Sherry. “That’s why we need partners and outreach to make sure we make the most of the facility.”  
To make the most of the facility, the Michigan State University’s Demmer Center offers activities to people from across the campus and community. They serve archery and firearms shooters; work on research and education projects with colleges; serve schools and youth groups; offer date-night packages with restaurants; and host fundraisers for community causes.
4. **Build to meet the need:** A facility’s design helps determine its use.  
“Bigger is always better,” said the Demmer Center’s Michael Galella. Leaders at each school see a need for more space. Some are planning and fundraising for expansion.
5. **Partner with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR):** Each state has access to Pittman-Robertson Act funds, which can be used to build ranges. The DNR pitched and largely funded the Georgia Southern University facility. Equivalent agencies in other states have provided technical assistance and helped bring shooters to ranges in their states.
6. **First-timers will fill the room:** “Of the 11,000 people who have shot at our facility,” said Galella, “I’d say about 80 percent of them have been first-time shooters.”  
Other ranges had similar observations and the consensus was this: College ranges are

educational. They introduce people to the shooting sports. And, they teach people of all ages how to safely and ethically handle firearms. So, invest in certified coaches, safety officers, equipment and best practices to create a safe and comfortable learning environment.

7. **Research sources of funding:** College-based shooting facilities are finding funding from their colleges, DNRs, nearby communities, individuals, foundations, fundraising events, NSSF's Collegiate Shooting Sports Initiative and other grant programs.

8. **Choose contractors wisely:** Dr. Stuart Woods of Connors State College recommends working with contractors who are alumni or otherwise trusted by the institution. In all cases, it's important to keep close watch.

9. **Know the system:** Politics, campus culture, goals and even building codes differ from one college to the next. To build and operate a successful shooting sports facility, you have to understand and navigate campus circumstances.

10. **Get counsel:** There's no need to go it on your own. NSSF, NRA, departments of natural resources and others will share insight, give direction and invest in your success. Reach out.

11. **Think NSSF:** "Zach Snow [NSSF Manager, Shooting Promotions] was one of the first people I ran into, and it would have taken me a lot longer if I hadn't," said Dr. Woods, "He was a great source of information. And, he helped me with the application for the NSSF grant. I'm very proud of the association we have with NSSF; they did so much for us to start our program."

12. **Find champions on campus:** There are passionate students, faculty and staff members on your campus. Allow them to be champions for the facility and the tradition.

13. **Collegiate ranges have something to offer in exchange.** "It's an easy formula," said Dr. Woods, "Say we have a kid who's never shot a firearm before. If we put a Remington in his hand and he has success with it, when he goes to buy a gun, he remembers that gun. Lots of kids leave here and go buy guns. And they remember what they shot in these classes." Reach out to the manufacturers.

## NSSF Can Help

Since 2009, the National Shooting Sports Foundation's Collegiate Shooting Sports Initiative (CSSI) has been supporting shooting sports at the college level by:

- Raising awareness of college-level shooting sports opportunities
- Serving as a resource for colleges interested in the shooting sports
- Helping grow the shooting sports at the college level
- Giving financial and technical assistance to college shooting clubs, teams and facilities.

In 2009-2010, CSSI's first academic year, the program granted \$100,000 to college shooting sports programs. "And, in 2013 – 2014," says Zach Snow, Manager of NSSF's Shooting Promotions, "we have \$200,000 available to get new college clubs or teams off the ground."

For students, college representatives or others interested in learning more, contact Zach Snow at [zsnow@nssf.org](mailto:zsnow@nssf.org) and visit the Collegiate Shooting Sports Initiative website at [www.nssf.org/cssi/](http://www.nssf.org/cssi/). Here you'll find guidance for establishing a collegiate shooting sports program, samples of successful grant applications and other resources.