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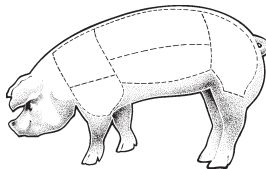
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Hunters hone skills

By Joey Falkoff

Colby Free Press
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Like any sport, hunting requires hours of practice and preparation if you want to be successful. While golfers may go out to the driving range to work on their game, hunters can hone their skills by shooting at a trap range.

Instead of taking aim at a deer or game bird, trap shooting involves firing at a round clay target, also called a "pigeon," that shoots out of a machine. The targets can fly to the left or right and marksmen have to be quick with their trigger once the pigeon flies out.

Trap shooting has grown as a sport over the last 10 years, so much so that Benny Young of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks says it's approaching NASCAR racing in popularity. The effects of trap shooting's growth have already been felt in northwest Kansas, which has ranges in Oakley, Colby, Atwood, Goodland, Norton, Hoxie, Oberlin and St. Francis.

"In the last few years, the club here in Colby has grown," said Bob Luck, co-founder of the Colby Trap Club. "We have about 150 members and 20 different teams. Oakley was ready to go out of business a few years back, but now they have close to 100 members and eight or nine teams."

He said Olympic trap shooters can hit somewhere close to 997 out of 1,000 targets from 25 feet. Even if you're unable to hit half that many targets, though, he said, just getting used to firing your gun at a target can be a huge benefit for

hunters.

"I think hunters need to come out and get used to their shotgun so they're not as quick to shoot at anything that moves," said Young. "When you're out shooting pheasants, you may only shoot three rounds. Out here, you can shoot as many rounds as you want."

Not only can the practice be helpful for the everyday outdoorsmen, he said, but it's also a good way for beginning gun owners to learn how to use their weapon safely.

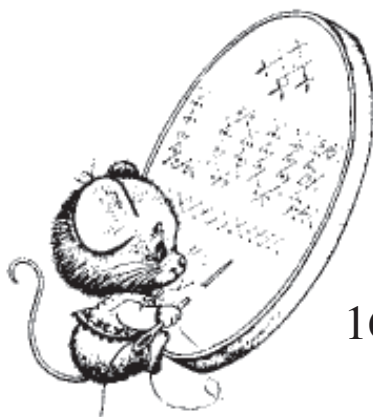
"We really try and teach hunter safety, and show people how to properly handle a gun," said Luck. "Kids aren't out here shooting at tin cans in their back yard. This is much safer."

"Since we opened four years ago, I haven't heard of any hunting accidents in this area," said Young.

No longer is trap shooting just a sport for men, either. More and more, Luck and Young say, they have noticed women and children coming out and spending a day shooting together.

"Girls, moms and kids just eat this stuff up," said Young. "The last two years, I've held my Youth Skills Hunting Day, it's been full of girls. Also, a lot of wives are scared of guns, but when they come out to the range and see them used properly, then it puts them more at ease."

Five miles west and one mile south of town at College Drive and County Road 15, the Colby Trap Club is just in its fourth year. In 2003, Luck, along with six other founders, broke ground the range and four years later, he said, it is the largest and best equipped facility in northwest Kan-



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