

# General Session Successful Ranges and Attendee Feedback

## Case Studies of Successful Ranges: Indoor Ranges

*By Robin Ball, President*

*Sharp Shooting Indoor Range and Gunshop, Spokane, Washington*

*I don't have a background in the shooting sports. I didn't get into this because I was a shooter. The first time I shot, I went out kicking and screaming to a gravel pit with my husband. I figured if I went out with him once, it would keep him quiet. I found out I could hold my own. He had shot a lot, and I shot better than he did. I got hooked very quickly.*

*We started the Sharp Shooting Indoor Range and Gunshop as a business opportunity in Spokane, Washington, because it hadn't been done before. It was not a learning curve for me, it went straight up. I got into this industry not knowing anything about firearms. I knew firearms were a bit of a political hot potato, but I had no idea how much was driven by the politics of the industry.*

*Our indoor shooting range has 22 positions. We are primarily a handgun caliber range. We do a lot of defensive training. We are licensed to train armed security. We do all of the training in the inland Northwest for Fargo truck drivers and some police department training as well. We don't do Spokane County. They have their own range, which is only about a mile from me, but it's great to have them come over and buy targets because they're out of stock or buy ammo because they didn't remember to order it!*

*I was asked to talk about the unique aspect of our range and what makes us successful. I always use the term "we." My husband is intricately involved in this business, but he has another job. I run the operation on a day-to-day basis.*

*One of the things that has made us unique is our employee group. I am happy to say that of nine employees working for me, five started with me before we opened and were involved in the construction of the range. Staff is really important. Professionalism is what we've brought to the industry in the Northwest. We always say that it's bad that there are no other indoor ranges in the area, because the majority of people in our area can't make comparisons. Locals look at us as an industry standard. In fact, I know from traveling around the country that isn't the case. We've worked hard to make our range user friendly.*

*We know this industry is driven by men who have been shooters for years. Men will shoot anywhere, as evidenced by the fact that my husband dragged me to a gravel pit. Women won't. Women want more amenities. If you're after the new market, you must attract and keep women shooters. If you intimidate them the first time they're in the door, you won't get them back. It's hard to build a habit pattern with women who've got kids, school functions, after-school activities and careers.*

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*Robin Ball is experiencing tremendous success as owner of Sharp Shooting Indoor Range and Gun Shop, in Spokane, Washington. She has extensive, previous business and communications experience through her role as a customer service and media representative in the airlines industry. Robin also formed an airline firm which was a Federal Express fleet carrier in the Pacific Northwest. She has degrees in liberal arts with a minor in international business. Using this expertise and tons of preparation, she turned her attention to developing a successful indoor range, complete with active plans for promotions and business management, as well as a healthy supportive group of stockholders.*

*We've done a lot of outreach in our community. I want to talk a little bit about the media. The media in Spokane is my best friend. I love them. If I have something I want them to know about, I call them. They don't always cover it, but they always thank me for calling. Those guys are on a time line, and they're starving for stuff to talk about because they have daily deadlines, and it's got to be something different. We work with them, and they have treated us well. Sometimes I don't like them to put our name on it; it depends on the story. I'm very selective about how they deal with the range and how they handle different shoots.*

*Most of the time, I require that the media put our name and address in the story. I can't afford to pay for advertising like that. In exchange for us giving them everything they want on the range, they do say where we are and what we're doing. We've been very fortunate with the media, and I consider them friends. Other gun stores are hesitant to deal with the media, but I think it's in our best interest as an industry to work with them.*

*We've also been very successful in doing tactical shooting. We have a large contingent of International Practice Shooting shooters and International Defensive Pistol Association shooters.*

*My Women and Guns classes are always full. Our membership is about 90 percent male, but my classes reflect exactly the opposite. My classes are 90 percent female. Women come into it new, not knowing anything and a bit hesitant. Your best sales tool is getting them to attend classes. Most of them will return, as long as you treat them well, and they're comfortable and not afraid when they leave. Once they're gone and away from it for awhile, they will forget everything that you taught them. So it's important to give them an incentive to come back. Programs to work with new shooters attract kids and moms, and they keep the dads coming in. That's our number one success.*