

General Session: Successful Ranges and Attendee Feedback

Case Studies of Successful Ranges: County Ranges

By Holden Kriss, Rangemaster

Broward County Parks and Recreation, Markham Park Target Range, Sunrise, Florida

[Editor's note: Holden Kriss now is with Indian River County Gun Range, Indian River, Florida.]

I work for Broward County Parks and Recreation, and our range makes a profit. Thank you very much.

I'll give you a bit of insight about my facility, where we've come and where we started. Markham Park Target Range started in 1979. We fulfilled a need for our area. The National Rifle Association, and state and local police departments decided along with the public that there was a need for a regional shooting facility in southern Florida.

Markham Range is located on a 666-acre piece of land within a county park. The original facility was designed to be 60 positions of 50 yards, 40 positions for a combat range, a 40-position 200-yard range, and 3 combination skeet and trap fields. They set up access roads. The state legislature approved \$306,000 for construction of the range in 1980. The funds were budgeted through the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission (Commission), Pittman-Robertson program and Florida Division of Wildlife Management. The property for the shooting facility was leased to the Commission in March 1981. The local help to design or build the facility never materialized. Due to that, they found additional money and outside sources to build the facility. Finally, the Commission set it up for limited use, using \$57,000 of Pittman-Robertson money to do it.

The 170-acre range then was leased back to Broward County to be operated by the Parks and Recreation Division. Broward County changed the needs of the facility and redesigned it for more public use. Basically, they created what I manage now. I have a 44-position 50-yard range with electronic turning targets. I have a 66-position 100-yard range. I had four combination skeet and trap fields at that time, one trap field and covered shooting platforms behind the skeet and trap fields to set up a staging area.

The facility was opened in 1984. The total cost of construction was \$1.2 million.

Since then, improvements to the facility include lighting the 100-yard and 50-yard ranges, and constructing a 7,500-square-foot building on the skeet and trap fields as a clubhouse and my office. That upgrade cost \$540,000. In November 1993, we added a 12-station sporting clays course that can be expanded to about 26 stations. In December 1998, we also added full automation to our sporting clays course.

Holden E. Kriss has served as Range Master for the Markham Regional Target Range since 1988. He has more than 30 years experience working with various ranges. He also has been an NRA certified instructor for home firearms, voluntary practical firearms, security firearms and police firearms categories. He has been an NRA certified shooting coach and referee for the National Skeet Shooting Association, and Chief Range Safety Officer, Executive Committee, National Association of Shooting Ranges.

We're open six days a week. The sheriff's department leases our range on a full-time basis. We charge them, but we also keep and maintain the property. It's become a very good cooperative effort.

Almost every agency in southern Florida uses our facility, including U.S. Customs Service, FBI, immigration, highway patrol and Army Reserve. Several clubs also use our facility for black powder, bench rest and silhouette target shooting, high-powered rifles, skeet, trap and sporting clays. We even host a fully automatic club. We host a speed shooting club and another club that shoots defense pistol. We also have a big club now that's called the Gold Coast Gun Slingers. They're a cowboy club that attracts probably 150 shooters.

One of the things that has put us on the map is that we host the National Shooting Sports Foundation's Chevy Trucks Sportsman Team Challenge. We hosted that national championship 11 times, and it's brought us a lot of recognition.

Last year, we expanded something different. We got together with Taurus International Handgun Manufacturers and organized an open house and registered National Shooting Sports Association skeet shoot. We use the Step Outside program at this event. We also had gun locks there. The Women's Shooting Sports Foundation was represented. It became a big event. Instead of just a skeet shoot, we organized a very special event. I've been fortunate that Torse International is down in Miami. They approached me to help promote my range, and we're right on the cover of the last issue of "Skeet Review."

Southern Florida is the fastest growing community in the United States. In the early 1930s, the population was a little above 20,000. Now, the population is 1.4 million. So I want to touch on addressing community concerns. I know that's a tough subject for a lot of you. We push the range as an environmentally safe place for people to shoot their firearms. Broward County has developed a good rapport with people in the area through the Parks and Recreation Department. We have a recreational facility that reduces community liability because it is a safe place to shoot firearms.

Some successful programs we run are the hunter education programs and all types of safety classes. I developed a youth airgun safety program. We didn't call it a shooting class, but we developed it so that parents and kids come to the class. At least one parent must attend. We require that because a lot of these parents are taught firearms safety at the same time. It's very important.

I want to give you some figures from my facility. The attendance last year was more than 90,000. We're completely owned and operated by a government agency, and we made more than \$100,000 profit. You private range guys who don't have restrictions should make a lot of money at this! We threw 3.5 million clay targets last year. Revenues were up 16 percent, which is \$103,000 more than the year before. This year, revenues are sitting up around 8 percent more than last year.

Markham Range is a successful government-owned and operated facility. Go out, do the same thing we're doing—we'd be pleased to help you if you have any questions.