

## SPORTS &amp; RECREATION

## WOW introduces women to outdoor activities

By DONALD J. WARD

**H**unting, fishing, living off the land and camping in the woods are often seen as recreational activities for men. For nearly a decade, Washington Outdoor Women has been proving the stereotype wrong by teaching women, including many from the Bellevue area, how to survive in and enjoy all aspects of the wild.

Washington Outdoor Women's program is a sort of "Intro to Outdoors 101." Participants are given information and training in about 20 outdoor elements.

The most popular classes have been the shotgun and fly-fishing workshops. During these clinics, 15 women are given one-on-one training by certified instructors how to properly handle and fire a shotgun or cast a fly.

The training sessions often last all day to allow the student a chance to fully immerse themselves in learning their lessons but not feel rushed about a short deadline.

There are other classes that have also grown in popularity, such as outdoors first aid, wildlife identification, Dutch-oven cooking, digital photography, map and compass navigation, environmental stewardship, emergency survival and fish and game tasting.

Bellevue-based WOW was originally formed in 1998.



*Courtesy photo*

**Washington Outdoor Women instructor Donna Farley, left, teaches Lee Perry how to fire a shotgun.**

Much of its support comes from the Washington Wildlife Federation. Ronnie McGlenn, a former high-school English teacher from Bellevue, helped found the program.

She said Washington, at the time, was one of two states that didn't have an educational program geared toward teaching women the fundamentals of outdoor recreation.

The all-volunteer program is now in its ninth year and has grown through word of mouth, advertising provided by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and by WOW's Web

site, [www.washingtonoutdoorwomen.org](http://www.washingtonoutdoorwomen.org).

About 35 instructors lend their services to teach an average of 200 women a year. Most of the instructors are women, although a handful of men are involved at times.

Jessica Todd of Mill Creek was a first-time shooter at WOW's shotgun workshop March 11 at Renton's Fish and Game Club.

"It's a good place to learn. A lot of my friends are guys that hunt and shoot," Todd said. "It can be intimidating learning from them, though. I don't want to feel like I'm

holding them back."

Todd said there is a definite confidence boost in learning from a fellow females as opposed to a man. She said that oftentimes men will simply tell you do something rather than take the time to explain why you're supposed to do it in a particular way.

McGlenn said she has had women ages 18-70 show up at the workshops, but the average age seems to be about 45. The women are pretty well split between those who are single, married or divorced or who have children.

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Next year, WOW will be launching its Wee-WOW program geared at girls ages 4-7 and their mothers. Instructors will show participants how to treat nature and teach them environmental stewardship and simple outdoors basics.

“If you want your children to enjoy the beauty of the outdoors, you have to take care of it,” McGlenn said.

The number and types of courses offered by WOW have evolved over the years. Pet first aid is an example of a new course that will be taught in the future.

Although the classes change to meet new demand, McGlenn said there are elements of WOW that won't change. Among them is the program's commitment to teaching hunting and fishing.

McGlenn said sometimes a handful of people who have anti-hunting sentiments will question her about the program's pro-hunting stance. By having them come to a wildlife tasting clinic, part of the question is answered.

“Some people come who don't know why people hunt. We have an open discussion but don't force on anyone our beliefs,” McGlenn said. “There's a biological process in us that knows we're all hunters and gatherers. That enjoys being in the outdoors. Whether you answer that call is up to you.”

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