

GREAT OUTDOORS WELCOMES ALL



JANET JENSEN/The News Tribune

Sharon Rose loads her shotgun while grouse hunting in Duvall. Rose is an avid hunter and instructs other women through the nonprofit group Washington Outdoor Women. Several organizations in the Northwest focus on introducing women to the great outdoors, offering classes in hunting, fishing, mountain climbing and more.

WOMEN

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summit, but the experience left her wanting to be a better climber.

She took a class from the Seattle-Tacoma Mountaineers, made some climbing trips and was eventually teaching classes of her own.

Climbing started out as a man's sport and men have an advantage for their upper-body strength, which can make it intimidating for women. But Roberts said women have their own advantage.

"The best climbers use their feet right and make sure they're balanced. Women have better natural balance," she said, adding that, because women don't have the upper-body strength of men, they also tend to focus more on their feet and technique.

She said local climbing gyms are a perfect place to play around and see if climbing is something you're interested in without getting intimidated. Many gyms,

savvy to the increasing number of women taking on the sport, offer women's nights, where women can climb at a discounted rate.

GETTING HOOKED

Ronni McGlenn, 64, was lucky: She was raised behind three boys, so she got to do all the hunting and fishing that they did.

When she had a family of her own, she remained active, taking her oldest son on his first backpacking trip when he was 2½.

But, she said, she realized later in life that not all women are exposed to the wilderness: Their brothers are taken fishing while they stay at home, leaving women feeling unwelcome or intimidated from the get-go.

"I thought women deserve to have the opportunity to learn about what's available," she said.

So, in 1997, she approached the state Department of Fish and Wildlife to start the Washington Outdoor Woman

(WOW) program.

Every year since 1998, the nonprofit has held women-only retreats and workshops around the state, teaching women to do everything from bow hunting to tying flies.

She said the workshops aren't just attracting women who want to hunt alongside their husbands or boyfriends, although there are those as well. Participants range from 18- to 70-year-olds, single mothers and professionals, many of whom are interested in the outdoors for themselves.

McGlenn said it's rewarding to see women get hooked on the outdoors.

"We have several women that have gone through the program, gone on to improve their skills and come back and are now teaching," she said. Going full-circle like that, she said, shows women that they can be experts, too.

Laura Graynum of Gig Harbor is one. She went to the first WOW weekend as a student. The following year, she returned as a big-game hunting instructor, and

she's been every year since.

This was the first year she had to miss. "It hurt bad," she said, but she'd just started her dream job as a neonatal nurse at Tacoma General Hospital, so she couldn't take time off.

She said she loves getting outside and hunting, fishing, riding bikes and hiking, and the women-only weekends offer a noncompetitive way to improve her skills and meet other women interested in similar activities.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Many women said the peace of mind that comes from being outdoors – and, of course, the exercise often involved – is reason enough to get them out of town.

But McGlenn and Graynum also said one of the best things about learning to hunt and fish is that they know where their food is coming from.

"I do all my own butchering and processing. I enjoy knowing what I'm eating," she said. That means the animals have no artificial hormones and no chemicals and

usually contain less fat – and healthier kinds of fats – than meat raised on a feedlot, for example.

McGlenn said that the wild-game tasting class on WOW retreats always surprises the students: "Women are absolutely blown away by how good wild game is."

McGlenn said the "field to freezer" class, taught by Sharon Rose, is usually packed.

Rose, of Duvall, said it's gratifying teaching others how to cut and pack their own meat. She sends her students off with a reminder of the class for their freezers – lamb that they practiced on.

Another fringe benefit of teaching women outdoors sports is that they feel more connected to the environment, McGlenn said, which makes them want to be better stewards of the land.

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