

Cullman Community Archery Park Opens

By DAVID RAINER

The Community Archery Program doubled in size recently with the opening of the Cullman Community Archery Park, and the program is just in its infancy. Through an unprecedented allegiance among the Archery Trade Association, municipal parks and recreation programs and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, the community archery program began in 2007 with the goal of archery becoming as mainstream as soccer, baseball, softball and other community recreational activities.

"Archery is a life skill," said Stuart Goldsby, regional hunter education coordinator with Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. "Anyone can use it. Basically, many people who are physically challenged, young children and older adults are capable of pulling the bow back and hitting the bull's eye. They are capable of being successful and successful early. Depending on their capabilities, they can have equipment and a range to fit them and can be successful almost immediately with very little training.



"This skill can take you from target archery to hunting to competitive archery – all the way from a strictly novice situation to professional situation. You can compete in the Olympics and win your own gold medal. Anyone can shoot archery. It gets you away from the computer or TV or Playstations. It gets you in the great outdoors. And it's family-oriented. A lot of times, the whole family can shoot the same target side-by-side."

The Athens Community Archery Park opened in February 2008, and the Cullman facility was dedicated just two weeks ago. Archery parks are under construction in Demopolis and Dothan, while construction will begin on parks in Heflin and Huntsville in 2010.

The Cullman park is located 3 miles off of I-65 at exit 299 in Cullman County. The park is situated on 17 acres that WFF leases from the City of Cullman adjacent to the city golf course. There are eight targets for youths from 8 to 20 yards and an eight-target adult range from 15 to 50 yards. The adult range is for bows above 30 pounds (draw weight). The youth range will be bows 30 pounds and below. You can also shoot crossbows at the adult range. A platform range is available with a 13-foot elevation and four targets from 10 to 40 yards. The youth and adult ranges are wheelchair accessible, and shooters can simulate shooting through a blind from a wheelchair, standing or kneeling.

There's also a 16-target, walk-through, 3-D range with targets at unknown distances – anything from 20 yards to somewhere around 70 yards, according to Goldsby. Each station has a bench and bow rack. Cullman High School Carpentry Department, Good Hope High School FFA and Fairview High School each contributed to the range by building signage, benches and target frames.

"The Archery Trade Association (ATA) presented money through the Easton Foundation to build a pavilion with bathrooms," Goldsby said. "We're looking at about a 30-by-50 (foot) pavilion. The City of Cullman has pledged \$40,000 for a playground for the kids. We hope to have the pavilion and playground in place this year."

Goldsby said the community support of the archery park has been excellent.

"Around the community archery program, the Heritage Archery Club was formed in the Cullman area," he said. "It is a Bowhunters of Alabama (BHA) club, the third largest in the state, and an ASA (Archery Shooters of America) club. Our next tournament will be July 4th weekend. We're planning a tournament in September after the regular BHA season has ended. It will be an open shoot and a 'Thank you' event for all the supporters."

"It's our expectation to make archery and bowhunting available in communities just as little league baseball or soccer is, but it's also about all the pieces of a community coming together to make the park a possibility and archery a real piece of the area's recreational menu," said Jay McAninch, CEO/President of the ATA, which funds the purchase of equipment for the schools that participate in the National Archery in Schools Program (NASP), as well as the USA Archery equipment used for different styles of archery – field archery, bowhunting and 3-D archery.

Goldsby said the ATA approached him and Hunter Education Coordinator Ray Metzler about a community archery program in 2007. Obviously, WFF jumped at the idea. With the help of retired Conservation Enforcement Officer Steve Pepper, Goldsby located property in Athens that was suitable for an archery park.

The Athens Community Archery Park, which opened in February 2008, is the first in the nation to combine the cooperation of the aforementioned three entities. The Athens park has the same platform range, as well as adult and youth ranges.

"Unique about Athens is it's right beside the swimming pool and tennis courts," Goldsby said. "There's a pavilion already there with bathrooms. It's on Athens High School and city parks and recreation property. There's a walking trail that goes right through the archery park. There are about three miles of walking trails right there, so it lends itself to host a larger pro-am type tournament. We've already held several BHA tournaments there."

Parks are open daylight hours only. To use the platform, a full-body harness is required by regulation. The parks are open to the public. The requirement to use the park is a valid hunting license or \$10 Wildlife Heritage License if you are of hunting age – 16 to 65. Those who are not required to have a hunting license – under 16 and over 65 – shoot for free.

"The parks are being well utilized," Goldsby said. "The communities have responded very well. That's what the Community Archery Program is about – bringing families together outdoors with a common focus, and that's archery. We've seen this is the National Archery in Schools Program already where the older kids are actually assisting the middle school kids with their archery. It's great for the schools because you don't have that strife between the ages. It brings them together.

"We want the community to embrace this like they do the tennis courts, the soccer fields, baseball fields, football fields and swimming

