

Appleseed Project in Enfield

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non-partisan environment,” according to its website. The project gets its name from Johnny Appleseed, the frontiersman from Boston, whose real name was John Chapman and who became an American folk legend for planting thousands of apple trees in the Midwest before his death in 1845.

After signing up for his first Appleseed last month, Reida encouraged Eyre to come along. Throughout the gathering, Barnes encouraged the group to bring more friends and family the next time they attend an Appleseed. “If your friends say they don’t have the time, tell them our forefathers didn’t have the time,” Barnes told the group.

The shooters had one goal: To earn their “riflesman” patch by scoring of 210 or higher on the AQT, or Army Qualification Test. During the New England version of the test, shooters are given four minutes to fire 40 rounds at four sets of targets sized to represent distances of 100, 200, 300 and 400 yards.

“I shot a 243 on that last one,” Reida said excitedly after checking his score.

“Are you serious?” Eyre said.

“Yeah, it’s my best,” his friend said.

“That’s the best score I’ve ever seen,” said Roger Ek, another instructor, after tallying Reida’s score.

“Really?” Reida said. “Well, it’s due to your coaching.”

Barnes, the head instructor, who has been shooting with Project Appleseed since 2008, looked at the sheet in Ek’s hand. “Wow, that’s two from my best.”

“Dude, if you get 250, we’ll have to start covering your eyes,” Eyre said.

Ek drove 380 miles from Maine with his wife to be at last weekend’s Appleseed. He said he believes it’s important for Americans to know how to use rifles because the country’s founders had a connection with firearms.

“The reason we’ve been so effective in the many wars we’ve been in is that we’re a nation of riflemen. Other countries were not,” Ek said. “The reason why there were so many casualties in the Civil War is because both sides were riflemen.”

Last weekend, the shooters were trying to earn their winter riflesman patch, which can be awarded only if there is snow on the ground.

Reida and Eyre said the cold didn’t

bother them too much. The key to staying warm: layers. Several shooters wore sneakers the first day, but switched to boots the next.

And the cold wasn’t the only challenge.

“My shooting eye keeps getting fogged up,” Reida said, grabbing a defogging wipe.

“There’s nothing worse than a fogged-up eyeball,” said Bill Fish of Concord, whose effective shooting range improved from 100 to 300 yards over the weekend.

Later, as the sun began to slip behind the hills, the group gathered in the clubhouse, welcoming the heat that came from the woodstove.

There, Fish and Reida were awarded their winter riflesman patches. So was Louise Pressler, of Merrimack, N.H. Pressler had been to eight or nine Appleseeds, but this was her first patch.

She pumped her fist as she received the award, a light blue rectangle with what looked like small icicles dripping from the bottom. As she shook Barnes’ hand, Pressler smiled and mouthed, “Yes.”

Then, as the group sat around Barnes near the stove, he tried to answer the question: “Why Appleseed?”

“Because the ship is sinking and the water is cold,” he told the group.

The idea behind Appleseed, he said, is to encourage people to exercise their rights while they still have them. He encouraged his students to write letters to the editor, to attend Town Meeting, and to vote.

“The short of it is about our heritage,” he said. “It’s about the sacrifices people made for an uncertain future and our benefit.”

Before dismissing the group, Barnes introduced Reida as his newest instructor-in-training.

“We don’t give this to everyone,” he said as he handed Reida an orange hat. When he becomes a certified instructor, he’ll have earned the right to wear a red hat like Barnes.

As he put his new hat on his shaved head, Reida gave a sheepish smile.

Pressler shouted out, “You did it!”

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