

Project Appleseed Louisiana

by Linda Cuccia



Mom & Boy are blessed to have lots of offers each month for our adventures, and this month it was particularly difficult to choose. But when I heard about the goals of Project Appleseed, I knew it was something I wanted to experience. I expected it would be a good learning opportunity for the boy. Also, the man who invited us, Kenny Fernandez, is so passionate about the program, his sincerity and enthusiasm is infectious.

Project Appleseed is a program designed by the Revolutionary War Veterans Association (RWVA) to improve rifle marksmanship and inspire respect for the choices and actions of our nation's founders, particularly for those on April 19, 1775. Also, the program encourages civic involvement, regardless of political affiliation. Project Appleseed workshops are held all across the United States, and on the day we attended, there were 104 events being held at the same time.

The boy and I arrived at the Louisiana National Guard's Camp Villere on a beautiful Saturday morning in April. Some of the day would be held under the canopy learning safety rules and shooting techniques, and the rest of the day would be spent on the shooting range, putting those lessons into practice. Our instructor for the day was Dan Plunkett, Expert Marksman and Louisiana State Coordinator for Project Appleseed. Dan has been involved with the program since 2011 and is fully committed to the ideals that it presents. "I ini-

tially went to a Project Appleseed event because it was something that I could do with my son. Then, once I heard the history stories, I knew I had to get involved. Appleseed presents a unique way to remind Americans about our history and heritage - and how precious our liberty is."

We sat among the other participants and learned the basics of good rifle marksmanship from Dan and his assistant Kenny, who is training to be an instructor in the program. Kenny has been involved since his first Project Appleseed in 2012. "I was impressed by the professionalism, friendliness and passion of the instructors I met at that first Appleseed; and when I heard the historical oration of the events of April 19, 1775, I was hooked, like a speckled trout striking a Deadly Dudley Slammin' Sammy lure in Lake Pontchartrain! Hearing the tale of what Appleseed calls the

"first strike" tugged at me and left me wanting to hear more. Today I'm not sure if I'm more excited about the history lessons or honing the Six Steps to firing a shot." Both men are knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and we enjoyed the initial training session. But, of course, the real fun began when we got out to the range.

The shooting starts at 25 meters, and shortly after the boy and I got into the prone position, the competition began. He and I naturally try to outdo each other in physical challenges, and as long as we are on equal footing, we can get pretty competitive. I let Dan know early on that I would be the "expert" marksman of the day and would outshoot the boy. He encouraged us to make a wager: If the boy won the challenge, I would

have to cook him breakfast for a week. And if I won, he would have to wash my car. We both agreed to the terms, put on our eye and ear protection, and commenced shooting at "Redcoat" targets. Neither of us did remarkably well on our pretest, and both of us blamed it on the guns. Seriously, I was aiming right at the head of that guy, but the target was punctured inches away! It turns out my rifle needed some adjustments, and thankfully, they were done prior to our first actual drill.

We spent the remainder of the morning shooting at one-inch squares on an 8x11 piece of paper from 25 meters, five rounds at a time. I have to say, with my scope adjusted properly, my results were much more successful. Throughout the process of firing and



reloading, the boy and I could not help but notice the littlest member of our group that day. He looked to be about 8 years old, and was fully engaged, attentive, and excited whether we were sitting under the canopy or shooting at the range. Of course, we both wanted to meet him. His father, Oren Deroche of Gramercy, says he signed up for Project Appleseed so that his son, Beau, could learn about American History and gun safety. Beau could not have been happier. "I like history about wars and I like shooting. It's awesome to be here!" Neither Oren nor Beau has hunting experience, but they both have quite a bit of practice at shooting ranges. It was refreshing for us to see someone so young being educated in a "classroom" that maintained his interest.

After our shooting session, we returned to the canopy for a break, and the history portion of the program began. Kenny used a large map to recount the events that led to the war for independence, including the shots fired at Lexington and Concord. I have never heard that story told with such detail and emotion, and every one of the participants was transfixed. While the creators of Appleseed believe teaching rifle marksmanship encourages the development of qualities like patience and self-reliance, they believe teaching our shared history builds citizenship and patriotism.

We returned to the range for more practice after the break, and this is where the boy and I got to compare our target results. Both Kenny and Dan confirmed I was the winner of the shooting competition, and I was astonished with the accuracy of my aim. The biggest problem I have with shooting is the fact that I cannot close my left eye while looking through the scope with my right. And the lesson I loved most about this event was finding my natural point of aim (NPOA). The boy was still struggling with his rifle being appropriately sighted in, and although he missed the black squares, his shots were all in tight clusters. His found his challenge was in waiting for the bottom of the breath to pull the trigger, where movement is less likely. One of the most valuable things about this training is that you get to study your target with the instructors and zero in on the technique that will improve your results.

Project Appleseed is a two-day event, and although the boy and I could not attend the second day, we were impressed with what we learned on the first. Our instructors were patient with us, professional and unbiased in their teaching of our shared history, and prepared for every aspect of the training. We consider ourselves very fortunate to have been able to participate in the basic goal of the Appleseed Project, which is saving America, one rifleman at a time.

As a mom, I am particularly thankful that my son and I can learn about our nation's beginnings and practice our shooting skills together in a safe, encouraging environment. I am also thrilled that I won the competition against him. This will give me bragging rights for at least a month, as well as a sparkling, clean car. A bet is a bet!

Schedules and other information about Project Appleseed can be found at the website, www.rwa.org or on the Facebook page, Project Appleseed Louisiana.



June 6-8, 2013
Grand Isle, Louisiana

16th Annual
SWOLLEFEST
Fishing Rodeo

