

THE SPORTSMAN

Glenn Jones has been providing new hunters with safety training for nearly four decades.

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Glenn Jones completed his first hunter safety course in 1980, the second-ever hunter education class taught in West Virginia. He liked the sport so well, he purchased a lifetime license. "My hunting license number was 181, which meant it was the 181st lifetime license ever issued," Jones says, smiling behind his white mustache.

Jones had started hunting at age 12, chasing squirrels and rabbits with a neighbor in his hometown of Pinch, in Kanawha County. But he didn't get serious about the hobby until he got married. His wife's family were avid hunters, and he frequently spent time in the woods with her father and brothers. So when the state started requiring hunter safety courses before buying a license, Jones signed up as quickly as possible.

After completing the course, the older gentleman who had been Jones' instructor approached him. He had taken note of the younger man's attention to detail and asked if he would be interested in getting certified to teach. Jones agreed to test the waters by shadowing the man in a class that was coming up a few weeks later.

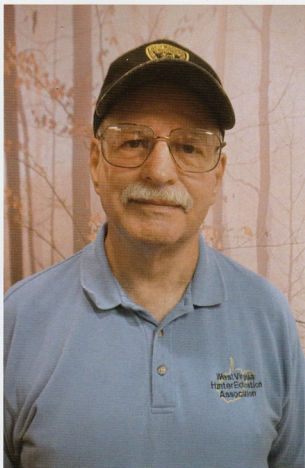
"After the first hour we took a break, and he said, 'I've got to run downtown to take care of some business. You go ahead and start teaching.'" The man never returned. Jones finished the night's class on his own and, when the students were gone, found himself in possession of a table full of guns and teaching aids. Not knowing what else to do, he took everything home. In the classes that followed, Jones assisted another instructor, who personally delivered Jones' hunting safety instructor certificate a few weeks later. He hasn't stopped teaching since.

The Five Stages of a Hunter

Decades after teaching his first class, Jones is now the president of the West Virginia Hunter Education Association. The organization has named him its state Instructor of the Year three times and district Instructor of the Year four times. In 2016, he was an inaugural inductee into the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources' Hunter Education Hall of Fame. He continues to teach eight to 10 hunter safety classes each year, for which he receives no compensation.

The course he now teaches is much different from when he started. Back then, "we spent two and a half hours talking about firearms and safety, then took a test and walked away with hunter safety cards," he says. The course now requires 10 hours in the classroom and firearm safety is only one small part of the curriculum.

When Jones first began hunting, accidental shootings killed a dozen or more West Virginia hunters each spring turkey season. But accidental gun deaths of all kinds plummeted nationwide throughout the 1990s, as firearm safety programs gained momentum. Rates of gun accidents currently hover around historic lows. In 2016, there were zero firearm-related hunting deaths in West Virginia. So these days, hunter safety courses only spend 1 or 2 hours on firearms before moving on.



"The primary thing we stress now is tree stand safety," Jones says. "The number one cause of hunting accidents in the United States right now is tree stand accidents. People buy one because it's the thing to do, and they never get trained how to use it." In his classes, Jones makes sure students know there are more than half a dozen drawbacks to a tree stand, but only one advantage: you can see farther.

ATV accidents are the second leading cause of injury and death for the modern hunter, with heart attacks a close third. So Jones talks about helmets and other safety aspects of ATV use as well as conditions that can make heart attacks more likely. He also delves into the ethics of hunting, game identification, and wildlife management.

But more than anything, Jones says classes lay the groundwork for "The Five Stages of a Hunter," a phrase coined in the 1980s by two professors at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse. The first stage is the "shooting stage," in which the hunter is more concerned with firing his weapon than actually hunting. This hunter is usually inexperienced, often with a newly purchased firearm, and is interested in testing out its capabilities.

The middle stages are called "limiting out," "trophy," and "method." These represent a shifting focus, first from the quantity of game hunted to the quality of animals bagged, and then to the way the game is taken.

Ideally, hunters move through these four quickly. "All of these stages are dangerous because you're pinpointing one thing you're trying to do," Jones says.



The fifth and final stage is the “sportsman” stage. Here, the hunter attains a sort of zen. He finds joy not in any specific metric but in the totality of the hunting experience: the peace and beauty of nature, the company of friends or family, and, perhaps most important of all, mentoring and support of those who will carry on the tradition.

“My definition of being a sportsman is when you give up your hunt to help a kid pull the deer he’s killed out of the woods,” Jones says. “You care about other people. When you go to the woods to hunt, you don’t have to kill anything. You just go to be there.”

Conserving Animals, Preserving Traditions

Jones’ classes, and others like it, generate significant funding for the state Division of Natural Resources’ wildlife conservation efforts, forestry management, and state parks.

In 1937, the federal legislation called the Pittman–Robertson Act redirected the existing 11 percent tax on guns and ammunition back to state wildlife agencies, with the money distributed according to a formula that takes into account each state’s land area and number of licensed hunters. The more hunters you have, the more money your state receives.

Many credit the Pittman–Robertson Act with bringing species like wood ducks, white-tailed deer, and wild

turkeys back from their previously endangered status. But there is a growing chorus of concern about the future of this funding. The nation has seen a decline in the number of hunters over the period during which Jones has been teaching. While participation in fishing and other outdoor activities seems to be growing, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report shows that licensed hunters made up just over four percent of the U.S. population in 2016, a significant drop from nearly 8 percent in 1991.

Jones says he’s not particularly worried about this problem in West Virginia. The state has a hunting population of 17 percent—four times higher than the national average. We also have an extremely high percentage of forested land, a cultural tradition of hunting, and a healthy interest in firearms.

He has noticed some positive demographic shifts over the years, though. “At least 25 percent of every class we teach is female now,” Jones says. “When I first started teaching, it was rare you’d see a female show up to class. At the one I took my daughter to, she was the only one.” There are also many more women teaching hunter safety classes now.

To Jones, that’s yet another sign all those years of hunter education classes are paying off. “These dedicated instructors doing this work, these are people in the sportsman stage,” he says. “They’re giving back.”

To locate a free hunter education class near you, search online at www.register-ed.com