

"Pulling" for Kids...

By Dean Leonard, Editor/Writer



PHOTO BY DEAN LEONARD

From L to R: Betty Jernigan, Alan Farley, Don Keith, and Alan Loveless

When local businessman Alan Farley called to inform me of an upcoming event for charity, I was "all ears."

When he told me that the event was a charity shoot, I sat straight up in my chair.

"A shoot?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "Have you ever shot trap?"

I couldn't say that I had.

Farley was involved with the recent annual Celebrity Shoot for Sugarbugs, a non-profit organization that benefits children with diabetes. Held at Big Springs Clay Target Sports just outside Murfreesboro, the event has gained recognition for raising a substantial amount of money for children, with last year's fundraising efforts totaling \$180,000. This year, the event again raised over \$100,000.

My interest was piqued about the sport, so I agreed to go out and "shoot" photos for

I became concerned because he wasn't blinking. "You know that it's real, don't you, son?" I asked.

"Uh, yeah..." he replied, still gazing and glazed over.

I think the gun scared him. Good.

Loveless drove us out to a sidewalk, known as the 16-yard line, and readied my child for his first try. He placed a cardboard box about 20 feet in front of Chase and handed him the shotgun.

"Is it loaded?" he asked my wide-eyed boy. Chase shrugged his shoulders and looked to him for the answer.

Never leaving his side, Loveless contin-

ued in a fleeting moment, I remembered the book report I handed in to my 11th grade English teacher - "The Life and Times of Belle Starr." Other kids chose presidents, dignitaries, and dignified people. I don't know why I chose an outlaw from the Wild West. My teacher didn't either...she gave me a C.

I returned to reality when Loveless gave me the 12-gauge, a shell, and an important piece of advice, "Watch your finger when you close the chamber."

Good advice, very good advice.

I nestled the gun against my shoulder, just as Betty had instructed me to do, and settled my right cheek against the cool wood

proof that I actually held the gun in my hand and gifted my son with a T-shirt that labeled him "A Big Shot." He was thrilled.

The day was a good one, for several reasons.

First, my son learned firsthand that a real gun is loud, it's dangerous, and it can do a lot of damage...it isn't a toy.

Second, Chase and I participated in something that brings joy to a lot of people, but doesn't often get the recognition that it deserves.

And third, we discovered that trap shooting is a fun, safe, and challenging sport.

"The sport is safe," said Loveless. "National statistics are this...more than 82 million targets have been thrown in Registered National Competition and we've never had a fatality. That's a statistic to be proud of."

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My interest was piqued about the sport, so I agreed to go out and "shoot" photos for a story. Taking my 10-year old son, Chase, along with me was a last minute decision. I was a little hesitant about introducing my oldest boy to a shotgun, but I wanted him to learn that along with the excitement of shooting a clay target, respect for the weapon always comes first.

Upon our arrival, Farley gave us a tour of the facility, which includes several stations in a wooded area built for sporting clay practice. Each station has a stand for the shooter along with a trapper - a manual machine that throws clay discs, simulating rabbits, quail, and other fowl.

I was enthralled, but my son was more interested in the golf cart we were riding in, and with hunting bits of bright orange clay remnants scattered about the forest.

After returning to the pro shop, we were greeted by Alan Loveless and Betty Jernigan. Loveless, local photographer and operator of Big Springs, generously allowed us to try our hand at shooting. Folks ran in and out of the pro shop, outfitting Chase and I in shooter's vests, safety glasses, earplugs, and hats. We looked official, but it was obvious we were amateurs. *Nervous giggling may not be appropriate in this sport.*

Loveless spent a great deal of time with Chase, demonstrating the correct way to handle a gun and explaining why you never point it at anyone.

"Always assume the gun is loaded," he told my son, who was staring at the 28-gauge with all the fascination of a brand new video game.

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After taking a deep breath, Chase was ready.

The first shot kicked the gun back against his shoulder and the noise alarmed him, but he hit the box. I clapped like an idiot.

The next couple of tries were successful, but then my boy began to lose interest.

He wanted to drive the golf cart instead. *Good.*

I guess it's like giving a kid their first taste of candy. You let them experience it because it's something they're fascinated with, but then they quickly lose interest in it. Keeping it from them only adds to the mystery, making them want it that much more.

Farley, Loveless, Jernigan and former DNJ publisher, Don Keith, took their turn on the 16-yard line, demonstrating their skill and impressing me with their accuracy. I bravely shot photos while they shot targets.

Then, it was my turn, and I admit it...my trigger finger was getting a little itchy.

I stepped up to the line, and for just a

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of the stock.

I was ready.

Chase was my "puller". His only task was to press a button when I yelled "PULL!" and a clay disc would fly out in front of me. He showed interest again...maybe because the contraption he held in his hand was bright yellow and resembled a GameBoy.

I yelled, Chase pressed, and I squeezed off the first shot. I missed. To be expected, but I was a little disappointed.

Loveless handed over more shells and I reloaded, watching my finger and lining up for the next one. I managed to hit the next five targets (three dead-on, mind you) and missed the last.

Pretty darn good for a pasty-faced writer who doesn't see the light of day much, wouldn't you say?

Well, *okay*...beginner's luck or a couple of darn fine teachers in Loveless and Jernigan.

My shoulder started to feel the strain and I knew it was time to get Chase back to school, so I decided to quit while I was ahead. My Wild West fantasy would have to wait until next time.

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Then he added, "You can't say that about Pee Wee football."

Loveless reiterates that safe handling is a must for young children AND adults.

"It's very important to enroll in ongoing safety courses when participating in the sport," he said. "Kids are oftentimes fascinated with guns because of video games, not realizing that they could actually injure or kill someone by just picking a gun up incorrectly."

"Guns can be used in a positive way," commented Farley. "Events like this give sportsman an opportunity to come out and shoot while helping raise money for children who suffer from a deadly disease like diabetes. I feel very fortunate that I have healthy children, but I wanted to raise awareness, because it's a worthwhile cause."

As for me, I'm glad to have had the experience. In fact, I would like to do it again. I think next time I go out to Big Springs, I'll wear a Stetson and a pair of western boots...*with spurs.*

Do you think they'll let me bring a horse?

If you are interested in participating in the sport of Clay Target Shooting or for more information, call Big Springs Clay Target Sports at (615) 890-6360. Operation times are Tuesday - Friday and Sunday from 1:00 p.m to 7:00 p.m. and on Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

To get there, follow Manchester Hwy. to Big Springs road. Turn left and look for the Big Springs sign on the right.