

# Two Harbors High School Clay Trap Team Participates in World's Largest Shoot

By Haley Searls

Picture with me a line of young people that stretches out for a half mile. Where does this image take you? An amusement park? A concert? This June, that line was at neither of those places. Instead, it was composed of competitors at a trap shooting meet in Alexandria, MN. But not so long ago you would have been hard pressed to find a fraction of that number of young people in trap shooting.

The Minnesota High School Clay Target League was founded in 2008 to bring life back to Minnesota shooting ranges, which had seen a large decrease in membership. After conducting an informal independent study, the Minnesota DNR determined that the average gun club member was around 57 years old. Though there were some youth programs at shooting ranges, they weren't long-term and didn't fill the need for younger shooters that would protect the future of these shooting ranges. Jim Sable, Youth Program Director at the Plymouth Gun Club, was tasked with getting young people involved in shooting sports. So Sable turned to the schools, where he knew he could find a large population of youth - some of whom might be interested. Students were interested, and the Minnesota State High School Clay Target League was inaugurated with three teams and 30 youth from 6th to 12th grade. By 2014, the year Two Harbors joined the league, the Minnesota State High School Clay Target League Championship had be-

come the largest shooting event in the world. It is also a sport that boasts a record of zero injuries.

Back in 2014, when Two Harbors first joined the league, they had 15 athletes. Every year since then, there have been 30 participants with a waiting list! This year, 13 of the 30 team members were new to trap shooting. All the coaches are adults who volunteer their time to mentor young shooters over the five week competition season. The team meets every Friday at Agate Bay Gun Club.

Though the Two Harbors team uses the name of the high school, that is the only thing the trap team uses from the school, says Coach Gary Hastings. Team members pay a fee for the targets and ammunition. As both a team and an individual sport, trap is a good fit for both those that enjoy the comradery of a team and those who prefer to work by themselves. The team uses both 12 gauge and 20 gauge shotguns, and the clay targets, called "birds", are fired using a microphone system. The Agate Bay Gun Club accommodates five shooters at a time.

The THHS Clay Trap Team participates in the Proctor Pheasants Forever Shoot each year, and this year there were 360 athletes from across Minnesota at the Proctor event. Senior Brady Libal finished #4 overall, and the Two Harbors novice team repeated as champions. Emerson Backen was the top female novice,

and she was the #2 novice overall.

Two Harbors also attended the State Championship Shoot in Alexandria, MN. The State Championship Shoot is the world's largest shoot, and this year it boasted over 11,000 competitors - a reasonable number when you consider that there are more trap shooters than hockey players in Minnesota - with 900 athletes shooting the same day as the youth from Two Harbors. There, the top THHS shooters were Brady Libal, Ethan Swartout, Casey Underdale, Anders Hastings, and Reicher Shold.

I chatted with 13-year-old Josiah Poe, a first-time member of THHS Clay Trap Team. He says that his favorite part about participating in the trap team is breaking the birds. Poe's biggest challenge was, "When I got a 20/18." That is a score derived from two rounds of shooting and means that the shooter broke 20 birds in the first round and 18 in the second round.

Another 13-year-old, Gavin Eide, is also a first-time member of the trap team. He says, "I would recommend trap because it's fun and a life skill." Some life lessons Eide says he's learned include "How to handle a firearm and how to work individually towards a group goal."

Learn more about the Minnesota State High School Clay Target League at [mnclaytarget.com/](http://mnclaytarget.com/)!

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