

# Building Archery Participation & Club Membership With Free Archery Classes

Maintaining a range and providing competitive opportunities requires a strong and active membership. Pasadena Roving Archers offers free introductory archery classes to the public every Saturday morning. These classes were begun in the early 1960s. What started out as a small group with perhaps a dozen students on a busy day, has expanded into an active, multifaceted archery education program serving up to 80 students at a time. Student archers, traveling from over 100 zip codes in Southern California, line up every Saturday for the Safety and Orientation Class, the sixweek sequential Basic Archery Instruction Program (BAIP) class, and supervised shooting on the practice range.

These free programs see hundreds of new, first time archers in thousands of student-class contacts during the year. Many of the students are exploring the sport for the first time. They come in all ages and backgrounds. The club teaches children from 5 to 18 years old. Adults range in age from college students to retirees. A high percentage of the participants are adult women. All are motivated by the challenge of directing an arrow to a target. The Safety and Orientation Class is given to beginners who have never shot at the Pasadena range before. Even if they have shot elsewhere or, as is sometimes the case, having shot many years ago, all first time archers are required to take this class. The one and a half hour Safety and Orientation Class has three goals for first timers: to learn range safety rules; to learn basic shooting form; and to have fun. After a warm up and stretching session, beginners are divided up into groups of 8-12 archers for instruction.

Safe equipment handling, shooting line rules and range whistle commands are demonstrated and practiced. Students learn to shoot from a "T" stance with an emphasis on body alignment, smooth draw, and solid anchor. Many instructors include an archery game during the class. At the conclusion of the orientation class, new archers join the more experienced group for a "Balloon Round." Archers who burst a balloon may claim a prize inside.

The more advanced Basic Archery Instruction Program (BAIP) was conceived by PRA President Mike Burnham as a six week sequential class in shooting form. The syllabus and course materials were developed by Van Webster and members of the PRA teaching staff. Based on the "9 Steps to the 10 Ring," students are lead through a progressive program of shooting skills. Additional topics include equipment choices, maintenance, selecting arrows, a bibliography, and archery resources. Students shoot practice tournaments on both 10 ring targets at fixed distances and on field targets at varying distances and terrain. The goals of the BAIP classes are to develop the skills of the archers; direct them to choosing and purchasing their own equipment; increase the participation in the club's tournament offerings; and to encourage membership in Pasadena Roving Archers. Students who have completed the Safety and Orientation Class, as well as those who have completed, or are waiting to take the BAIP class, are invited to participate in our supervised shooting program. Archers shoot at 10 and 20 yards and are guided by the instructors in improving their shooting form. The Saturday classes provide an opportunity for students to ask the instructors for guidance on selecting equipment or setting up their new bow. The Saturday morning shoots have also proved to be a popular social time, as people get to know one another and share stories.

All of the instructors are volunteers and club members. They are NAA certified and follow the NADA guidelines for safety and shooting form. It is the staff's belief that starting the student out

with the correct form from the very beginning reduces the number of bad habits that have to be unlearned later. As one instructor said, "Beginning students will make more progress in their archery on the very first day than they will on any future day." The value in this program, and the opportunity for other archery clubs and archery retailers, is in the use of free instruction as a lure to draw new participants to the sport. All of our introductory programs are free and the club provides all of the recurve bow equipment at no charge. The only obstacle to joining in is just showing up. Expanding the number of people participating in archery expands the number of potential club members as well as the market for archery equipment and accessories. For participants, this free program is a great way to try a new sport without the expense of gearing up and paying for lessons or joining a team. Parents are thrilled that there is an activity for their kids, that costs the parents nothing and in which they can play, too. By reducing the barriers to entry, people are willing to try something new. For the club, the free archery classes have increased the goodwill of the club in the community.

Our membership is growing and diversifying. We add an average of three to four members or families per month. By offering a 300 round, the participation at our tournaments is up. We are adding more instructors too. Students who have completed the program are being certified to teach the next group of newcomers. In a broader context, these free archery classes, and others like them, are bringing the fun and challenge of archery to a whole new audience. Kids, who may not have found their place in team sports, can be successful with archery. Adults are finding an activity that they can share with their children and not just sit on the sidelines. Many adults are coming to archery from other disciplines including fencing, martial arts and firearms shooting. They are enjoying the competitive challenge and the social network that archery provides. Pasadena Roving Archers has found **that about 3% to 8% of first timers stick with archery long enough to purchase equipment, join the club, and shoot in tournaments.** While that may not seem like a big number, it is consistent with industry figures for participants in camp and youth archery programs. The high volume of archery students PRA sees in its free archery programs translates over time into a solid base of committed archers who will benefit the sport as participants, competitors and retail consumers.