

# Learning to handle guns properly keeps everybody safe

Seeking greater proficiency in handgun usage, my wife and I recently completed Northeast Wisconsin Technical College's "Civilian Firearms Safety" course. Some people perceive gun owners as redneck cowboys who walk around brandishing a big ol' six-shooter at their side to look tough. To be sure, there are a few of those. But the vast majority of gun owners are regular folks who own firearms for hunting, competitive sport, collection, or, perhaps most important, self-defense.

In addition to my wife and me, attendees at this course consisted of a college ROTC student and his home-schooling mom, a young couple (she being a law student, he a business owner) with two young children at home, an empty-nester attorney and his wife, a petite female bar/restaurant owner and a service manager from a large vehicular dealership. Gee, no stereotypes.

Like most of the noncredit courses offered by NWTC, this one was top-notch. It was a 16-hour program stretched across two evenings and a Saturday. Held in the public safety training facilities on campus, the course was geared to providing the knowledge, confidence and hands-on experience to use a pistol safely and effectively. Student time was split between classroom theory and live-fire range drills. One of the traits NWTC is noted for, and was certainly upheld in this course, is instructors who bring boatloads of knowledge and real-life experience. The primary instructor, Paul Loppnow, spent

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Commentary



30 years with the Brown County Sheriff's Department and has been an adjunct instructor since 1987. The range officer and assisting instructor was Erik Walters, who spent 17 years with the Manitowoc Police Department and now is full time at NWTC. During their tenure in the field, these guys encountered plenty of examples of good and bad use of firearms. Now their substantial experience, training both law enforcement professionals and civilians, make them highly effective learning coaches.

Unfamiliarity with anything breeds myth and misconception. And nowhere is that more obvious than in debates about gun control. Those who try to curtail legal and responsible gun ownership frequently have one thing in common — they know little or nothing about the safe operations of a firearm. Yet they feel compelled to dictate public policy for gun owners. Seems that too many of our laws and regulations are drafted by those who know little or nothing about the subject. Unfortunately, ignorance in the hands of policymakers is probably far more dangerous than guns in the hands of responsible users.

Bottom line: Safe gun ownership is about the operator, not the tool.

How many people have torn off an arm or leg with a rip saw? Just because you can plug it in and turn it on doesn't mean you can use it safely.

How many people have been killed on motorcycles? Just because you can launch without falling over doesn't mean you can ride safely.

How many people are killed by automobiles each year? Just because you can get behind the wheel and make it go, doesn't mean you're not dangerous.

Instructors Loppnow and Walters do a very nice job of busting the myths, developing a responsible mindset and building operator proficiency with handgun usage.

I challenge anyone who currently believes we need more gun control to complete the NWTC course. Get to know the other attendees, engage the instructors, learn what the course teaches, then honestly re-evaluate your thinking. Maybe it will have changed, maybe not. But at least you'd be in a far better position to develop an informed opinion and speak intelligently about gun control.

And, if you believe the Second Amendment freely applies to us all, then I challenge you to take this course and improve your firearm proficiency (if you have the humility to admit you don't already know everything).

In either case you'll come out a winner.

Dan Linsen of Green Bay advocates for personal responsibility and thinking outside the box. His book "Who's to Blame?" is available at [www.whostoblame.net](http://www.whostoblame.net) and other online sources.