



DANA FARRELL REPORTS FROM FLORIDA

RIGHT: ELEVATED STATIONS ON THE FLAT RED COURSE.

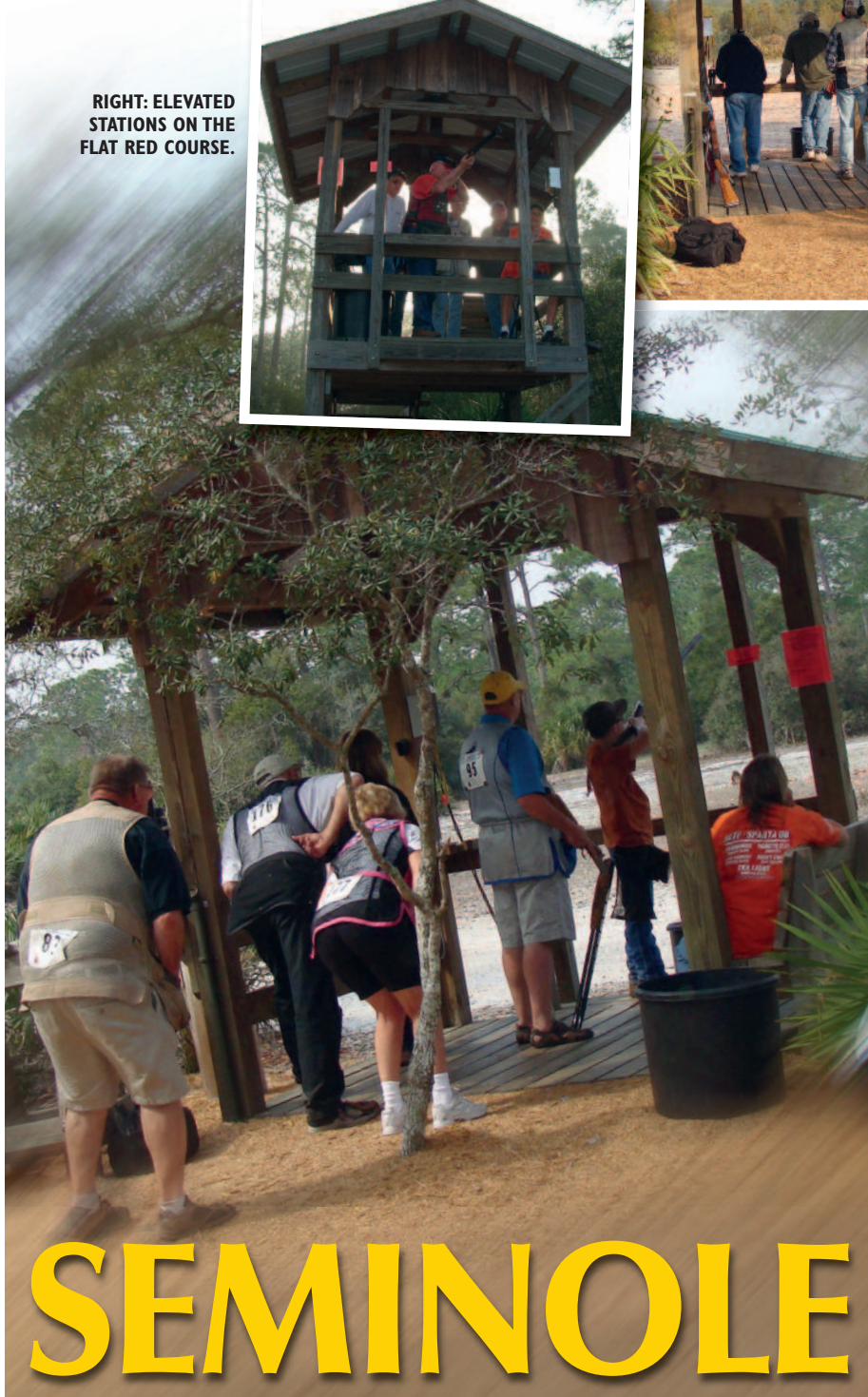


Eighty degrees and sunny – that was the forecast for Central Florida’s Lake

Okeechobee region, home of Quail Creek Plantation and the Seminole Cup for the last seven years running. The combination of perfect weather and 800 registered targets on the late February schedule produced a palpable energy in the air. The parking lot was jam packed full of out of state license plates and vehicles of all sizes, from sub-compacts to motorhomes, and the place was buzzing with dozens of shooting carts weaving throughout the grounds. Vendors had their tents and banners set up and tables full of product to browse. With this much excitement, it’s no wonder that this late winter event has become, to many shooters, the symbolic kick-off of the sporting clays season.

This was my first trip to the Seminole Cup, so I sat on one of the oversized rocking chairs under the eaves of the Quail Creek Plantation clubhouse with Fred Fanizzi, managing partner of Quail Creek, and Shereen Fiorito, the whirlwind “go-to girl” of Seminole Gunworks, and was treated to a crash course on the history of the Seminole Cup, Quail Creek Plantation and a look behind the scenes of this staggeringly complex operation.

The 3400 acre Quail Creek Plantation, a former working cattle ranch, was purchased by owner Whit Hudson in 1998 for use as a quail hunting retreat for friends and business associates. Fanizzi has been with Hudson since the 1998 purchase and says that around the fall of



SEMINOLE

CUP 2011

2001 they started talking about developing a commercial quail hunting venture. It was about that same time they decided to also put in a 14 station sporting clays course and in 2002 started throwing NSCA sporting clays tournaments.

Nothing at Quail Creek is done only half-way, and in 2004 after throwing targets for just a couple of years, they played host to the Florida State Shoot, followed by their first Seminole Cup in 2005. "We've just been getting a little bigger every year. We now throw almost 4 million targets a year – a combination of both recreational and registered birds," says Fanizzi.

Quail Creek has two separate course layouts, known as Red and Blue. According to Fanizzi, roughly 70% of their targets are thrown on the exquisitely manicured Red course,

with its covered stands and shady, wood lined cart paths. The course winds through the native laurels, palmettos and slash pines, and with the use of raised stands, allows several target presentations below the shooter's feet. Although all of Quail Creek's recreational fun shoots, fund raisers, hospitality events and corporate events happen on the premier Red course, the Blue course is also top-notch. More wide open than Red, this course is where most of the ten or so NSCA registered events each year are held. Fanizzi feels variety is key when it comes to target presentations and never allows a course to remain the same for more than two weeks, saying, "We move our courses around every other week. If we move the Red course this week, we move the Blue course next week – the shooters here demand that kind of variety."

Well Oiled Machine

Shereen Fiorito wears a lot of different hats for Seminole Gunworks and is the person who takes care of advanced registration and confirmation emails for the event, working for several months prior to the event carefully making plans in order to allow the shoot to run like a well-oiled machine. Of course, the Seminole Cup preparation must be squeezed in

among a myriad of other day to day tasks related to the general operation of the Seminole Gunworks. She could be seen throughout the week filling different roles – behind the registration table, helping with the raffle prizes, whatever needed to be done. "I do everything at Seminole Gun – processing, shipping, sales of guns, chokes, whatever Seminole Gunworks owner Randy Mitchell needs me to do. Six to eight months out of the year I spend organizing the Seminole Cup – I do all of it." It's not hard to imagine why a shoot of this scale should take six months to organize, especially doing it as successfully as Seminole does – and 2011 was a huge success, with 516 total shoot numbers issued, up from 496 in 2010. This is the only shoot Seminole Gunworks organizes each year, and the care they devote to it is clearly evident. "This year I've not had one person come up to me and complain about anything," said Shereen. "There hasn't been any *'it would've been better if you did this'*... I've had a ton of people come up to me this year and ask if they could sign up for next year already."

Big Winner

This year's Main Event win went to Alabama shooter Mike Benton, who dropped only 11 birds out of 200, beating out a literal "who's who"

field of top-notch All Americans from around the country. It was Benton's first trip to Quail Creek and although he had shot the Seminole a couple of times when it was held at TM Ranch, this was his first Seminole Cup HOA. He's no stranger to the winner's podium though, having won a handful of State championships in Alabama, Georgia and Arkansas. Benton and his red hot 32 inch Renato Gamba also finished Runner-up, one bird off of Robin Irvine's 98, in the Phil Hughes Pre-lim event. I asked for his thoughts on this year's Seminole Cup and he told me there wasn't one thing about the event he didn't like. "It was a good course – good targets... no complaints." His sentiments were echoed by everyone I spoke to.

Entertainment

Food is a huge part of Quail Creek's program, not only at the Seminole, but at their regular NSCA shoots – and customers have proven they don't mind paying a little extra for a delicious meal. "Food is included and it's usually not a hamburger or hot dog type thing! We always try to do a steak, a big pork chop or brisket," says Fanizzi. Saturday night's Seminole banquet featured a mouthwatering serving of prime rib served under their covered



Quail Creek has two separate course layouts, known as Red and Blue.



ABOVE: RANDY MITCHELL AND MIKE BENTON MAIN HOA.

pavilion, where the crowd seemed to unwind and enjoy the festive atmosphere, with lots of mingling and repeat trips to the beer keg. "We really try to focus on hospitality – because we know that people are down here to get out of the cold and to start out the year with a good event. We try to show everybody as good a time as we can," says Fanizzi. "If there's any need, we try to fill it for them."

Fanizzi explains that they could get by with less than the eighty people they have working the whole event, but with less people, they couldn't offer the same level of service. "A few extra people on the payroll helps to provide a good

level of service. This is the biggest Seminole Cup we've had and we feel it's the smoothest one yet," said Fanizzi.

"We've historically had two rotations, but this year we tried something new by going to three rotations, which gave us a maximum of 84 shooters on each course at any given time. There was no double squadding, just A squads of six – no B squads in any of the Main or Pre-lim events. So instead of taking over 3 hours to shoot 100 birds as in previous years, now we're doing it in 2 hours and 15 minutes." Fanizzi credits Chuck Frazier, of Hunter's Point in North Carolina, for pushing for the three rotation schedule. Frazier, a ProMatic

dealer, brought in a truck load of traps to augment Quail Creek's battery of machines and took on the target setting tasks for the 5-Stand and the sub-gauge events.

who said Bloom did a good job of exposing shooters' early season weaknesses, posted the only 25 straight of the event, which he scored on Parcour 3.

FITASC

Michigan's Pat Lieske dropped only one target on the 50 bird 5-Stand to take the event, also finishing first in the Bill Wall FITASC competition with a score of 93 on a stiff four Parcour set-up that this year saw a field of 224 shooters. The FITASC targets, set by Gary Bloom were tough, but like Manager Fanizzi said, "It is the Seminole Cup and those are the kind of targets you expect to see down here." Robin Irvine finished Runner-up with 91, followed by Curtis Mauldin in M1 with an 89. Mauldin,

Sub-Gauge

The Sub-gauge events were held one per day, spread out over ground that normally serves as two 5-Stand layouts. The

"We've historically had two rotations, but this year we tried something new."



VENDORS MADE THE SEMINOLE CUP AN EARLY SEASON SHOPPING OPPORTUNITY.



ABOVE: PAT LIESKE. RIGHT: CURTIS MAULDIN.





GARY BLOOM SET THE FITASC TARGETS.

approach was different this year, with a 20 gauge event on Friday, 28 gauge on Saturday and a .410 event on Sunday – with shoot-offs after each day. This required moving targets around each evening to accommodate the following day’s event. Other events included a 100 bird Thursday Pre-lim, another 100 bird Pre-lim on Friday, plus a Friday 100 bird Phil Hughes Pre-lim, named in memory of Seminole Gunworks machinist Phil Hughes.

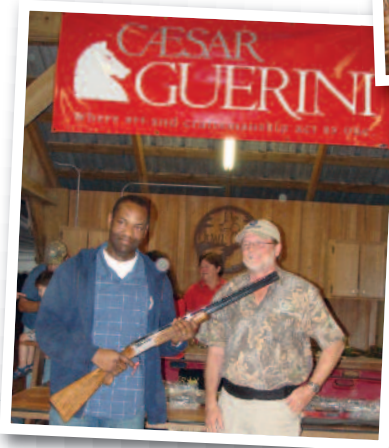
All of the vendors at the Seminole Cup are event sponsors, either donating cash, product or both. Shoot management actually prefers vendors donate product because it all goes directly back to the shooters, thereby directly elevating the quality of the shooters’ experience. Caesar Guerini USA has historically been a top tier supporter of the Seminole and this year donated three guns, which were given away in an exciting draw during Saturday night’s prime rib dinner. “We have been involved with the Seminole Cup for a number of years and it has been consistently a great event,” said Wes Lang of Caesar Guerini, who throughout the weekend could be seen tweaking shotguns on the bench of Caesar Guerini’s trailer. “The people at Seminole Gunworks and Quail Creek are organized and friendly. After a long winter, most shooters

are eager to get out of the cold and do some shooting in the warm Florida sunshine, so everyone seems to be in a good mood. It’s a great atmosphere.”

RU Shoot-Off

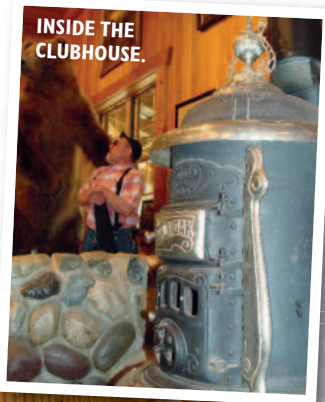
The shooting came to a close Sunday evening after a round of shoot-offs held on the practice 5-Stand, the highlight of which was a “Clash of the Titans” match between Anthony Matarese Jr. and Brad Kidd for the Main event Runner-up spot. Matarese came out on top, adding the Main Event RU trophy to the armful he took home this year, including hardware for HOA wins in both the Thursday and Friday Pre-lim events. Kidd, last year’s National Champion, had to settle for Main Event M1.

Looking back, I have to say that getting out of the upper Midwest snow and ice wasn’t my main motivation for attending the



KIDD AND MATARESE.

Seminole Cup, but the lovely Florida weather sure made me not want to leave. I admit I now totally understand why northern shooters come down to Florida in February to start their sporting clays season. Quail Creek Plantation’s targets, camaraderie, wonderful customer service, delicious food... plus the gorgeous Florida weather in February. What’s not to like about that? ■



INSIDE THE CLUBHOUSE.



CLUBHOUSE PORCH.



LEFT: ONE OF THE GUERINI RAFFLE WINNERS. ABOVE: CLUBHOUSE.

MAIN EVENT		
HOA	MIKE BENTON	189
RU	ANTHONY MATARESE	188
M1	BRAD KIDD	188
AA 1	ED ARRIGHI	183
A1	HUNTER BROWN	175
B1	DOUGLAS DU QUESNAY	172
C1	JIM HUTCHINSON	160
D1	EDDIE BLAZEK	149
E1	DARLENE VEIT	133
L	JENNI CLARK	179
SJ	JENNI CLARK	179
J	THEO RIBBS	181
V	DAN CARLISLE	185
SV	JACK CONCANNON	176
SSV	BILL CAMPBELL	136

FITASC		
HOA	PAT LIESKE	93
RU	ROBIN IRVINE	91
M1	CURT MAULDIN	89
AA1	JOSH MILLIGAN	81
A1	BENJAMIN REMLER	82
B1	ZACH SNOW	82
C1	BRIAN CURTIS	68
D1	GENE SIMMONS	60
E1	LEWIS MC MURRAN IV	57
L	DIANE SORANTINO	76
J	BEN SLOME	89
V	JOHN WOOLLEY	88
SV	GEORGE BOGNER	80

PRE-LIM, SUB-GAUGE AND 5-STAND WINNERS	
THURSDAY PRE-LIM HOA	ANTHONY MATARESE 95
FRIDAY PRE-LIM HOA	ANTHONY MATARESE 96
PHIL HUGHES PRE-LIM HOA	ROBIN IRVINE 98
5-STAND HOA	PAT LIESKE 49
20 GAUGE HOA	WILL HINTON 45
28 GAUGE HOA	BRET BRODERSEN 48
.410 HOA	HUNTER MILLIGAN 48