

THE BUSINESS OF 'SPORTING CLAYS' IS LIKE LOOKING AT AN ICEBERG – MOST OF IT IS CONCEALED BELOW THE SURFACE. THE BIG CLUBS ARE PROMINENTLY IN VIEW WITH THEIR BIG NAME SHOOTS AND ADS PUBLISHED IN MAGAZINES. YET MOST SHOOTING IN THIS SPORT HAPPENS OUT OF SIGHT – BELOW THE SURFACE AT THE SMALL CLUBS. WHAT EXACTLY ARE THEY DOING TO GET THE SHOOTERS' ATTENTION? OHIO'S INDIAN RIDGE LET **TOM THOMPSON** LOOK OVER THEIR SHOULDER FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER, AS THEY WENT ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS OF MEETING SHOOTERS' NEEDS.

ATTRACTING ATTENTION



DAVE BELL SHOTS STATION THREE. DAVE AND HIS UNCLE (JACK) TRAVEL THE CIRCUIT EVERY WEEK.

INDIAN RIDGE REGULAR, BOB MOORMAN, SHOTS FROM A BOAT MOUNTED ON CHAINS TO GIVE IT A FLUID MOTION. BOB JOINED THE DUCK HUNTERS FOR THE SPECIAL SHOOT, BECAUSE HE WAS SURE THE NEW TWISTS WOULD ADD FUN.



Located in Western Ohio, halfway between Dayton and Toledo near Indian Lake, Indian Ridge is a small club that attracts shooters the old fashioned way, they work at it. After five years in business, the club's mailing list holds 950 names and continues to grow. It is a proprietary enterprise, owned and operated by Brian and Rita Thompson. Much of their growth has occurred through the development of new shooters or by

attracting occasional shooters into regular participation.

"Our Ducks Unlimited shoot is a good example of developing an event and seeing it grow," says Brian. "DU was looking for a meeting place near the lake after the duck blind drawing. We made an offer to them to turn it into an extended event including a round

of clays. We set up some special fun shooting stations that are no longer allowed in NSCA shooting – poison birds, shooting from a boat, reload station, sitting in a duck blind.

"It has continued to grow over the three years. Shooters look forward to it, and the club picked up some duck hunters who come back often," Brian said. "With their



BRIAN AND JIM RESET A TRAP MAKING A QUICK CHANGE ON THE INDIAN RIDGE COURSE FOLLOWING THE SMALL GAUGE EVENT. MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED TURNED OUT FOR THE WESTERN OHIO CLASSIC'S 100 BIRD EVENT.



Shoot, staged in the memory of sportsmen buddies Mark Coomer and Brent Bailey who were afflicted with cancer. Mark and Brent's friends organize the shoot and proceeds go to health related charities in Auglaize County. This shoot draws its own crowd of once a year shooters. "It's amazing that they can bring in so many new shooters each year," says Rita. "They always bring lots of kids. They generate good money from raffles and shooting station sponsorships. I don't have exact figures about their final donation, but it's the biggest charity event we work with."

raffle tickets, silent auctions and side games, DU claims this year's shoot turned a bigger profit than some chapters have netted with shoot fees fixed at three times the cost."



INDIAN RIDGE'S CREW OF TRAPPERS HIT THE CHOW LINE DURING A BREAK IN THE ACTION AT ONE OF THE AUTUMN FUNDRAISERS.

FUNDRAISERS.

The Western Ohio Classic is Indian Ridge's centerpiece shoot of the year. Held over two days, September 25 and 26, the shoot features competitions in small gauges, pump guns and side by sides on Saturday, and a 100 bird Classic on Sunday. One hundred and thirty entries were generated for the multi-gun events on Saturday. Jim Bowers won the small gauge HOA with 136/150 – he won .410 with 46 and 20 gauge with 48.

The 'duck shoot', as Rita calls it, headed the busy autumn season. Indian Ridge also offers a once a month fifty bird fun shoot on the fourth Sunday of each month – part of a rotating schedule worked out in co-operation with three other clubs. These fourth Sunday events usually draw more than a hundred participants. "We don't schedule events for the Sundays when other clubs on our shooting circuit are shooting," Rita points out – leaving the club with a calendar of busy Saturdays.



The 100 bird Classic on Sunday drew over 100 shooters – Ohio sporting clays Champion Robert Harford (an Indian Ridge regular) and Indiana club owner Mike Hafley tied for high score on 92.

The third Saturday in September was reserved for a charity event, the Coomer-Bailey

MARK THOMPSON DOUBLE CHECKS SCORES FOR ACCURACY BEFORE TURNING OVER THE PAPERWORK FOR THE SHOOT REPORT THAT GOES TO EVERY SHOOTER WHO PLAYS THE MONEY (LEWIS CLASS). INDIAN RIDGE BUILT ITS REPUTATION ON GOOD SERVICE. GETTING THE SHOOT RESULTS RIGHT IS MANDATORY.

Dave Hudgins was the only other shooter in the nineties (90). A favorite side bet at Indian Ridge is a one-dollar draw pot – one score is selected at random, and the shooter with that score gets the pot. Three shooters with 65 shared the \$90 draw pot.

Logistically, carrying off a two-day event stretches the resources of this small club. The small gauge course was completely new, set in place on Friday evening. After the shooting ended on Saturday, the course was rebuilt for Sunday's hundred-bird shoot. "Friends and family have played a major role in our success," Brian says. "Truth is, we have fun setting up the course. Usually two of my brothers and one or two nephews join us along with one or two friends – it's always good for a few laughs. We have a great pool of creative and talented target setters."

Brian has the final word on course design. He's conscious of the skill level of his shooting clientele. The charity shoots are usually set pretty soft. His intent is to let shooters break some targets and have fun. "We'll set up something that looks more like a small gauge course for the fund raisers," Brian says. "Our competition courses require a step up in skills. We factor a lot of gun safety concepts in when we are hosting shooters of limited experience."

Rita takes care of recruiting trappers – the club uses a mixture of manual and automatic traps. Eleven trappers were ordered for the 100 bird Classic, meaning nobody had to wait long for their turn to shoot. The club is very 'customer service' oriented, trappers work for tips. Trappers are the 'oil' that makes the machine run efficiently – generous tips assure an abundant supply of trappers. Rita says, "If the kids can't make good money, it's hard to get them to come back. Ours

are well trained and efficient. Shooters treat them pretty well."

When asked to compare running a small club to a big club, Rita says, "It's probably much the same – we all have equipment issues and personnel issues, we're all dependent upon the weather and we all have to keep our shooter

base informed. The biggest difference is how we measure success. A hundred and thirty shooters coming to our fifty bird fun shoot is a big deal. A charity event that nets three or four thousand dollars is rewarding for us."

Brian added, "Big clubs don't likely get excited about such

numbers, but the Bath High School Wrestlers couldn't attract their fund-raiser crowd to Detroit or Quail Ridge. We serve a different role than the big clubs, and do not view them as competition. We cover our little corner of the world, and nobody else even knows we exist." ■