



Women hunters (left to right) Crystal Ludowese, Jenna Hill and Sandi Murray walked through a field with their dog, in search of pheasants during the fall bird season in northwest Kansas.

— Photo courtesy of Rex Murray

Stanley

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Women taking to the hunting field

By Karen Krien

The Saint Francis Herald
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These days, more and more women are taking up their gun or bow and arrows and heading to the wilds to hunt.

Sandi Murray, who owns Ringneck Country in Cheyenne County with her husband Rex, said when they started 31 years ago, there were no women in competitions. Today, several women have started coming to their shooting-dog events. To help encourage women to hunt, she said, the Murrays are planning to have a women's competition.

Sandi said she didn't grow up in a "hunting" family. But, before she married Rex 30 years ago, she took the hunter safety course and has been hunting ever since.

The Murrays often hunted as a family. Even when their children, Ryan and Crystal, were little, they were out — the adults with shotguns and the kids with their BB guns. They didn't care what the temperature was.

"Rex always said, 'If the birds can fly in it, we can hunt it,' so we hunted," she said.

Crystal has continued to hunt

through the years. She and her husband, Travis, are avid upland bird hunters. They have added waterfowl as part of their hobby.

While Sandi hunts all birds, she said her favorite sport is hunting pheasants with her 20-gauge shotgun and her own Vizsla dogs, Magic and Reggie.

"I like having my own dogs," she said. "I have more confidence with them and they listen to me!"

Because she is short, she said, she has a shorter stock on her gun. She also has her own gear box and bag which she takes care of and carries.

The biggest problem, she said, is getting hunting clothes to fit her. Women, she said, just don't comfortably fit into men's clothing.

She has started her own line of hunting clothes, "Ringneck Diva," which will feature T-shirts, hunting vests and jackets. Kathy Roll of Kingfisher, Okla., will be helping develop the line, she said.

Getting her kids out to enjoy nature has always been important to her. Hunting, she said, is one of the best ways to do that. The Murrays are implementing a youth division in the hunting competitions held at Ringneck.

Ever so often, she said, they find kids who love to hunt and take them under their wing. Joel and Jenna Hill spend a great deal of time at Ringneck (their dad, John, is a hunter). During the competitions, Jenna helps plant the birds and, this year, Joel also plans to help. Both of the Hill kids have hunting dogs they have trained and Joel goes with Rex to sport shows and helps with the dogs, Sandi said.

"We think it is important that kids learn how to hunt, handle a gun and know what to do with the birds," she said.

And, she said, it's not how many birds you kill, but how the hunt goes, how the dogs work and having fun.

When she has a day off, she said, she and Rex go hunting. They find hunting different birds on different terrain challenging, so they have traveled as far as Idaho to hunt. In Idaho, they hunted chukkar partridges, she said, and the terrain was hard and rough.

A number of years ago, she and Rex had gone to the National Grasslands in the southwest corner of Kansas to hunt quail. Sandi said she had never hunted quail before, and when a covey flew up in front of her, it startled her so much that she didn't even shoot

the gun. That was the last time that happened, she added.

The rush of the birds still startles her, she said, but, today, she is ready for it and finds the rush of the birds exciting.

Sandi said she and Rex never waste the birds they hunt. Sandi, who also cooks for the Ringneck lodge, said she has lots of recipes, including smoking the birds.

"Nothing goes to waste," said Sandi, adding that Rex's favorite dish is pheasant pot pie.

She will shoot clay pigeons and has beat men in competition, she said, but this is not the same as hunting live birds. There is not the same challenge.

Sandi and Rex conduct paid live shooting and dog competitions at Ringneck. They also have controlled shooting land. The National Upland Classic was set for Oct. 17 and 18. Then Dec. 12 and 13, another Upland Classic event will be held. Feb. 20 and 21, the Kansas State Pheasant Championship will be held at Ringneck.

Hunting, these days, consumes much of Sandi's time. When she isn't carrying a gun, she is preparing for, helping with and following up on

hunting activities held at Ringneck. The lodge and sleeping quarters require cleaning and keeping up, as well as preparing food.

But, she said, she loves it!

"I like the people who come," she said. "They come from all over the United States, and they have interesting stories. Best of all, they all love to hunt."

Jenna has been hunting since she was 7, going after pheasant, chukkar, deer, quail and turkey. She says deer and pheasant are her favorites.

Her guns include a 12-gauge shotgun and a .243 caliber rifle. Hunting is best when she has her dogs, Zoom and Sade, with her. She trains her own dogs so they work the way she wants them to, Jenna said.

Like the Murrays, the Hills eat what they kill. The kids said their favorite way of eating most of the wild game is when their dad smokes it.

Some day, Sandi said, she wants to hunt a wild boar. There is a place in Oklahoma that holds boar hunts. Why boars?

"Just sounds like fun," Sandi said. Jenna said she would like to go, too, so look for more about the hunt in the future.

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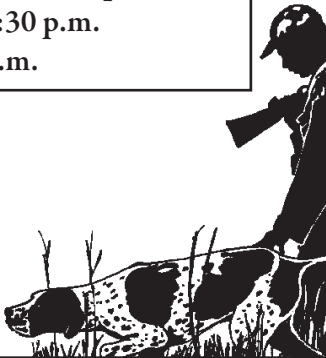
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