

Apprentice license allows 16 and older time to try hunting

By Jim Merriott

The Oberlin Herald
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Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius has signed a law authorizing a one-time apprentice hunting license allowing anyone 16 or older to try the sport on for size.

"The individual would be exempt from the Hunter Education requirement for the term of the license," said Wayne Doyle, hunter education coordinator for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, "provided the apprentice hunter is under the direct supervision of a licensed hunter 18 or older while hunting.

"The apprentice would be required to meet hunter education requirements prior to buying the next hunting license. Hopefully, this gives a person who has never hunted before an opportunity to find out if they enjoy the sport before committing to the hunter education course."

Since the Kansas Hunter Education program began in 1973, statistics show that hunting gun and bow accidents have spiraled downward. Doyle said the 200,000 hunters in 2006 averaged five days each in the field, or roughly 1 million

hunting days during last season. Only 17 accidents were reported, only 10 of which involved hunters' swing on game and shooting into other hunters.

Two occurred during the spring turkey season with hunters mistaking other hunters for game. Most of the rest were due to carelessness of the individual.

"The program has proven itself over the years," Doyle said. "After the influx of veterans after World War II, the accident rate in the field across America was staggering.

The state of New York and Kentucky each decided to begin programs to reduce the hunting accident rate. Since that time, all 50 states have developed hunter education programs, making shooting sports one of the safest sports in America.

"Hunters born after July 1, 1973, are now required in the state of Kansas to take the 10-13 hour course if they want to purchase a license on their 16th birthday," Doyle said. "There are also school districts in the state ... that have established the program into their physical education curriculum for the main purpose of teach-



Wildlife Conservation Officer Dick Kelly explained the importance of firearm safety in the field recently to students at Oberlin Elementary School.

ing students proper firearm safety procedures.

A new college-level course introduces teachers to gun safety, nature education, conservation and preservation so they have the experience necessary to develop curricula for their schools, he said.

Over the past 34 years, Doyle said, Kansas has taught about 500,000 students.

Oberlin Hunter Education instructor Rick Doeden and his partners, Terry Ream, Kevin Brown, and Rick Pauls, have taught the course in northwest Kansas for several years.

"Everybody needs it, no matter how old they are or how long they have hunted," said Doeden. "It is just a good refresher, and the firearm safety unit of the course is just as important in today's society."

For information on the hunter education program, go to the Department of Wildlife and Parks website to locate Hunter education instructors in your area at www.kdwp.state.ks.us or contact the department at Hunter Education, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, Kan., 67124, phone (620) 672-5911

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