

BC3 unveils courses that aim to improve handgun safety, marksmanship

“You can be considered a proficient shooter when you are done,” instructor says

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(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College is offering for the first time a series of basic pistol shooting courses for civilians, instructed by a former military special operations member and designed to teach participants about firearm safety, and how to place five rounds into circular targets that are 4 inches in diameter.

The two-day basic pistol shooting - National Rifle Association course will be held from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. July 7 in Room 106 of the Science and Technology building on BC3’s main campus in Butler Township; and continue from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. July 8 at the Litman Range Facility, off Route 8 in Butler Township.

The same course will be offered over two days on Aug. 11-12; and over three days on Aug. 29, Aug. 31 and Sept. 1; and on Oct. 10, Oct. 12 and Oct. 14. The first two classes of the three-day course are scheduled for 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. in Room 106 of the Science and Technology building; followed by the final class held from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Litman Range Facility.

Participants must be at least 21 years old and supply their own pistol, holster or case, and ammunition, which is limited to first-run factory bullets.

Michael Pearson, a training sergeant with BC3’s campus police, has served as a certified instructor for five years with the NRA, for nearly seven years with the state of Pennsylvania, and was a firearms and tactics instructor while serving in the Air Force.

“You can come in for this two-day class and not know anything,” said Pearson, a police officer for 25 years. “When you are done, you will have more knowledge with safety and with your firearm, its abilities and your ability. You can be considered a proficient shooter when you are done.”



A 9mm handgun and the target used by a participant in a pilot program for Butler County Community College’s basic pistol Shooting - National Rifle Association course is shown May 13. Its user, a 63-year-old woman who prior to the program had never fired a gun, qualified for the NRA certificate of course completion on her first attempt.

Participant: Instructor on target with techniques

Russell Hendrickson, 43, of Economy, Beaver County, was a participant in a pilot course held May 11-13.

“What impressed me was the instructor’s ability to take a purely novice shooter and be able to get him or her on target and able to shoot well enough to pass the qualification course,” said Hendrickson, who brought with him a 9mm handgun.

As of Dec. 31, 2011, an estimated 786,000 Pennsylvania residents possessed active gun permits, a number that trailed only Florida and its 887,000, according to a July 2012 report by the federal Government Accounting Office.

“The best way to be a responsible gun owner is to know how the handgun works,” Pearson said, “and what it will and will not do. In the movies and on television, as a whole, people pull the trigger and someone falls down or it knocks someone back 15 feet. A handgun won’t do that. That is one of the things it will not do.”

Pearson will teach participants about why carelessness and ignorance are the main causes of injuries and accidents, and about the different types of pistols, their parts and how they function. Participants will learn how to improve their sight alignment, which is “positioning the front sight equally between the rear posts” on the barrel, Pearson said; sight picture, which is “the orientation between the sight alignment and target,” he said, and their grip.

“More than likely your fingers are in the wrong place and many people still try to do the whole cup and saucer position,” he said, laying his right hand with index finger and thumb outstretched in the shape of a pistol onto the open palm of his left hand.

“If you don’t have the proper pressure, as far as gripping the firearm, it will have the tendency to rise out of your hand.”

“It’s a lot harder than you think”

To receive an NRA certificate of course completion, students must demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attitude necessary for the safe and proficient use of a pistol, and pass the qualification shooting standard at a Level 1.

That means placing five shots in a grouping inside four different 4-inch circles at 10 feet.

“You are not allowed to exit that circle,” Pearson said. “Most people think, ‘Oh, 10 feet. I could do that.’ It’s a lot harder than you think.”

Among his success stories is a 63-year-old woman who prior to a pilot program had never fired a gun – “not even so much as a BB gun,” Pearson said.

“Her husband bought her a firearm for Christmas, and told her they would take a class together so she would feel more comfortable,” Pearson said. “She literally listened to what she was told to do and had these nice, tight groupings.”

The 63-year-old woman placed five shots in a grouping inside four different 4-inch circles at 10 feet, and qualified for the NRA certificate of course completion.

“Some of the shooters in the class had not even fired a pistol,” Hendrickson said. “I observed (Pearson) taking the time to walk them through proper sequence for shooting a pistol to putting rounds on target. For an instructor to do that takes lots of skill.”

For more information or to register, visit bc3.edu/firearmtraining or call 724-287-8711, ext. 8418.