

BY BRIAN MCCOMBIE

HELPING THOSE WHO SERVE

The Oregon Firearms Academy believes in community involvement

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, NATIONAL GUARD UNITS IN WEST-central Oregon discovered they'd soon be shipping out to Iraq. Dan Abbott, co-owner with Rick Benson of the Oregon Firearms Academy, in the town of Lebanon, was there to lend a helping hand.

"A lot of the men and women who were being deployed were concerned about their loved ones, who they were leaving behind for at least a year," says Abbott. Abbot and Benson decided to offer the spouses discounts for basic handgun safety courses at the academy so they could get concealed-handgun licenses.

"In the last few years since we've gone to war, and, really, ever since 9/11, we've tried to support our nation on multiple fronts," Abbott says. "Rick and I just want to contribute to the community. As a general rule, we do things that support military and law enforcement. We just have a real soft spot for that area."

In business for a decade now, the Oregon Firearms Academy

trains people in cutting-edge defensive shooting techniques and tactics. The staff trains about a thousand shooters a year, many from the military and law enforcement. Additionally, active

Dan Abbott (left) and Rick Benson of the Oregon Firearms Academy help their community, and their country, however they can.

military receive tuition reductions on any classes they take. "We know that the skills they're going to be learning with us are directly applicable to serving our country," says Abbott. The academy has also provided free instruction for military firearms instructors and armorers who

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PHOTO BY JOHN REPALEY

want additional training.

The academy offers retired police officers the qualifying courses they need to satisfy the requirements of the federal law that regulates concealed-carry permits. Local police departments with tight training budgets have found generous discounts for training and certification work at the academy, too.

The academy also donates free classes and gear from its pro shop to Friends of the NRA banquets. "It's giving back to the community," says Abbott. "We feel very strongly about that."

This includes being a good neighbor, too. The facility is located in a rural area of rolling foothills, but it still has some neighbors. "We offer them the chance to take our classes for free or to use the range," says Abbott. "It's built a lot of goodwill. They've become our allies and support us."

Respect for the community is expressed in other ways, too. "Nearby our facility is an old cemetery," Abbott says. "It doesn't get used a lot. But on Memorial Day we shut down; we won't do any kind of shooting on Memorial Day at all, because we know there are people at the cemetery doing remembrances."

A couple of years ago a neighbor who's a retired police officer came by and mentioned that his family was going to conduct an outdoor wedding, Abbott recalls. "We had a class that day, but we scheduled around the wedding."

Abbott believes the academy's work with the community has had a positive impact on how people perceive firearms, too. "There are a lot of people who don't like guns," he says. "They may not be antigun, but they're just not comfortable with firearms. They have either come out to the range because they had a spouse or loved one train here or, in the case of the National Guard spouses, took their own training here."

For such people, that experience put shooting and shooters in a more favorable light. "It creates community goodwill," says Abbott. "I've heard that numerous times."

"We have a pretty harmonious relationship with our neighbors," he says. Such relationships, Abbott notes, take time, genuine caring and a real commitment to being an active member of the community. E



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