

Arming against crime

Concealable-handgun demand exceeds supply, retailer says

By RICHARD WAGONER
Of the Emerald

Guns. America won its independence with them, tamed the west with them, and helped feed its families with them.

They are collected and coveted by millions of Americans. And they are hated and feared by millions more.

America has had a long and intimate affair with firearms. But as violent crime increases, accidental shootings occur, and presidents, musicians and other public figures are wounded or killed, some people feel that affair has soured.

Yet the sale of guns mounts across the country, and Eugene is no exception.

While many — if not most — firearms are purchased for sport or collection, fear of burglary, rape and robbery has prompted many local residents to set aside their apprehension of guns and spend up to \$500 for a handgun.

"Expensive guns, quality guns, are the ones that are in demand," says Jeff Jagels, retail manager at Lenz Firearms Co., a local gun sales and repair shop.

"Especially the concealable handguns — the small autos or snubbed-nose revolvers. Supply doesn't exceed demand," he says.

Jagels describes business as good, and his stock of quality handguns indicates the type of weapons consumers want.

"In any season but hunting season, handguns are the bread and butter of a gun shop. About 70 percent of our sales are handguns."

Jagels attributes the sales handguns are enjoying to fear of rising crime and the feeling that police can no longer protect lives and property.

"It's a shame. Business is usually best in times when either crime goes up or government is screaming for more gun control," he says. "Our best times are the worst times for victims."

Women and young couples are becoming more frequent gun shop customers, Jagels says. Women prefer the small, automatic pistols — such as Smith and Wesson .38-caliber specials or .22 automatics — because they are easy to shoot and don't recoil much.

"They (some women) used to say they wouldn't want (a gun) in the house. They still don't want to shoot one, but it gives them peace of mind," he says.

Jagels recommends at least a .38-caliber pistol for defensive use. Gun owners shouldn't be interested in a gun's killing power. They should be concerned with its stopping power.

A good .38 caliber — which would cost about \$135 new — has enough power to knock a man down, he says.

Jagels is concerned some people who purchase guns don't know how to use them. He advocates requiring a test — similar to a driver's test — for all potential gun purchasers insuring they know how to operate and take care of the weapon.

"Ignorance about a product is more deadly than the product itself," he says.

Local law enforcement officials share Jagels' concern.

Lane County Sheriff Dave Burks, who is responsible for handing out concealed weapon permits locally, says he is careful in deciding who can carry a gun.

Burks says Lane County — which currently has 783 outstanding concealed weapon permits — is "right in the middle" in granting them.

Douglas County, smaller in population than Lane, has issued about 60 permits since last January. Officials there say most gun permits aren't renewed when the yearly application expires.

Burks grants concealed weapon permits to Lane County residents who can prove to him they have an "exceptional" need to carry one. That need may be because their life has been threatened or because they have a job that requires carrying large amounts of cash.

To obtain a concealed weapon permit, a resident must first apply at the sheriff's office and explain in detail why the permit is needed.

The applicant is fingerprinted, and those records are sent to the FBI and the state police to check for prior arrests. Anyone with an arrest record is denied a permit.

About seven weeks after application, the background information from the federal and state agencies is sent to the sheriff's office, where it is reviewed and the permit is either approved or denied. The sheriff has complete discretion in deciding who will receive a permit.

Permits are reviewed every year, and if any arrests or other damaging background turns up, the permit is revoked, he says.

Eugene Police Chief James Packard also is concerned about the growing number of gun owners.

Packard says he sympathizes with people who feel they need the extra protection a gun gives. But he fears the damage they can cause in inexperienced hands.

"When used by untrained people, I've seen



Graphic by Ken Babbs

more misery caused by handguns than I've seen protection," Packard says.

Packard, like Burks and Jagels, favors gun control. He says people should be made responsible for the guns they own to prevent guns from falling into the wrong hands. How people can be made responsible, Packard is not sure.

Jagels says education is the only effective and fair way to control guns. Gun owners should be required to demonstrate their competence with weapons before they can buy one.

"There is no quick fix," he says. "The only way to get rid of handguns is to go into the homes and take them away, and God help the agency that tries to do that."

Burks says swift and sure punishment for criminals who use weapons is the best solution. A criminal will get a weapon even if it is illegal, he says.

Packard says changing society's perception of guns may be the only answer.

"When you decide to buy a gun, whether it is a handgun or a deer rifle, what you're really doing is saying you've decided that you are willing to kill something under some certain circumstances."

"That's a very heavy thing, and I don't think many people think about that."

Bills may provide easier gun access

By LESLIE FERRIS
Of the Emerald

Multnomah County sheriffs say passage of two bills pending in the Legislature could result in more Oregonians carrying concealed weapons.

HB 2421 and SB 887 would require Oregon county sheriffs to grant concealable weapon permits to applicants who meet state law criteria. Currently, the sheriff can grant or deny a permit request, even if the applicant meets state criteria.

"Essentially, the (House) bill would change the permissive language of the law, which says the sheriff 'may' issue a concealed weapon permit, to mandatory language, which says the sheriff 'shall' issue a permit if the person meets certain conditions," says House Judiciary Counsel Steve Griffith.

Chief among these conditions are that an applicant not have a criminal record and have a valid reason for carrying a concealed weapon. A \$10 application fee is charged, and the permit must be renewed each year.

A coalition of gun clubs called "Gunners of Oregon, Inc." requested the bills be introduced to the House Judiciary Committee and the Senate Justice Committee. Both committees have held hearings on the bills, and more hearings will be scheduled.

John Nichols, a former Multnomah County deputy sheriff, said he and others requested the bill to provide uniform, statewide licensing criteria. He said the House bill has been amended to apply only to concealable pistols and revolvers. And the bill would increase penalties for those carrying unlicensed weapons.

"Sheriffs in some counties have been very arbitrary about

issuing permits," Nichols said. "In Multnomah County, you just about have to show up with a death certificate to prove you have reason for needing a permit."

Nichols says he believes many law enforcement administrators have testified against the bill because "they think the citizen is an incompetent slob who can't be trusted."

"But there's a great difference between what the street policeman thinks and what the administrator thinks," Edgar Martin, Multnomah County sheriff, says since 1968 his office has issued just two or

"In Multnomah County, you just about have to show up with a death certificate to prove you have a reason for needing a permit."

three permits per year. In contrast, Douglas County has issued 60 concealable weapon permits this year, and Lane County currently has 783 outstanding.

"We feel in such a densely populated area as Portland, there's a high potential for violence," Martin says. "The question of carrying concealed weapons in a relatively unpopulated county like Douglas or Grant County is a different question than in a densely populated area like Multnomah."

"If passed, the bill would result in larger numbers of citizens carrying concealed weapons in our society."

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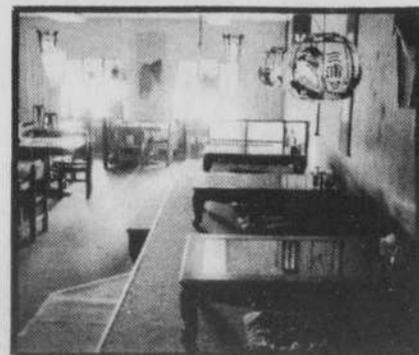
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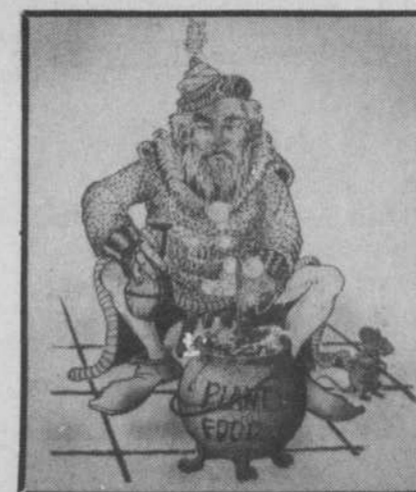
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