

Friends of NRA banquet raises \$114K

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE Maybe it's because we're leading up to an election, or maybe it's because there are a couple hundred gun-toting Wallowa County residents who want to have some retail therapy in the company of like-minded folks, or maybe . . . the reasons for NRA membership are diverse.

In any case, 276 folks bought out tickets to the Wallowa County Friends of NRA Banquet almost a month before it happened; the event was Saturday, Oct. 17 and it was sold out by Sept. 28.

The event grossed \$114,000, half of which will come back to the Oregon Friends of NRA State Fund Committee to be used for grants and scholarships.

"(Our banquet) was a tremendous success," said a beaming Stephen Wolfe, chairman of the Wallowa County Friends of NRA. "I'm so tickled. It exceeded my expectations. I can't thank the community enough for their tremendous support."

The chapter is even thanking more than 100 people who never made it to the event. There are over 100 who sponsored, underwrote or donated to the banquet but were unable to attend because of limited seating, Wolfe said.

"In addition to those people, there were even more people who would have liked to come," Wolfe said. "We could have sold another 100



Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain

Approximately 280 people gathered to enjoy a night of bidding, socializing and eating at the 2015 NRA Banquet, Oct. 17.



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Chief Joseph Days Rodeo Queen candidates Lauren Makin and Sarah Aschenbrenner help out at the banquet.



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Rep. Barretto socializes with one of his constituents at the NRA Banquet.

tickets easy if we'd had room to put the people."

Fifty-six guns were awarded, sold or raffled at the

event along with thousands of dollars of other items.

Bruce Bliven of Enterprise was the big bidder of the night, purchasing the landowner preference youth cow hunt tag in Sled Springs (hunt came with a Remington 30.06 rifle w/scope); and all the "key" items that gave him a key that might open the padlock on the Rossi Model 92 Rifle with an NRA Coin inset. He took no chances, even negotiating a deal with a fellow who outbid him on one key item. In addition to his Rossi, he won a bonus

Funding

NRA funds come into the county in some of the following ways: Divide Camp got a grant for an all terrain track wheelchair to allow disabled veterans to hunt; range improvements have been made for Eagle Cap Shooters Association and Wallowa Rod and Gun Club; for the last two years WC NRA has

awarded three \$1,000 scholarships per year to local high school seniors; and the Education Summit Scholarship is open to for high school students - a winner is chosen every June to take a three-day trip to Salem to see how government works, and vie for a trip to Wash. D.C.

prize of a Chiappa 1873-style revolver.

After a fine dinner catered by Tammy Couch of Enterprise and featuring prime rib bought at Dollar Stretcher and cooked by Randy Garnett's Apple Flats Catering, attendees began sharing their opinions about gun ownership with table mates.

Les Bridges of Enterprise uses his guns for hunting. He got his tickets to the event early and was at the event

because "our second amendment rights are the most important thing to me and I appreciate how active the NRA is in protecting those rights."

Gail and Doug Wickre of Joseph have been NRA members for 45 years. Gun ownership was natural to the Wickres, who have lived in Juneau, Alaska and other remote locations where carrying a firearm is recommended for those going into the wilderness.

The Wickres are ready to discuss issues of access to firearms, background checks and more - that "more" includes pointing out that gun ownership is meant to come with some heavy responsibilities.

"My granddad used to carry his gun to school, hunting on the way in and on the way home," Doug Wickre recalled. "There were no school shootings in his day and his daddy would have thumped him if there had ever been a mishandling of firearms."

As Doug Wickre sees it, the current misuse of firearms is indicative of a problem of values. In a rural society there's no anonymity, he said. In the city, individuals can own guns and no one knows about it or about them.

"It's a problem I see with thuggery," he said. "One of the biggest methods of teaching responsibility in a rural society is in teaching proper behavior around handling a gun."

Individuals who want to attend next year's 2016 WC Friends of NRA banquet can purchase tickets right now, Wolfe said, though where he'll put all the people next year is an open question.

"We've looked at renting a tent," he admitted.



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