

Olympic-style archers push for practice range in forest preserve

By Katie Foutz

STAFF WRITER

WHEATON — Naperville teen John Nelson joined a group of archers asking the DuPage County Forest Preserve District for a place to hone their skills.

It would beat shooting arrows across his basement.

After training for four years with the Chicago Bow Hunters Archery Club, Nelson, 17, earned third place in the National Target Championships last year. But his is not a sport sponsored by Neuqua Valley High School, where he is a junior.

"I'm a competitive shooter, and it's important that I have a place to shoot at and to practice," he told Forest Preserve District commissioners Tuesday. "Not having that at school, it's difficult ... to prepare for tournaments."

Karl Nelson, a nationally certified archery coach at the Naperville Park District, said he would be "thrilled" with simply a designated practice range built within the Forest Preserve District. It would be roughly the size of two football fields, 150 yards by 200 yards, grassy or lined with dirt.

"Ideally, we would get four times that space so we could host national competitions in a big, beautiful indoor facility, hold classes, training, meetings ... but that's out there," he said.

Boys, girls and people with disabilities all excel at the sport, Karl Nelson said. It's popular locally — in the four area Park Districts that offer archery, more than 200 families sign up for classes every six weeks, he said. And several DuPage County residents are nationally ranked competitive archers.

John Nelson and teammate Kenneth Walther, 14, of Carol Stream now practice at members-only ranges or at home. They also travel every other Saturday to practice with their coach, who lives almost three hours away in Pekin.

Walther told commissioners that building a local archery range would encourage people to pick up a bow and stick with it.

"An archery range could be a great help, not only for current archers but for new ones," he said. "They would get used to the bow and have a place to go."

A Forest Preserve District committee is looking for places within the district to put an archery range, combined with a rifle and pistol shooting range. Executive Director Brent Manning, a bow hunter himself, said possible locations have yet to be determined.

"What they asked for is certainly reasonable," he said after the meeting.

Shooting range update

Also Tuesday, Forest Preserve District President Dewey Pierotti, R-Addison, responded to what he called an "urban legend" — that DuPage County Sheriff John Zaruba may relocate the regional law enforcement shooting range and 250-vehicle impound lot to Greene Valley Forest Preserve land.

"It is not on forest preserve property," Pierotti said. "If it is adjacent, we will oppose any project that will be detrimental to the forest preserves."

DuPage County staff members had suggested moving the developments to a former wastewater treatment plant on county land that is surrounded on three sides by Greene Valley Forest Preserve near Naperville. Woodridge residents and officials opposed the location along with Pierotti and DuPage County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom, R-Naperville.

Sheriff's office spokeswoman Carol Roegner said the location is now off-limits for both the shooting range and the impound lot. The sheriff is waiting to hear other suggestions from the county.

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