

Archers in DuPage stump for practice range

Forest panel urged to provide a site

By Lynn Van Matre
Tribune staff reporter

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DuPage County residents eager to learn archery don't have far to go to find an introductory program. Park districts in Naperville, Carol Stream and Glendale Heights offer beginners' classes that draw hundreds every year.

But once archers have mastered the basics of target shooting and want to hone their skills for competition, finding a public practice range can be tough.

"The only ranges in DuPage are members-only clubs," Naperville Park District archery instructor Karl Nelson told DuPage County Forest Preserve District commissioners during a planning session Tuesday. "Most of them charge usage fees and are oriented toward adults and hunters, not beginners or children."

Nelson was one of several archery instructors and National Archery Association members who appeared before commissioners during a presentation urging them to consider establishing an indoor or outdoor practice range on Forest Preserve District land.

According to Nelson, an indoor range ideally would require a building about the size of a school gym, plus a meeting room and equipment and coaching areas; an outdoor range would require between 3 acres and 5 acres. No cost estimates were provided.

Additional space would be required for a parking lot that could accommodate as many as 100 cars at a tournament. According to local archery instructor Ken Walther, local, state, regional, national and even international competitions could be held at the range.

"We eventually would like to have Olympic [archery] trials held in DuPage," Walther said. But Nelson and Walther said that archers' immediate goal is simply to have a place to practice.

Project supporters noted that archery is suitable for people of all ages, including those who use wheelchairs or have other physical challenges; does not cause noise or other pollution; and causes minimal wear and tear on open land.

"Arrows are expensive," Nelson said. "Believe me, nobody is going to leave an arrow behind in the ground if they miss the target."

Nelson added that archery is an especially safe sport, with strict rules, and that injuries are "virtually non-existent."

In remarks following the presentation, district Executive Ddirector Brent Manning concurred with Nelson on archery's safety and briefly discussed with him the sport's accessibility to youths from low-income families.

At the direction of district President Dewey Pierotti, Manning and staff plan to meet with the archers and instructors in the near future to explore the issue further.