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Taking Aim

April 01, 2009 | Eric Brown

Thanks to the vision of two Liberty alumni, a group of on-campus archers are forming the LU Archery Club. With the aim of sharing the Gospel through this unique recreational sport, club members are targeting a group of people that are sometimes overlooked — outdoorsmen.

“Our main goal needs to be to reach people for Christ,” said the club’s student president Ben Stallard. “I want to reach out to people who don’t get reached out to very much at archery tournaments.”

A current sophomore and biblical studies major at Liberty, Stallard began inquiring about starting an archery club during a resident prayer leader meeting last year. To his surprise, Dan Witt and John Allen, Liberty graduates who had fond memories of hunting on LU’s mountain property, had previously presented the same idea to the university. A short time later, LU Archery was born and has now blossomed into a group of about 30 archers, including men and women. Determined to use its talents as a living testimony, the club is focused on establishing a competition team. This 10-member squad will travel to various collegiate and open archery tournaments, competing against other archers from around the country.



As the club forms the team, one local business has agreed to be its first corporate sponsor. Based out of Madison Heights, Va., Tomorrow's Resources Unlimited, Inc. (T.R.U.), a manufacturer of archery accessories, is lending support to the team by providing products such as T.R.U Ball Releases and Axcel Sights.

The company also owns a 30-yard indoor range complete with eight shooting lanes in which club members can practice. Brandon Reyes, T.R.U.'s shooting staff coordinator, will serve as LU Archery's competition coach. Reyes, a professional archer for Mathews, Inc. and a 2004 International Bowhunting Organization World Champion, brings a wealth of knowledge to the team, having competed in numerous state, national and international tournaments for more than 15 years. The accomplished pro is also a level two instructor and is certified to train others on how to coach up-and-coming archers. LU professor Jonathan Geukgeuzian, the club's faculty advisor, said Reyes is a great asset.

"(Brandon) made the comment to me, 'I get more satisfaction and fulfillment teaching someone how to shoot than shooting myself.' This is the type of guy I want coaching the team because that's the whole idea behind coaching."

Reyes' brother-in-law and Liberty alumnus Ben Summers is the director of marketing for T.R.U. and serves on the Archery Trade Association's (ATA) board of directors, which consists of industry manufacturers, retailers and distributors nationwide. Summers said when talking with representatives from some of the industry's leading companies about LU Archery, the reaction he received was very positive.



“There are a lot of potential opportunities for growth,” Summers said. “It is pretty well limitless.”

Each year the ATA hosts an annual trade show where thousands of enthusiasts visit booths set up by archery dealers, distributors and exhibitors. This past January, Stallard and LU Online student Kennon Snow accompanied Liberty alumnus Doug Gilmer to the 2009 Archery Trade Show in Indianapolis.

During the three-day event, Gilmer and the two students represented the Kicking Bear Foundation, an outdoor ministry dedicated to mentoring under-privileged youth through summer camps. The foundation also offers internship opportunities in which Liberty students can spend a summer traveling around the country, mentoring youth during two-day Kicking Bear camps and events.

While in Indianapolis, Stallard also had the privilege of giving the invocation at the Christian Bowhunters of America prayer luncheon. During this time, he shared the mission of LU Archery with the group.

“Ben used the opportunity God had given him to stand before many of the most prominent members of the industry to proclaim the number one priority of the club ... to share the Gospel as a ministry outreach of Liberty,” Gilmer said. Recently, the university cleared 10 acres of land near LU’s paintball fields for the club’s archery range. Members can use the range to shoot at various 3D targets provided by alumnus Diane Crickenberger and husband, Rick, owners of Dusty Ducts, Inc. in Forest, Va. LU Archery members also have access to Liberty’s Jack Mountain property during spring and fall hunting seasons. Stallard noted that while the club offers great opportunities for sportsmen and women to perfect their craft, the most important aspect is sharing the name of Jesus Christ with fellow archers.

“Hunting is fun, but if we really want this to be a ministry, we have to get our team together, so we can spread the name of the university and the club,” Stallard said. “That’s really how we’re going to be able to reach out to people.”