

BARRE'S CENTRAL VERMONT GUNSHOW HIGHLIGHTS THE NON-PARTISAN CULTURE OF VERMONT'S FIREARMS ENTHUSIASTS

By J.D. Thomason

BARRE, VT. – Outdoors enthusiasts, sportsman, artists and firearms collectors gathered the weekend of February 7-8 at the Barre Municipal Auditorium for the Central Vermont Gun Show, hosted by the Barre Fish and Game Club of Vermont.

Vermonters and others from around the country perused the wares in a family-friendly environment offering everything from fine art paintings depicting Vermont's rich wildlife and lovely countryside to custom tools and knives. And of course there was an excellent collection of firearms.

The show was an added treat for history buffs as vendors Michael Blair and Chuck Eaton displayed their beautiful collection. Blair, pointing to his collection, said, "Here you have a history of what's kept this country free from the Civil War to World War II."

The relationship between democratic principles and arms ownership was a subject of much discussion as state legislators in Montpelier were scheduled to hear public testimony on a proposed bill that aims to place new restrictions on Vermonters. One self-described "liberal" gun-buyer described the proposed legislation as a "wedge issue designed by Bloomberg" to make Vermont more partisan.

At the Gun Owners of Vermont table, statistics from the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms were available that clearly show Vermont to be one



Central Vermont Gun Show brings generations of Vermonters together. (Credit: J.D. Thomason)



Michael Blair and Chuck Eaton share impressive historical collection. (Credit: J.D. Thomason)

of the safest states in the nation with the lowest levels of gun-related crime in spite of its permissive gun laws. Based on this federal data, one visitor articulated a question being asked by a lot of Vermonters: "Why are we looking for a solution when we don't have a problem?"

Conversation became very pointed around the issue of the

newly proposed gun-control legislation as many of those gathered in Barre emphasized the importance of attending the Statehouse hearing on Tuesday. But, overall, the atmosphere of the show was light-hearted with Vermonters young and old, men and women, liberals and conservatives alike gathered to enjoy the event