

Cowboy Mounted Shooting Event at Rawhide

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By Krystin Wiggs Ahwatukee Foothills News

Not too long ago Arizona was a frontier with cowboys and outlaws, and a growing sport called cowboy mounted shooting celebrates this rich history.

Ahwatukee Foothills resident Peggy Ahern is active in the sport, which consists of riding a horse while shooting blanks at various targets, and she will participate in an event this weekend at Rawhide Wild West Town.

"It's a timed action event using two colt .45-caliber single revolvers," Ahern said. "Each revolver is loaded with blank ammunition, and you maneuver through a course of 50 different patterns with your horse."

While that may seem like more than enough to concentrate on at once, riders also have to shoot at balloons as they go through the course.

"You shoot five balloons with one gun, then you holster the gun and pull out the other gun, and then you shoot five more balloons in a row to test your horse's speed," Ahern said.

There is also a dress code for competitors, which consists of period Western clothing.

"The sport embellishes our Western heritage in that we wear 1900 Western vintage clothing of the era," Ahern said. "You will see ladies competing wearing big, flouncy Western dresses."

Cowboy mounted shooting began in Arizona in 1991, and there are now more than 10,000 members worldwide in the Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association. Thanks to a donation of 14 acres from the Arizona Game and Fish Department, there is now a facility designated specifically for mounted shooting at the Ben Avery Shooting Facility in Phoenix.

The facility opened last year, and the Arizona Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association raised more than \$80,000 to build it.

"Arizona Game and Fish had the land, but they didn't have the money to build," said Robert Morris of the ACMSA. "We have raised over \$80,000 to build it, and donated about another \$80,000 worth of volunteer hours."

The next cowboy mounted shooting event at the Ben Avery Mounted Shooting Center will be March 27 and 28 in conjunction with the Arizona Game and Fish Expo. Morris expects more than 40,000 spectators to attend the event at 4044 W. Black Canyon Blvd. in Phoenix.

Morris and his wife have been participating in cowboy mounted shooting for six years, and he has enjoyed watching the sport grow.

"About two years ago we had nowhere to shoot or hold an event," he said. "With Rawhide Wild West Town coming on board and Ben Avery being available all the time, the sport is exploding."

Roughly 40 percent of cowboy mounted shooters are female, with ages ranging from 6 to 74.

"It takes a very skilled rider to shoot going full speed, fire a pistol, put it away, and fire again," Morris said. "Our horses have to be well trained and able to do anything at any time with no notice."

Ahern encourages people interested in taking up cowboy mounted shooting to take lessons.

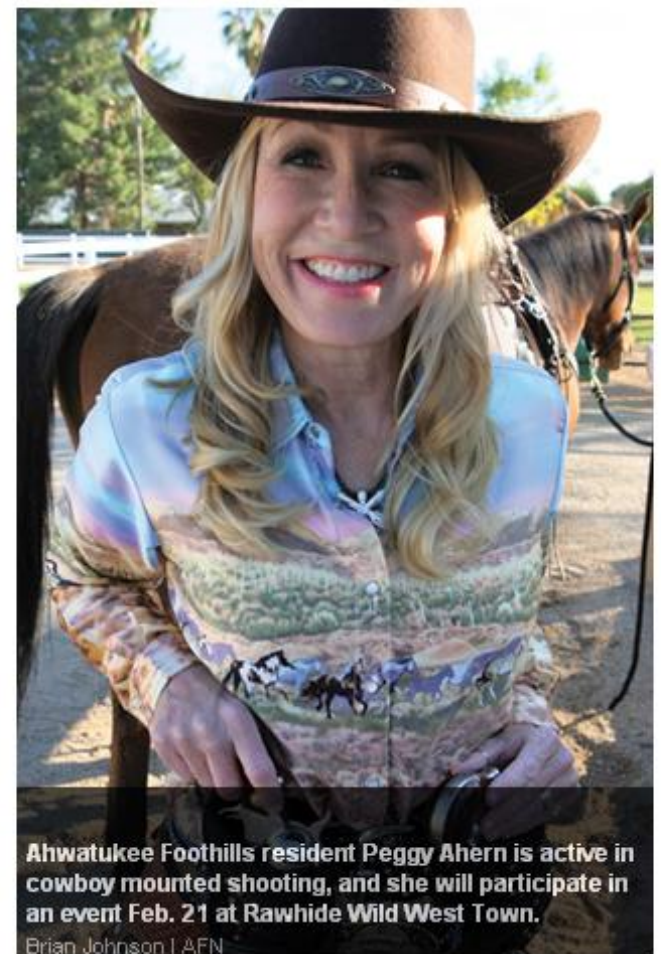
"We have trainers in the sport that will help teach you to ride, as well as help you learn how to shoot," Ahern said. "It's easier if you know how to ride, and then learn how to shoot."

The Feb. 21 cowboy mounted shooting event this weekend at Rawhide Wild West Town will begin with cowboy church at 8:30 a.m., and the main event starts at 10:30 a.m. Admission is free. For more information, visit www.acmsa.com or call (480) 502-5600.



Peggy Ahern and her horse Chica will participate in a cowboy mounted shooting event Feb. 21 at Rawhide Wild West Town.

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