



# THE FIRING LINE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE RIVER FALLS SPORTSMEN'S CLUB

MARCH, 2026

### THIS ISSUE:

**Clean-up day goals set**

**Lost members George, Nelson, remembered**

**Scholarship offered; past winners offer updates**

2026

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### **PRESIDENT**

John Pietenpol  
715-781-0799

#### **VICE-PRESIDENT**

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715-781-7708

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Ben Gaus

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Ed Gibb

#### **CHIEF INSTRUCTOR**

Kevin Larson  
715-495-5114

#### **CLUB MANAGER**

Eric Swenson  
715-760-0499

#### **DIRECTORS**

Dan Herum  
Rachel Vogt  
Nate Schultz

Sportsmen's Club members showed up at the River Falls Moose Lodge on Saturday, Jan. 3rd to renew their membership at the new rates, sample some complimentary snacks, and buy a chance at guns and accessories. About 75 members stayed for the 1 pm meeting -- voting to return incumbents to their board seats and re-electing those same directors to the same leadership posts.

Directors took steps to address a potential deficit in late 2024 when treasurer Ben Gaus reminded board members that annual membership dues were supposed to cover basic annual operating costs and club upkeep. Since the national pandemic in 2021, most basic operating expenses for the club increased to the point where dues are barely covering them and might fall short going forward, he said.

Club bylaws required a majority vote by the membership last year for any dues increase. The change was approved in January 2025 on a 72- to 20 member vote.

Individual memberships rose to \$90 (with four volunteer hours) or \$180 without. Family memberships are \$135 or \$270 without volunteer hours, and Junior memberships increased from \$25 to \$30.

President John Pietenpol convened the annual session at 1 pm, and offered a summary of 2025 highlights and accomplishments:

-- A six-week lead reclamation project was completed by Missouri-based Gipson-Ricketts, recovering a decade's worth of lead -- just more than 279,000 pounds. The lead sale yielded about \$68,000 for the club under the revenue-share arrangement with the firm. Most of the money was subsequently spent with Spring Valley's Asphalt Maintenance & Paving on milling, regrading, and repaving the club's parking lot. AM&P crews will add a second asphalt layer this spring. Pietenpol thanked members for their patience through the disruption of some access to trap ranges and the main parking lot for weeks. "No one wanted to spend the money, but (paving) wasn't going to go down in price."

-- The club netted about \$12,500 from a 500-ticket gun raffle which culminated in July.

-- Big turnouts by members and high school trap team participants helped spruce up club grounds and buildings during Spring- and Fall clean-up days. "It's amazing how much stuff has gotten done in the last four or

five years. It's awesome!" said Pietenpol. "We just really appreciate it."

-- Efforts by members Nick Larson and Eric Sterner spawned fresh interest in archery at the club. Old targets have been replaced and a variety of 3D targets have attracted more than 25 regular league shooters and resulted in some new memberships.

-- The club continues to make facilities available to RFPD (which pays for a membership) for regular firearms training; accommodates trap teams from St. Croix Central- and River Falls high schools; helps sponsor a WDNR Carcass Disposal roll-off in RF during archery and gun deer seasons; makes ranges available for 4-H firearms training and pre-fair competition and welcomes spring and fall sessions of Project Appleseed training -- a national non-profit program that teaches the fundamentals of American heritage.

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**Rich Cernohous, left, received the President's Award from John Pietenpol for volunteerism and diligent service to the club.**



**About 75 members stayed after membership renewals to participate in the annual meeting.**



**WDNR offers thanks for sponsorships. See back page**

Please welcome these new RFSC members!

### None (December)

Connor Alexander, Chad Olsen, Wade & Tom Maleeka

### (January)

Tom Moody (February)

## Upcoming events

- RF Wildcat Trap team requested club use from 4-6:30 pm, Thursdays, 4-9 pm, Fridays, and 9-noon, Saturdays, beginning March 4, and continuing through July 10th. Director Nate Schultz said he expects 125-150 athletes to participate this season.
- St. Croix Central Trap team requested club use on Sunday afternoons, March 15-June 21.
- Project Appleseed has reserved the 50-yd range for sessions from 8 am-4 pm, Saturday/Sunday, April 11-12, and Saturday/Sunday, Oct. 3-4. Organizer Josh Knudsen said he expects 10-14 participants per session. To learn more, see <https://appleseedinfo.org>

### Newsletter

Comments, tips, criticisms, contributions, obits, and club – related questions are welcomed. Write, text or call Steve Dzubay at #715-821-7537 or [stevendzubay@gmail.com](mailto:stevendzubay@gmail.com). Thanks to Deb & Rich Cernohous for proof-reading help. RFSC's Facebook site offers updates between quarterly newsletters. For club-related matters, write [RFSC@sbcglobal.net](mailto:RFSC@sbcglobal.net).

## Annual meeting ...

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Going forward, members can look forward to a new, more user-friendly website, continued sprucing up of facilities and grounds.

Pietenpol singled out member Rich Cernohous to receive his "President's Award" for 2025, drawing a round of applause.

He thanked Cernohous for his unsolicited help that included replacing pistol targets, helping Rangemaster Ed Gibb with fashioning walkway and elevation adjustments after new pavement was laid, and his conscientious attendance and input at most every board meeting. "He's my right-hand man!" Gibb quipped.

When members were invited to bring up any new business, a member inquired whether the board had considered membership in Gun Owners of America or the Wisconsin Gun Owners as an alternative to requiring proof of National Rifle Association membership along with annual dues? The inquirer noted that the NRA has recently gone through some "tough times" and recognizing membership in a different pro-gun group might woo new members.

Pietenpol said the board has heard that request before, but no one has ever offered a formal presentation. He invited anyone to gather facts and bring them for directors to consider.

Later, it was asked what benefit the club receives by associating with the NRA? Pietenpol said its partnership assures the availability of insurance for the range and has a grant program through which the club acquired a gun safe, and financial help when new trap-throwers were purchased some years ago.



Amilia Gagne served as the official drawer of raffle tickets.

Another member asked about the possibility of developing a 200-yard range on the new property.

Pietenpol said bringing shooting activities onto the new acreage would require a rezoning and a special use permit from St Croix County and would probably spur legal action by the neighbors.

"What about a new clubhouse where we could hold the annual meeting and rent it out for private parties? It would be nice," someone else suggested.

Unfortunately, current finances wouldn't cover a new



Moose Lodge chef Jake Vorwald presides over meatballs, chicken wings, and cocktail weiners.

clubhouse, Pietenpol said.

Earlier in the meeting, members approved last year's meeting minutes prepared by Brad Cran, and financial reports provided by Ben Gaus.

In response to a member questioning phone expenses of \$2,427, Gaus said the club pays a higher rate than homeowners for its land-line, which also supports the alarm system, because it's charged as a business.

Gaus' balance sheet for 2025 showed current assets of \$163,144 -- including \$132,288 in checking and savings. Profit & Loss details included income of \$47,523 for memberships, \$20,346 in food and beverages, \$67,962 for trap fees and ammunition, \$2,587 for merchandise sales and \$1,500 in donations. Expenses showed bar and food costs of \$10,126; trap expenses of \$65,925; and expenses for NRA, gate keys and sales tax of \$10,794. Facilities expenses -- electric, insurance, LP, property taxes, phone, trash, annual meeting, porta-potty, etc.-- totaled \$52,829. The club took in \$29,429 on its gun raffle fundraiser, raffle board and interest, and spent \$16,109 on related expenses. As of Dec. 31, 2025, the club's net income was \$20,343.

Pietenpol then announced elections to board positions of vice-president, secretary, rangemaster, and two director seats. All incumbents remained eligible and had indicated they were willing to continue serving.

Someone suggested casting a unanimous ballot for current Vice-President Parker Heise, Secretary Brad Cran, Rangemaster Ed Gibb, First Director Dan Herum, and Second Director Nate Schultz. The motion was seconded and the group was re-elected on a unanimous voice vote -- with one dissenter heard.

The meeting adjourned at 1:38 pm.

## Graduation just weeks away. Candidates sought for Club scholarship

Do you know anyone who might be a candidate for the Club's annual \$1,000 education scholarship?

It's a generous award, intended to incentivize an appreciation for our Second Amendment, the right to bear arms. Applications are available in the clubhouse. Deadline for submission is March 31.

Instructions are included on the application itself. Forms are available in the clubhouse and via a link on the club's website.

Here's a few updates on past recipients:

-- James Vogt, a 2025 St. Croix

Central High School grad, is completing his freshman year at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, pursuing engineering. James, son of Rachel and Jeff Vogt, has adjusted well and just missed a first semester 4.0 GPA by a whisker, according to his mom. He enjoys the fact he can fulfill his phy-ed credits by tallying his trips down the campus-operated ski hill.

-- Keirka Kretzmann, 2024 River Falls High School grad, had planned to attend CVTC to pursue a one-year welding certificate. She reports she graduated CVTC last year with a welding certificate and "thoroughly

enjoyed the experience, the knowledge I gained, and the connections I made throughout the program. I am wholeheartedly appreciative of the RF Sportsmen's Club, along with a couple of other organizations, for financially supporting me in attending the program. That scholarship truly made a difference." Keirka is employed with Trelleborg Sealing Solutions in River Falls (formerly Minnesota Rubber & Plastics), where she works in medical and automotive assembly. My husband and I are thankful to be establishing roots in the River Falls area through our church, the local

FFA Alumni, and community involvement. We look forward to potentially joining as members in the near future." Keirka is the daughter of Martin and Tabitha Kretzmann.

-- Danielle Francis, of Prescott, a 2023 Hill-Murray High School grad and trap-team member at both Prescott and Hill-Murray, continues to pursue aviation at Mankato State University. She's earned her commercial pilot's certification and is completing her commercial instructor certification. She expects to graduate next fall. She is the daughter of David and Dawn Francis.

## Members lost

**Dr. Phil George**, longtime member and avid trap-shooter, died peacefully at his River Falls home on Dec. 4, 2025. He was 79.

Born Aug. 11, 1946, in Oakdale, Calif., he graduated from Thomas Downey High School in 1964. Phil worked at Shell Development Co. before attending California State University, Fresno. He earned a bachelor degree in Animal Science in 1970, then continued his studies, completing a Master of Science Degree in the School of Agriculture Science. He continued his education at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Ore., earning his PhD in 1975. After teaching for a period at OSU's Animal Science Department, he accepted a teaching position with UW-River Falls.

He retired from UW-RF in December, 2007. Over the 30 years here, he was a teaching faculty member, Animal Science Department Chair, and Director of the Academic Success Center. He enjoyed teaching and reaching out to all students. Phil received teacher of the year in 1990 from the College of Agriculture and the prestigious Distinguished Teacher of the Year for the University in 1988.

Phil was a member of the Faculty Senate and was re-elected Chair of the Faculty Senate five times. Phil crossed different areas of discipline during his 30 years at UW-River Falls and enjoyed the camaraderie of faculty from around campus. However, Phil's great love was teaching and mentoring students. He was an advisor for the Alpha Gamma Rho-Alpha Psi for many years and enjoyed the enthusiasm of working with students.

Phil met the love of his life, Judy Cutino, in December 1968, and they married on Sept. 12, 1970. They enjoyed traveling all over the United States, but especially the Southwest and Texas. The couple rescued many dogs (mainly German Wire-Haired Pointers) and abandoned cats, all of whom instinctively knew Phil was a pushover for a hungry kitten.

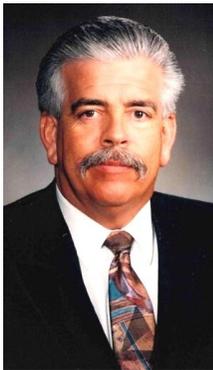
After retirement, Phil joined the River Falls Rod & Gun Club and traveled to many different gun clubs over the years. He forged great friendships with Dan Frederick, Mike Keenan, Virgil Nylander, Greg Keith, Mel Warren, Russell Nelson and many other great members of the gun club. Phil valued these friendships, and the men have been a significant help during the last few years. Phil's other great love was riding his motorcycle with his friend Rick Thorne.

During a Celebration of Life, held Dec. 17th at Bakken-Young Funeral & Cremation's River Falls chapel, friend of 38 years, Virgil Nylander, credited George with introducing him to deer-hunting "and he always shot the deer. He also introduced me to turkey hunting, and I never saw a bird!"

Nylander said he, George and others enjoyed shooting trap and sporting clays --which he characterized as more unpredictable, complicated "and a lot more fun. And Phil was a really good shooter." George was also the "team captain" and assigned them the name, complete with t-shirts, labeled "Los Gringos Blancos" or "Old White Guys".

At the Dec. 17 ceremony, George's niece Britt Hammon recalled how he shared passions generously -- whether as an "experiential" educator or animal-lover. His love for guns and dogs was on display when the pair hunted together with his dog, Chica. She recalled once seeking his advice after struggling with her marksmanship. " 'Just keep shooting', he said. He was practical, patient and encouraging," she said.

George is survived by his wife Judy; sisters, Corie Brooks and Trudy Harris; nieces, Geneva and Lindsay Brooks, Britt Hammon, and Stacey (Kenny) Spencer; nephews, Rodney Ferrario, David S. Hammon, Dominic Hammon, and Scott Stetler; and other relatives.



**Phil George**

**Steven Milo "Rooster" Nelson** passed away unexpectedly at his home near Roberts, Dec. 7, 2025. He was 60.

He was born Oct. 4, 1965, to Dennis and Faye Nelson.

A lifelong Roberts resident, he graduated from St. Croix Central High School in 1984. Steve worked as a machinist operating his own shop, Nelson Machining, Inc since 1999.

His "happy place" was the outdoors where he enjoyed deer and pheasant hunting and was a skilled trap shooter. Steve was a proud father, grandfather, brother, and son, his obituary noted.

Friend Ed Gibb remembered Steve as passionate deer and pheasant hunter, who enjoyed hunting out west. He enjoyed shooting sporting clays at Hudson's Game Unlimited, trail-riding with friends in his side-by-side, and going on outings with friends in their casual "truck and convertible club".

Mel Warren recalled procuring a Browning Citori for Steve years ago that was his favorite gun for trap-shooting "until the end." When Warren closed his Walnut Street gun shop, he gave a lathe and many tools to Nelson, who utilized them with his machining business.

Steve is survived by his children Corynne (Michael) Arendt and Logan (Erin) Nelson; his father Dennis Nelson (Janice Conwell); brothers and sisters Darrell (Tanya McConaughey) Nelson, Denise (Dave) Nelson-Cave, Tony (Angie) Nelson; and grandchildren Miles and Eden; the mother of his children Roxy; many uncles, nieces, nephews, and a large circle of close friends.

Steve was preceded in death by his mother, Faye Nelson; uncle Dean Nelson; grandparents Roger and June Nelson, Beth Linehan, and Milo Wilcoxson.

Visitation was Tuesday, Dec. 16, and the funeral, Wednesday, Dec. 17, at Roberts Congregational Church.

O'Connell Family Funeral Home & Cremation Services provided arrangements.



**Steve Nelson**

## Board briefs

-- **DIRECTORS HEARD** a suggestion from member Rich Cernohous that future on-line calendar schedule postings specify only "law enforcement", versus identifying the specific agency like RFPD or PC Sheriff's Dept., which might be using the range on any given day. His comment referenced a recent public protest in Hudson, spurred by news of the Hudson Rod, Gun & Archery Club's ongoing negotiations Twin Cities office of Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) for use of its range for training. President John Pietenpol noted that he'd had no further communication with an ICE staffer who had inquired about the availability of RFSC's range for ongoing training. The group wanted access seven days per quarter (28 days annually). The inquiry came after ICE lost its lease at a Rosemount, Minn, range owned by the State of Minnesota and operated by the University of Minnesota. ICE's contract earned the university about \$18,000 annually. Directors briefly discussed how member access to the clubhouse and ranges would be restricted on Mondays if the club committed to any such agreement. Pietenpol reached out to the ICE representative ahead of the December meeting but got no reply. The Hudson protest came after a majority of Hudson's club members voted at an October meeting to allow ICE use the club's property for training and storage, assuming the two parties can reach an eventual agreement. The Hudson club was -- according to an anonymous source -- to receive \$4,300/mo. or \$51,000 per year.

-- **CLUB MANAGER** Eric Swenson reported brisk business during the multiple public "Sight-In" dates ahead of gun-deer season. He collected \$580 from non-members, who paid \$10 per gun for a target, coaching by club volunteers, and access to range facilities. Several visitors also inquired about membership, Swenson said.

-- **RANGEMASTER ED GIBB** requested reserving the clubhouse July 25th or Aug. 8th to host a 90th birthday celebration for member Mel Warren, who will reach the milestone on Aug. 1st. Friends, family, and club members would be invited to join Mel for trap-shooting, food and fun. More details will be forthcoming, Gibb said.

## Clean-Up Day set for April 25th

Members and family members are encouraged to turn out from 8 am to noon, Saturday, April 25 for the Spring clean-up.

Bring gloves, a rake, or any other tools needed if you have passion for a specific outdoor chore.

Among tasks discussed for the project list: wad clean-up across the trap field (bring leaf rakes?); buck thorn and brush-removal from the

berm area on the east end of the archery range to ease overzealous archers in finding lost arrows and bolts; tree-trimming; spruce-up of flower beds and mulch, burning of brush piles, and the usual roadside clean-up.

Board members Ed Gibb and Dan Herum once again agreed to share chore-boss responsibilities.

RIVER FALLS SPORTSMEN'S CLUB

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## Club commended for WDNR partnership

The Wisconsin DNR recently acknowledged participants and donors towards its 2025 deer carcass waste program. Partnerships like these are instrumental in allowing us to work together in continued efforts to monitor CWD, the agency shared recently in a press release.

In Pierce County, participants were the **River Falls Sportsman's Club** and **Ellsworth Rod & Gun Club**. The DNR's St. Croix County partner was the **St. Croix Sportsman's Alliance**.

Mark Worth, wildlife technician with the WDNR's Baldwin office coordinates area partnerships.

"All of the dumpsters in our area were well utilized again this year!," Worth wrote in a recent e-mail exchange. "The Baldwin Office, Plummer Concrete and River Falls dumpsters were all placed in early November and they all got emptied twice -- in mid-November, early December-- and then were picked up at the end of the extended archery season in

January.

"So in total the adopt a dumpster program helped keep nine full dumpsters worth plus what was dropped off in the Deer's dumpsters off of the landscape again this year. Definitely deserves another pat on the back this year!

"Echoing what I said last year, none of this would be possible without help from conservation groups and people like you! A big thank you for all of your help again this year! I do get a good amount of feedback that hunters really appreciate having these disposal opportunities, so I'm glad we have been able to provide them over the past few years.

"Hopefully we can work together on this process again in the fall of 2026, and keep doing what we can to provide carcass disposal locations to the hunters in our area." Worth said.

