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Now, Accounting Can Get Its Gun

By [VINCENT M. MALLOZZI](#)



Earl Wilson/The New York Times

HIGHLAND LAKES, N.J. - This past summer, members of a Manhattan law firm went on a field trip to Danbury, Conn., where they spent an entire day at a range without swinging bats or golf clubs. The members of Kobre & Kim LLP were there not to hit and hack, but to lock and load, and to experience the thrill of firing pistols, rifles and even submachine guns.

"We do very aggressive litigation and trial work," said Michael Kim, a partner in the firm. "So we prefer an activity that dovetails nicely with that aggressive culture, and hitting a little white ball on the greens doesn't do much for us."

In the last few years, a growing number of professionals like Mr. Kim are abandoning traditional company outings like softball, golf or fishing, choosing instead to escape the pressures of their busy workdays by blowing off steam - and

rounds of ammunition - at shooting ranges that give corporate retreats some of the atmosphere of military attacks.

"We offer a thrilling experience denied a lot of New Yorkers who have never fired a gun," said Andrew Massimilian, 42. He owns Manhattan Shooting Excursions, which takes individuals and corporate groups on shooting parties at seven ranges scattered around New York State, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and New Jersey. The excursions are held outside New York City because almost all of the firearms in Mr. Massimilian's vast arsenal are illegal to possess in the five boroughs.

Chip Brian, president of Comtex News Network Inc., a distributor of financial news in Manhattan, has found that firing a few friendly rounds is an effective approach to bonding and networking. "At the end of the day, it's all about getting to know your clients better," he said, "and a shooting trip is one of the most unique ways to do that."

"There's a huge difference in taking clients out to dinner, with nice music playing in the background, as opposed to taking them to a sporting event, which is much more exciting," Mr. Brian said. "A shooting trip takes that to the next level - it really makes a lasting impression."

Russ Savage, a Manhattan lawyer who took a shooting holiday earlier this year, said that some of the men and women who have pulled the trigger on the increasingly popular excursion, especially those in the world of high finance, may have done so to gain "a feeling of empowerment."

"For major corporate executives whose job it is to lead, this is a much more powerful way for them to maintain a sense of aura than by simply taking the people on a company picnic," Mr. Savage said. "It's an exhibition of strength and power."

On a recent Saturday afternoon, Mr. Massimilian staged one of those exhibitions in a thickly wooded area at Highland Lakes in Sussex County, N.J., where a small army that included doctors, lawyers and Wall Street types, all wearing padded earmuffs and protective glasses, waited on his command to fire their guns into paper targets set 50 yards away in front of a mountainside.

When the signal was given, 17 men and women began blasting away at the targets, filling the cool air with the scent of gunpowder and the kind of echoing booms that can keep a deer up all night.

"Everyone goes golfing or to a Yankees game, but this is a much more exciting way to bring people together," said Anthony Belluzzi, a 31-year-old institutional sales trader for Knight Capital Markets in Jersey City. "It's great for people like me who sit in offices all day, under fluorescent lights, staring at computer screens."

Are field trips that involve packing heat instead of sandwiches detrimental to society?

"They might not be the best thing for a society that is already way too aggressive," Dr. Kenneth Porter, a Manhattan psychiatrist, said. "When you look at what is in the media, and what kids growing up are exposed to, something like this could have a negative effect on the overall mental health of the population.

"However," Dr. Porter continued, "shooting can be viewed as a legitimate sport and can be seen as a constructive outlet to express aggression, so it cuts both ways."

Seconds later, Dr. Porter, sitting at a picnic table at the Highland Lakes site with his fiancée and her son, picked up a long-range rifle and began firing at a wooden bull's-eye, shell casings flying behind him as he squeezed off round after round, his body recoiling slightly after every blast.

"Before today, I thought something like this was unequivocally harmful," he said. "But now I've learned otherwise."

Mr. Massimilian, whose grandfather once owned a firearms manufacturing company in Germany, holds an M.B.A. from Columbia. He worked for 20 years in the corporate world, with PricewaterhouseCoopers and Vornado Realty Trust, before establishing his shooting excursion business two years ago.

He said the fees for his excursions range from \$150 to \$600 a participant, depending on the firearms used and the level of personal instruction offered. His most expensive guns include the Springfield Armory M1-A Super Match long-range rifle; the Armalite AR50, a bolt-action, 50-caliber, long-range target rifle; the Benelli M4 Tactical Shotgun; and the Heckler & Koch Elite, a .45-caliber semi-automatic pistol.

Some customers, like Mr. Belluzzi, the trader, chose guns with special nostalgic or sentimental value, such as the M1 Garand, a G.I. infantry rifle used during World War II, which he had fired most of the afternoon.

"Both of my grandfathers served in the war and used the exact same weapon," he said. "I thought it would be cool to see what it felt like."

Mr. Massimilian blames Hollywood for the negative images attached to shooting.

"Hollywood marginalizes us by showing three types of shooters: criminals, policemen and soldiers," he said. "They never show the doctor, the banker or the father-and-son teams who just want to go out for a friendly shoot."

Or the aggressive lawyer, like Mr. Kim, who is targeting a return date.

"We're going back to shoot again," he said. "And we'll probably make it an annual event."

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