Thousands will flock to Illinois' new World Shooting and Recreati
this month to witness the transition of a 100-year-old competition.

A New Lease on an Old Tra

Shooters competed at the Amateur Trapshooting Association's Ohio facility for more than a century. Now shooters line up at Illinois' state-of-the-art facility.

Story By Kathy Andrews
Photos By Adele Hodde

"Illinois—and the nation—is on the verge of providing something new and exciting for outdoor enthusiasts," Acting Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Director Sam Flood is fond of saying. "The new World Shooting and Recreational Complex (WSRC) will not only allow Illinois to host a variety of large shooting sports events, but the overall design of the facility forges new ground for the type of recreational facilities the agency provides the public."

The WSRC has been designed for shooters but built for recreation, building on traditions present at the Amateur Trapshooting Association's (ATA) Vandalia, Ohio facility since its debut in 1900.

"Our Association is excited to have three tournaments—the 2006 Grand American, the U.S. Open Trapshooting Championships and an October shoot—

onal Complex

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The Events Center (above center and right) serves as the hub for shooting sports, meetings and dining.

at the World Shooting & Recreational Complex," Ken Duncan, 2006 ATA president, remarked. "These tournaments will bring a large number of people to Illinois and in return our shooters will have a wonderful new home for our championship events."

Developing the WSRC has provided unique opportunities for the state.

"So many agencies and organizations have worked for several years to make the complex a reality," said State Representative Dan Reitz, Steelville. "This is the best shooting sports facility in the nation—and probably the world—and it won't take but a few minutes for visitors to realize that this multi-faceted state park is an exciting addition to the Illinois park system."

Randy Mitchell, DNR chief architect, explained how coordination played a key role in completion of the nearly 1,600-acre construction project on time.

"Almost immediately after the ink dried on the purchase agreement transferring ownership of land from Peabody Energy to the state, contracts were competitively bid to bring 12 different contractors on site," Mitchell said of the project expected to generate $13.5 million annually for the state.

The Capital Development Board, Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), City of Sparta and Illinois Department of Corrections were major players in getting the process off the ground.

"IDOT crews came on board early, grading and constructing roads within the complex," Mitchell continued. "With nearly 150,000 people expected to

Joining Governor Rod R. Blagojevich for the World Shooting and Recreational Complex July 6 grand opening were state and local officials, business leaders and sportsmen from throughout the nation.

Picturesque settings await diners enjoying indoor and outdoor seating at the Heartland Range and Shooter's Saloon.

Heartland Range & Shooter's Saloon

Whether attending a major shooting event or conference, camping with your family or touring sites within the region, make plans to stop by the World Shooting and Recreational Complex for a meal at Heartland Range. Located within the Events Center, the restaurant features a family-friendly atmosphere and reasonably priced menu of homestyle meals, steaks, ribs, seafood and more. Heartland Range is owned by the Bloomington-based Ned Kelly's restaurant.

attend the August Grand American, clear informational signage is crucial, and we were able to rely on the expertise of IDOT in developing the multitude of directional signs needed."

Creation of the water, sanitary and sewer systems necessary for operation of the complex has in large part been the responsibility of the City of Sparta.

According to Mayor Randy Bertetto, Sparta and communities throughout southwest Illinois are rolling out the red carpet for visitors to the shooting complex.

"The WSRC will be a destination for hundreds of thousands of people each year," Bertetto remarked. "And with the Grand American drawing participants from outside the United States, this is an excellent opportunity to showcase everything that Randolph County, and all of southwest Illinois, has to offer."

Custom yet affordable infrastructural amenities—picnic tables, seating in the Events Center, benches, signs and trash receptacles—were constructed at Department of Correction facilities.

Also involved early in the process was the DNR heavy equipment crew, responsible for construction of the initial pistol berms, and creating a shallow wetland habitat in the process. Constructed at a cost savings to the state of nearly 50 to 60 percent, the berms provided the backdrop for the Randolph County Ruckus, a single-action shooting event sponsored by the Prairie State Cowboy Action Shooting Association.

"The 2005 Illinois state cowboy action shooting championship was held at the WSRC, and with 311 shooters it was the largest state championship in the United States—a great feat considering this was the state's first state championship," said Tab Baumgardner, Randolph County Ruckus match director. "The 2006 ruckus drew nearly 400 shooters, due in large part to the availability of on-site camping facilities."

Baumgardner attributes much of the event's success to the citizens of Sparta.

"The local community hosts the opening event, the Friday Night Fracas," Baumgardner explained of the Old West-style block party with costumed shooters providing action-draw demonstrations. "The community welcomed the Randolph Ruckus with open arms and have embraced this as a part of their summer festivities."

Sparta, and all of southwest Illinois, will welcome an estimated 150,000 people to the 10-day Grand American August 8-18, a crowd that will return each August to compete, or to support

The Tourism Bureau of Southwestern Illinois has a diverse and exciting schedule of day tours—historic, shopping, gambling, national forest, Scott Air Force Base, wine tasting and more—available during the 2006 Grand American. Visit www.thetourismbureau.org or call 1-800-442-1488 for information.

WSRC Partners

Amateur Trapshooting Association:
www.shootata.com
Prairie State Cowboy Action Shooters Association:
www.randolphcountyruckus.com
City of Sparta:
www.egyptian.net/%7Espartacc

Contact the Tourism Bureau of Southwestern Illinois for information on area tours and rooming accommodations:

Sixteen lighted fields will be utilized during the Grand American finals, and in other events.

With more than 1,000 camp sites, the Sparta-based WSRC is Illinois' largest campground.

some of the nation's best trap shooters.

And to meet the needs of these shooters are 120 trap houses stretched out along a 3.5-mile-long shooting line. Miles of sidewalks and pull-in parking lots provide easy access to the ranges, although during large events a trolley service will shuttle shooters and observers between the range, campground and facility headquarters. Golf cart rental also will be available on site. Canopy-covered benches provide shady retreats for watching the action. And as the competition narrows, shooters will continue into the night on the lighted fields at trap houses No. 9-24.

A variety of support services are necessary to handle the Grand American crowd and participants attending other large events throughout the year. Five vendor buildings will provide permanent storefront space for sales and service of firearms and a range of other goods and services related to the shooting sports industry. A vendor mall and tent/portable vendor spaces accommodate more transient businesses (see sidebar).

The hub of the facility is the Events Center, a 34,000-square-foot building housing a 7,000-square-foot registration area, conference rooms, a pro shop and a full-service restaurant where patrons may dine indoors or on the outdoor terrace overlooking one of the five lakes on the property.

Set against one of the largest lakes are 341 premium camp sites (equipped with water, sewer and electricity). Nearby are an additional 350 standard sites (in groups of 50 units with water, sewer and electricity) and 310 overflow sites (with electricity). See sidebar for additional information on campground amenities.

The WSRC was designed to accommodate a variety of shooting events, including the Randolph County Ruckus, a cowboy-action shooting championship.

"Not only is the WSRC campground three times larger than facilities available at any other DNR site," Flood explained of the unique design, "it was specifically designed for large recreational vehicles, with roomy, paved, pull-through pads long enough to accommodate a towed vehicle."

Camping

The WSRC campground will open for public use in September 2006. Features of the site include:

- 691 premium and standard sites with water, sewer and electricity ($20/night, including utility fee)
- 310 premium overflow or electricity-only camp sites ($15/night, including utility fee)
- 24 premium disabled-accessible sites ($20/night, including utility fee)
- asphalt pads, fire ring and picnic table
- a 22-unit shower facility near the overflow camping area designed to accommodate families and people needing assistance
- availability of portable shower houses during large events
- vault toilets
- six dump stations
- firewood, propane and ice available on site
- dogs allowed on leashes
- in the future, playgrounds will be built throughout the facility

Facts at a glance

Address: World Shooting and Recreational Complex, One Main Event Lane, Sparta, IL 62286.
Telephone: (217) 782-5706 or toll free at 1-866-850-2564.
Website: www.dnr.state.il.us/worldshooting/home.htm.
Directions: The WSRC is northeast of Sparta in Randolph County and can be accessed from Route 4 or Route 154.
Event information: Visit www.dnr.state.il.us/worldshooting/index.htm, call the numbers above or contact Bob Ruff at bob.ruff@illinois.gov.

Merchandise and services are available at the WSRC through vendors housed in the five vendor buildings, a vendor mall and portable vendor tents.

With 184-acres of open water remaining in four lakes from the surface mining operation, visitors will soon be able to pass their time fishing from shore for some of the 19 species of fish collected by biologists in recent surveys, including excellent populations of white crappie as well as largemouth bass, bluegill, green sunfish, warmouth and yellow bass. Site specific regulations will be posted on site, and published in the 2007 *Illinois Fishing Information* digest.

And as the sun sets on Illinois' first Grand American, stockings will be under way to improve the fisheries. Several small gravel boat access areas will be developed and landscaping crews will return to set additional trees in the ground. Once again, construction equipment will move freely about the property as the DNR heavy equipment crew works on the sporting clays area and as skeet houses are erected, creating another shooting opportunity in 2007.

All the while, campers will be settling in and visitors dropping by to enjoy events or a meal at the new facility.

"The WSRC is a tremendous showcase for the state, and the nation," Flood concluded. "Whether they are here for the shooting sports activity, an overnight in the campground or a special program in the Events Center, visitors will get a hint of the great resources Illinois has to offer."

And a visit in 2007 will include an even bigger and better Grand American.

World Shooting and Recreational Complex Vendors

Vendor Building

Americase
ATK Federal Ammunition
Beretta
Boyt Harness
Browning
DuPont Krieghoff
Dawson Enterprises
Dr. Frank Rively
Gamaliel Shooting Supply
Giacomo Sporting USA
Gift Box Boutique
Great Outdoors Company
G.U. Inc. (SKB)
Guns Unlimited
Hodgdon Powder
Jaqua's Fine Guns, Inc.
Jess Briley Manufacturing
Jim's Cutlery
Joel Etchen Guns
Kolar Arms/Target Arms
Krieghoff International
Little Egypt Golf Cars
Mayville Engineering
Morgan Optical
National Rifle Association
Perrazi USA
Remington
Sig Arms
Silver Sietz - Santa Fe
Spolar Power Loads
Trapper's Cabin
Whiteflyer
Winchester (Olin Corp)

Vendor Mall

100 Straight Products
Chester Chamber of Commerce
Claybuster Wads
Corps of Engineers
DKG Trading
Extreme Shooting Gear
IL Dept. Of Transportation
J&C Collectibles
James T. Owens
Mile High Shooting Accessories
Shooting Sports Souvenirs
Target 4 Optics

Portable Vendor Tents

Battlefield Sporting Goods
Beach Logos (Rich Dillon)
Betty Havens
Bob Shultz Target Shotguns
Brite Ears
CG Gunfitting Shop
Cornfield Products, Inc
Custom Sportswear and Optical
Decot HY-WYD Sportsglasses
Downrange LLC
Gota Hav It, Inc.
Graf's Reloading
Gray's Shotgun Cache
Gunstock Blanks.net
Hi grade Shooters Supply
Hunter Originals
Il. State Rifle Assoc.
Keith Heeg Stockworks
L&B Supplies
Lonesome Charlies
Lewis & Drake Associates
Lynn Gipson LLC
Mark Deprez, Stockmaker
Merlyn's Trap Guns
Mid America Custom Trailer Sales
Myers Cycle & RV Sales
Natures Gifts Trading
Pete Elsen, Inc.
Philips Gunsmithing
Pro-Matic Traps
Pro Shot Products
Red Bud Chamber of Commerce
Rod's Custom Stocks
Shamrock Leathers
Shooter Solutions LLC
Shotgun Sports magazine
Siemer Enterprises
Skip's Specialties
Sparta Chamber of Commerce
Sports Medicine of Atlanta
Storm Shooting Apparel
The Stock Shop
Topline Porting
Trappers Cabin
Warwick Case Co.
Wendell August Forge
Wright's Inc.