Members of Archdale-Trinity Middle School Hunter Safety team are, front row from left, Finn Owen and James Green; back row, Austin Thompson, Thomas Vickers, Wes Hodgins, Jacob Browning, Hunter Marshall, Levi Cox, Josh Collins and Blake Ray. Before participating on the team, members must complete a NC Wildlife Resources Commission Hunter Safety Education course.

Hunter safety team takes second in skills competition

BY DEBBIE HIGHTOWER

TRINITY — The Archdale-Trinity Middle School Hunter Safety team brought home a second-place overall in the Guil-Rand FFA Federation Hunter Education Skills tournament held Feb. 18. In only the second year that ATMS has had a Hunter Safety Team, they placed third in the archery category, second in rifle, second in hunter skills and first in shotgun categories.

In addition to the team awards ATMS eighth-grader James Green won first-place in shotgun with the only perfect score from middle school shooters, scoring a perfect 20 in clay competition.

“It was pretty easy,” said Green. “I felt prepared.”

Hunter Marshall earned first-place in the archery category.

At a recent team practice, members of the ATMS and Wheatmore High School teams demonstrated their proficiency in archery, rifle and shotgun skills at a Trinity range. On the archery course, Marshall, who has been shooting since he was 6, took aim at archery targets with his Hoyt Ignite bow set at 45 pounds. Beside him, his younger brother Ryan fired arrows at another target.

Providing close supervision was ATMS Hunter Safety faculty advisor Jack Blanchard. Team practices take place twice a week, rain or shine.
“At the Guil-Rand competition Hunter shot a 195 in archery with 200 being a perfect score,” said Blanchard. “For a middle schooler that is awesome.”

It’s also pretty impressive considering that Hunter is the youngest team member — a sixth-grader from Braxton Craven School, who earned his spot on the team among a field of 52 applicants who tried out in the fall.

“I like it,” said Marshall. “I like going to all the different ranges.

Near the archery range, Green takes aim at a firearms target from a prone position, while a row of his teammates simultaneously fire at their own targets. As Blanchard records the results, each shooter fires 10 rounds at each of four positions — prone, kneeling, sitting and standing.

Shooters are rated according to their proximity to the center. Afterwards, Blanchard critiques their performance.

Green collected three nines and a 10.

According to Blanchard, proficiency and accuracy are important but safety is an even higher priority. Before joining the team applicants must first take the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Hunter Safety class and pass the test with no outside assistance. Training includes a demonstration of firearms and their safe operation.

Said Blanchard, “I feel this course is important to educate young men and women about how to handle and use firearms safely. The course also addresses the importance of being an ethical hunter. The more information students are given, the safer they will be as they grow up. These students do an excellent job practicing safe gun handling.”

Officer Branden Jones of N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission said there are many reasons why he is excited to hear about school hunter safety teams.

“The first reason is to increase participation in hunting and shooting skills,” he said. “The second reason is safety — the first time that they pick up a firearm or archery they are doing it correctly and they don’t have any time to develop bad habits. Get them involved in shooting sports early and get them educated in safety practices.”

The ATMS team will advance to district competition later this month.

Donations are being sought to operate the ATMS and Wheatmore High School Hunter Safety teams, which require a budget of $6,000 per year. To donate, contact Blanchard at jblanchard@randolph.k12.nc.us.

Staff writer Debbie Hightower may be reached at dhightower@atnonline.net or 336-888-3576.