



Frank Minter, Contributor

I expose the excesses of the bureaucracy.

OP/ED | 1/18/2012 @ 1:30PM | 115,205 views

Why U.S. Gun Sales Are Shooting For The Moon

If James Anthony Bailey and P.T. Barnum had seen the Shooting, Hunting, Outdoor Trade Show (SHOT Show) they just might have conceded their “Greatest Show on Earth” needed more guns, sideshows and characters. Because come one, come all, the SHOT Show has no comparison on Earth and, in fact, is especially interesting this year because gun sales are breaking records.



I shoulder in with the 60,000 people the show has brought to [Las Vegas](#) to find out why guns are selling in a mostly down economy. The people around me have come to buy and sell firearms, ammunition, optics, tree stands (devices hunters attach to trees so they can sit and wait for deer to show), deer urine (for attracting those deer), as well as holsters, knives and enough law-enforcement paraphernalia to keep CBS's show *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* filled with cool props for another ten years.

They've come from all over America and from more than 100 countries. They are gun dealers, wholesalers, manufacturers and outdoor personalities. They are perhaps our most misunderstood capitalists: the politically incorrect people who buy and sell things that go *bang*.

They all seem to be having a hell of a time.

Their very own celebrities are here. Michael Waddell, Ted Nugent and other popular outdoor television hosts are shaking hands and talking guns. Legendary gun designer Dan Coonan, inventor and designer of the Coonan .357 Magnum Automatic 1911-style pistol, is at the Coonan Inc. booth. Richard “Dick” Marcinko, the former Navy SEAL who wrote *Rogue Warrior* is at the DeSantis Gunhide booth. The heroes from the History Channel's “TOP SHOT” are mingling with fans.

There is a line of people waiting for a signed picture of R. Lee Ermey (better known as “Gunny”) at the Glock booth. Shane Carwin, the UFC champ, is due to make an appearance at the GunsAmerican LLC booth. Larry the Cable Guy will perform at the NSSF's State of the Industry dinner.

Years ago I even met Mikhail Kalashnikov at this show, the Russian inventor of the famed AK-47. When asked what he thought of the show, he said with his laborious Russian accent, “It is good to see all the capitalists marketing their products.” He was there to merchandise with all the capitalists. He had official Kalashnikov coffee cups and t-shirts to market.

I check out guns of every make and model that are hanging from displays between carpeted isles—all have their firing pins removed, but not their wow factor—and decide that the very sight of all this gun-happy private enterprise just might just make Sarah Brady—the founder of the anti-gun group the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence—give up and move to France.

But I step away from the bustle of the show to have a moment with Steve Sanetti, president of the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) to find out why guns sales are a bright spot in a mostly depressed economy.

The NSSF is a trade group that represents about 7,000 firearms manufacturers and related companies. The NSSF puts on this trade show. Sanetti has been president and chief executive officer of the NSSF since May 2008. He spent 28 years with [Sturm, Ruger](#) and Company, a publically traded firearms manufacturer that makes fine American-made guns. He worked his way up in a company that still does CNC machining stateside. His is an American success story.

Sanetti is wearing the dark suit, white shirt and carefree warmth of a successful American CEO. He has reason to smile.

According to the FBI, over 1.5 million background checks on customers looking to purchase a firearm were requested by gun dealers to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) last December. That’s a record. In fact, nearly 500,000 of those background checks occurred during the six days before Christmas—people were putting more than Red Rider BB guns under their trees!

This \$4.1 billion industry “has had nineteen months of growth in an otherwise anemic economy,” boasts Sanetti. “We’re grateful and proud that our industry has helped maintain jobs from the manufacturer through retail levels during these difficult economic times.”

However, this upbeat sector of the economy hasn’t yet been praised by a president looking for good economic news to tout, which is too bad, as he’s helping these manufacturers.

Back in 2009 gun manufacturers labeled President [Barack Obama](#) as the “best gun salesman of all time.” They weren’t even jesting. The FBI recorded a 49 percent rise in gun background checks during the 2008 election week compared to the same week a year earlier. Fear of coming gun-control legislation certainly helped sell those guns, though how much is impossible to say.

Indeed, this prolonged surge in gun sales has driven Sarah Brady’s group to some very creative spin; for example, Caroline Brewer, of the Brady Campaign, said, “The research we’ve seen indicates fewer and fewer people are owning more and more guns.”

Sanetti doesn’t think the Brady Campaign’s spin has a syllable of truth in it; after all, he pointed out that the NSSF’s [First Shots Program](#) (a program that holds shooting lessons for the public) has been growing fast. “Fun, new

action-shooting sports, such as 3-gun and sporting clays, are also bringing in a lot of new shooters, especially women,” he says.

And popular shows, such as The History Channel’s Top Shots, have helped to showcase how much fun shooting can be; as a result, Sanetti says, “President Barack Obama can certainly be credited with some of the increase in gun sales. His Supreme Court nominees have been anti-gun and his administration has been hostile to the rights of law-abiding gun owners. And anti-gun activist Sarah Brady did stoke this fear when she was quoted in the *Washington Post* saying President Obama told her he’s working on gun control “[under the radar](#).”

“However, there is a lot more to it than a president scaring the public,” says Sanetti.

Sanetti explained that in 1959 some 70 percent of the American public favored handgun bans, whereas today that number has flipped. “We’ve been able to conclusively prove scientifically that, as John Lott wrote, more guns do equal less crime. Other factors include the fact that the number of hunters has actually risen in a number of states. Then you have returning servicemen and women who are staying with the shooting sports. Meanwhile, the advocacy of the NSSF, the NRA and other groups have shown that the Second Amendment is a fundamental part of our freedom.”

As Sanetti strides off to more meetings with busy manufacturers, I go back to a burgeoning trade that is outgrowing the Sands Expo & Convention Center. This year the NSSF asked exhibitors to voluntarily reduce their booth space so smaller companies could get into the sold-out show. Many were happy to do so. Yeah, Kalashnikov had it right, “It is good to see all the capitalists marketing their products.”

This show couldn’t happen anywhere else in the world. Let’s hope it will keep happening here, no matter what a president says.

This article is available online at:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/frankminiter/2012/01/18/why-u-s-gun-sales-are-shooting-for-the-moon/>