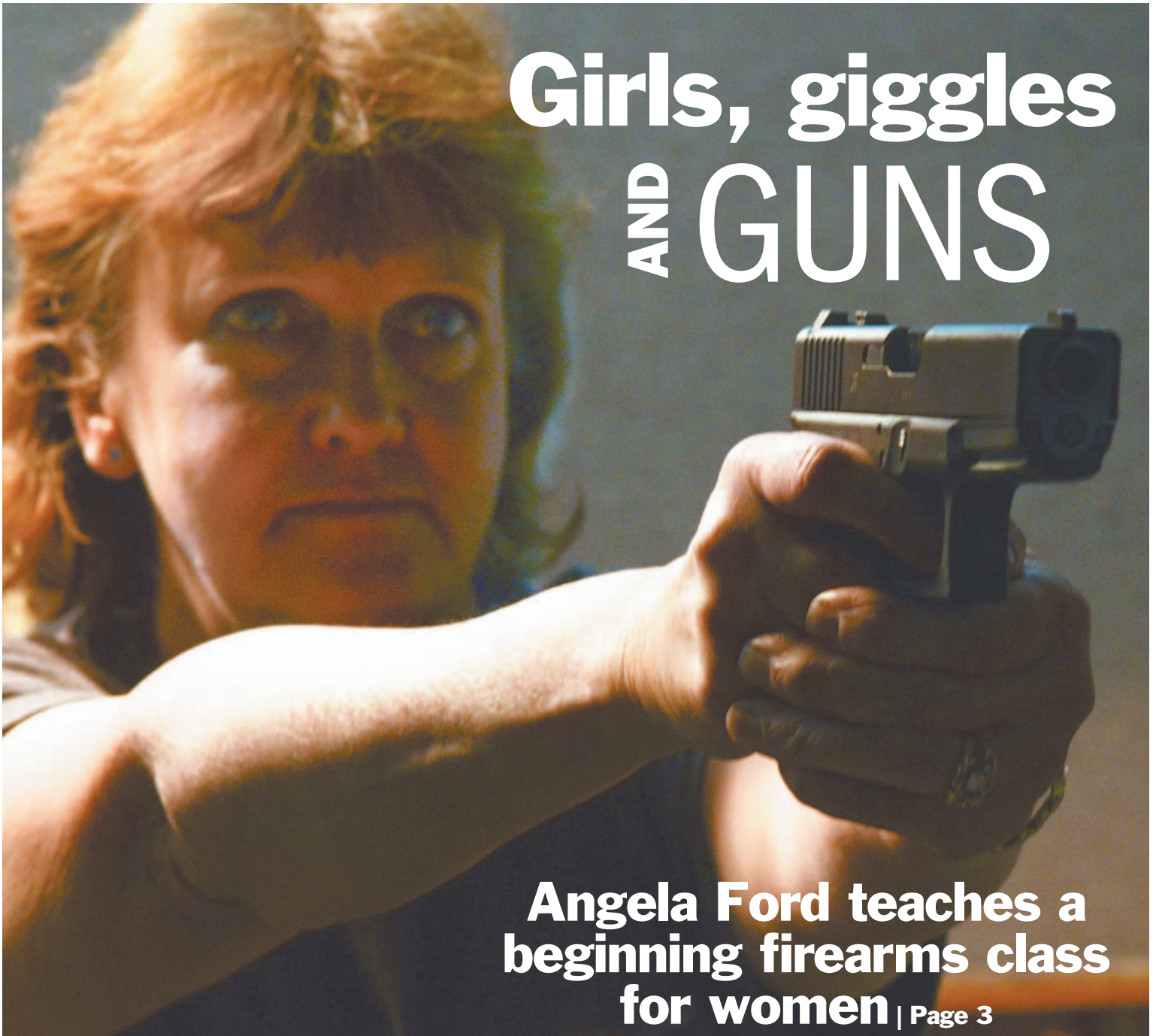




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Cover on Sunday

Women gain confidence with firearms class

BY KATRINA PAZ
Special to The Union

Girls and giggles may go hand in hand, and while throwing guns into the mix may raise some eyebrows, women from across Northern California are flocking to Angela Ford's Girls Giggles and Guns class, a beginning firearms class for women, taught by women.

Ford, an investigator with the Placer County district attorney's office, began teaching the class in 2005. Her classes were initially made up of two to three students. Today she offers one to two classes per month, accommodating up to 18 students each, with a two-month waiting list.

She started teaching the class because when she was learning how to shoot at the age of 25, she felt instructors didn't recognize the need for females to have a firearm that fit their hands and a caliber that matched their ability.

She believes women have unique learning needs and understand firearms best when taught by other women.

"Most of my students are women who have never handled firearms before," Ford said.

"They are living with or dating, or love a man who owns a firearm. Or a man who loves them bought them a gun and they have no idea how to use it."

The five-hour class takes place at The Range in Grass Valley and consists of three and a half hours of class time and about an hour on the range, where women have the opportunity to shoot a 9 mm semiautomatic pistol or .38 caliber revolver.

A variety of revolvers and semiautomatic handguns are reviewed during the class for women to familiarize themselves with and explore which one might be best for them.

At the end of the class, students have the opportunity, and the knowledge, to take the handgun certification test, which is required to purchase a handgun in California.

"It's amazing from the onset of class to see how the tensions leave as they understand that they're in control of the firearm," Ford said.

There is no typical kind of woman who signs up for the class. Ford notes that she has had a number of professional women coming in to take the



Photo for The Union by John Hart

Torie Quinterno is the manager of The Range, 13235 Grass Valley Ave, Grass Valley.

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— ANGELA FORD

first step in getting a concealed weapons permit, or women coming in to see which firearm might be best for them.

And while her students run the gamut (from ages 14 to 80), she is seeing a more mature age group "like 35 on up" to be more a common occurrence in the class.

"I took the class because I wanted to feel comfortable around a gun in case I ever need it for self protection," Shawn

Bianchi, a preschool teacher, and mother of five in her late 30s, said. "The class did that for me and much more."

While there may have been an uptick in interest since the recent school shootings in Connecticut, Ford's passion for training women, and the direction of her passion, hasn't changed.

"I think what has changed, because of all these shootings and the media coverage, is a person's recognition that

firearms can be dangerous in the hands of the wrong person, and because of that people are making a more proactive effort to educate themselves."

A good portion of the class is spent on firearm safety and she teaches her students, many of them mothers, the universal rule that if a child goes into a room where a gun is present, to not touch the gun, leave the area, and tell an adult. They must know to "never touch a gun," she stresses.

Ford first "put her hands on a gun" when she started the police academy in Sacramento. She then went on to work for the Placer County Sheriff's Department where she served as a firearms instructor.

She shot competitively for 15 years, winning two silver medals at the police Olympics in the biathlon (running and shooting).

She is currently a firearms instructor with the police academy at Sierra College.

"Angela is wonderful instructor," Torie Quinterno, manager at The Range, said. "The class is a wonderful way to get into the sport without the intimidation of men and a great way to learn in a safe manner."

Quinterno is also a co-instructor with Ford, assisting in most classes. She notes that they have a solid female population who come up to shoot at The Range and Wednesdays, Ladies Day, are very popular.

"We have more fun coming together now," Ford said. "Instead of coming in groups of one or two, they come in groups of four to six. It's like the new Tupperware party."

Ford came up with the name Girls Giggles and Guns from a comment made by one of her students six years ago. "She said 'girls, giggles and guns — how fun!'"

I adopted her comment as the name for my class because it reflected everything we attempt to accomplish: 'Girls' because it's all women here, 'giggles,' because we provide a safe and fun environment to discuss the sometimes ominous topic of firearms, and 'guns,' because of the handgun (revolver and semiautomatic) familiarization."

The next Girls Giggles and Guns class is scheduled for March 10 and costs \$65. For more information, call 530-263-5372, or email girls_giggles_and_guns@yahoo.com.

Katrina Paz is a freelance contributor to The Union.