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Despite age, Duncanson still on target

MIDDLETOWN: The retired city police officer first got involved in competitive shooting back in 1934.

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Fay Duncanson's face lights up when he talks about his favorite pastime – pistol shooting.

Duncanson is an 89-year-old Middletown resident with the energy of someone half his age. Just ask the members of the Middletown Pistol and Rifle Association.

Duncanson has been a MPRA member since the late 1960s. After so many years, he's still active in the club's weekly pistol shooting competitions.

Last Thursday was typical.

Duncanson was eager to start the night's .22-caliber pistol shooting match. So he urged his fellow members to stop gabbing and take their positions at the firing line.

"We've got a line full," to begin shooting, he told them. "We can start."

Duncanson, sporting a .22 Ruger, took his spot on the line, one of 10 competitors. Many of the others were half his age or younger.

Thirty minutes of shooting ensued. Each man fired 30 rounds at a bull's-eye 50 feet away. They were shooting for points, determined by how close they came to the bull's-eye.

Duncanson finished in fifth place with a score of 241 out of a possible 300. The winning score was 264.

Not so long ago, Duncanson was among the club's best shooters. He is a six-time club pistol champion, most recently in 1996. The champions are determined by their cumulative match scores in a given year.

"I try, but my scores just aren't what they used to be and they never will be," he said with a laugh. The passage of time has left him with an arthritic trigger finger and reduced eye-hand coordination, the chief reasons for his lower scores.

These days, Duncanson is the respected elder of the approximately 165-member club. Or, as club secretary Jerry Molnar put it, "He is the grand old man of Middletown shooting. That's what I call him."

As "the grand old man," he is subject to friendly barbs from fellow members.

"You started shooting when Smith and Wesson invented the gun, right?" club president Charlie Clark teased him after Thursday night's match.

Actually, Duncanson became involved in competitive pistol shooting in 1934, 12 years before he joined the Middletown Police Department, which he served until retiring in 1974.

Duncanson, a 1931 Middletown High graduate, has been to countless shooting matches over the years. That includes representing the Hudson Valley 10 times in international rapid fire competition at the Empire State Games.

And he still competes in the Orange County and Ulster County Pistol Leagues during the fall and winter.

Duncanson's wife, Marjorie, passed away in 1993. He remains active because "I live alone and this gives me the excuse to get out and be with people."

Duncanson sees himself continuing "as long as I feel I can do it and I'm safe, that I'm not going to cause an accident to anybody else and myself."