

Jungle Walk

Explosions, cannons, machine guns

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SIKESTON -- A crowd of about 150 people eagerly awaited an explosion on Scott Matthews' farmland.

"You may want to protect your eyes and cover your eyes in case any shrapnel comes at you," said Mike Williams.

With a single word he gave the command to proceed.

Seconds later, a charge of C-4 on a section of a car hood exploded a few hundred yards away.

As with all other demonstrations held Saturday, the crowd applauded.

The demonstrations were part of the ninth annual Jungle Walk, an event that celebrated the safe recreational use of class 3 weaponry and other firearms.

"The most amazing part of this event is that those of us who use these type of firearms on a regular basis are able to share this completely legal and safe pastime with the general public," Matthews said. "For us it's a real pleasure to showcase how guns can be useful in a responsible manner. Once you get involved in this, you discover that it's a lot of fun."

The afternoon included demonstrations of a flamethrower, a replica Civil War cannon, a cannon firing a bowling ball 600 feet into the air and automatic firearms.

The Sikeston Department of Public Safety, Special Operation Group and Bomb Squads also simulated a situation where they were forced to save a fellow officer in the line of fire. As the officers approached a wooded area, simulated gunshots were exchanged. Once the officer was down, his fellow officers ignited smoke bombs to blind their enemy while they transported him to safety.

Also featured during the event was a chance for the public to display their skills in a simulation where a hunter had to hit as many of 23 targets as possible. In a wooded area, hunters used a variety of weapons to hit targets such as bowling pins. The average time it took a hunter to complete the course was between one-and-a-half and two minutes, Matthews said.

Bob Dwyer of Marshall County, Ky., was on hand to show off his .44 Magnum. Dwyer said that educating young people at events such as the Jungle Walk is critical if future use of guns is to continue.

"If you don't get the kids involved, then it just dies out," Dwyer said.

Dwyer's Magnum was one of about 150 guns on display at the Jungle Walk. The guns included replicas of those used during the World War I, World War II, the Korean War and recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Matthews said the cost of guns on display ranged from \$2 000 to \$40 000

Matthews , said that , . contrary to what gun control proponents may believe, class 3 firearms are safe. He said that gun owners who use such weapons must go through a background check for each gun they own. Requirements to purchase a class 3 weapon include registering the firearm, paying a tax, submitting fingerprints and photographs and obtaining a signature from a local law enforcement member.

"We live in a great country where we're able to hold events like the Jungle Walk," Matthews said. "But it's safe to say that most everyone here would agree that we're uncertain about what will happen to our rights to have such guns in the future. To enact gun control would be catastrophic."

David Smith of Dexter said those who wish to limit the use of class 3 firearms are miseducated on the issue.

"We're in danger of losing our rights as each day passes," Smith said. "Basically it's a misunderstanding by the other side of the issue because they don't know the precautions we take in order to use these firearms."



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Marcus Hopkins of Holcomb shoots at a target with an MP5 9-millimeter automatic firearm as range officer John Bingham of Bloomfield guides him on the Jungle Walk Saturday near Sikeston.