



EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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From humble beginnings: The growth of the Mason County 4-H Shooting Sports Club

In 2013, a passionate group of volunteers laid the foundation for one of Mason County's most respected 4-H special interest clubs: the Mason County 4-H Shooting Sports Club. What began with a handful of 4-H volunteers, a few youth members, some borrowed equipment, and a vision for safe and responsible firearms education, has since evolved into a program that has educated hundreds of youth, fostered lifelong skills, and built a strong sense of community.

The club's inaugural year operated with limited resources. Club meetings took place at a property that needed much development to suit the club's needs. Despite these modest beginnings, the dedicated volunteers were driven by a deep commitment to youth through the principles of 4-H. "Our main goal was never just marksmanship," recalls one founding volunteer. "It was about teaching safety, responsibility, discipline, focus, and respect—all for firearms, the sport, and each other."

Over a decade, growth has taken place in the county and University of Illinois Extension Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit. The Mason County club has more than doubled in size to 37 active youth. Since its beginnings, 29 volunteers have attended 4-H Shooting Sports instructor certification, with nine current instructors. The club began by offering the disciplines of archery, air rifle/rifle, and shotgun. It has expanded to include air pistol/pistol and hunting & wildlife disciplines.

Three adult volunteers have become 4-H certified shooting sports club coordinators in Mason County, to assist with finances and logistics.

Strong partnerships have been formed and much of the club funding and supplies are provided by Whitetails Unlimited, Illinois Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus, NRA Foundation, Farm & Home Supply Store, memorial funds, and numerous independent donors. Local hunters and sportsmen have helped boost the program's credibility and reach.

Mason County club members have won top awards at county and state fairs for their shooting sports educational displays. Over 50 youth have participated at 4-H State level competition, and four have represented the Illinois 4-H Shooting Sports program at the National 4-H Shooting Sports Championships. One local member placed second in the nation for his recurve archery skills. Club archery instructor Ted Snider has served twice as the Illinois Recurve Archery Coach at the 4-H National Shooting Sports Championships.

In 2024, an additional property access allowed for the expansion of the shotgun and archery disciplines. The Spring 2025 session marks the newest expansion via a partnership with Havana High School trap shooting club. The two clubs now collaborate to provide youth more opportunity to form positive youth-adult relationships, to learn safety and skills, to be outdoors, and to excel at a competitive sport.

More than just a place to learn how to shoot, the Mason County 4-H Shooting Sports Club has become a vital, inclusive, developmental space. Participants gain confidence, improve strength and hand-eye coordination, develop goal-setting, leadership, and mentoring skills, and learn responsibility. For those involved, the club represents more than just a hobby—it's a place where they learn values to last a lifetime.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

Formerly the location of the Mason County 4-H Shooting Sports shotgun range, the newly expanded archery range allows for more space and provides a perfect setting for 3-D archery targets to be tucked in the woodland setting. Youth are assisted with equipment selection and meet up with Archery Instructor Ted Snider at the target range.

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