

AMERICA'S DISTINGUISHED BADGES

AMERICA'S DISTINGUISHED BADGES Golden Symbols of Marksmanship Excellence

By Gary Anderson, DCM Emeritus

DISTINGUISHED BADGES — Excellence-in-Marksmanship



One of the highest honors a competitor in the sport of Shooting can achieve is to become "Distinguished." Becoming Distinguished means earning a gold Distinguished Badge for "Excellence-in-Marksmanship" (EIC). These badges hold a quasi-sacred place of honor among marksmen and markswomen because they can only be earned by making multiple top ten percent placings in designated competitions where EIC credit points are awarded. In short, you must have a series of excellent performances in major competitions to earn a Distinguished Badge. When someone is identified as a "Distinguished Shooter," they deserve your respect because these distinctive badges are very difficult to earn.

The Distinguished program was inaugurated by the U.S. Army in 1884. The first Distinguished Marksman Badges were awarded in 1887. Those first badges were awarded for excellence in service rifle marksmanship, while today, badges are awarded for excellence in several rifle, pistol and even shotgun disciplines. For 20 years there was only one Distinguished Marksman Badge and for 75 years there were just three badges. Today there

are eleven Distinguished Badges. For its first 40 years, this was a military marksmanship award program, but in 1926, civilians became fully eligible to earn Distinguished Badges and it became an American marksmanship award program open to all U.S. citizens. This ***On the Mark*** article examines the history of this icon of American marksmanship, the Distinguished Badge's unique appeal, today's opportunities to earn Distinguished Badges, and how newer competitors can pursue their own personal quests to become "Distinguished."

Early Distinguished Badge History

Distinguished Badges trace their history to efforts by American military leaders in the 1870s and 1880s to improve military marksmanship. New York National Guard officers founded the National Rifle Association in 1871 to improve the marksmanship skills of National Guardsmen. General Phil Sheridan, who became Commanding General of the U.S. Army in 1883, was an advocate for marksmanship who encouraged the creation of an Army competition program. These military leaders believed that



Every year a new class of outstanding Junior 3-Position Air Rifle athletes earn **Junior Distinguished Badges**. These Junior athletes received their badges during the 2022 National Precision Championship at Camp Perry.

by having soldiers use their weapons in competitions, they would be better prepared to teach marksmanship skills to other soldiers and more effective in using them in combat. Today's Distinguished Badge Program began with U.S. Army shooting competitions that awarded prizes at department, division, and Army levels.

A problem troubling those early competitions was that the same soldiers were winning most of the prizes. This discouraged other soldiers from participating. War Department General Order No. 12, issued by General Sheridan in 1884, endeavored to solve this problem by directing that *"whenever any marksman has been three times a member of a department team or has won any of the three authorized prize medals, he will be announced in general orders from these headquarters as belonging to a distinguished class..."* Competitors in the Distinguished Class were thus removed from the pool of regular competitors and put into a class of their own. That decision became a permanent feature of Distinguished Badge regulations. Competitors who compete for Distinguished Badges compete against Non-Distinguished competitors. Competitors who are already Distinguished are not ranked in EIC Matches.

This program began as a military rifle program. Army competitions included carbine and pistol events and by 1889, prize credits for those events were also counted.

A separate **Distinguished Pistol Shot Badge** was established in 1903. The U.S. Marine Corps established its own Distinguished Badge program in 1908. It wasn't until 1959, after World War II, that Distinguished Marksman Badges officially became Distinguished Rifleman Badges.

Originally, the top twelve competitors in military rifle championships were awarded prize medals or credits. The stipulation that any soldier who won three prize credits became Distinguished led to the three credits being called "legs," perhaps from a three-legged stool analogy. As Distinguished Badges gained in acceptance and popularity, this three legs requirement evolved into a practice of awarding EIC credit points to



The *Distinguished Badges*, which were first awarded in 1887, were *"Distinguished Marksman"* Badges that could be earned by winning U.S. Army rifle, carbine, or pistol prizes. Oval targets were standard in that era because cartridge powder charge variations caused greater vertical dispersions of shots on the targets.

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A DISTINGUISHED VOCABULARY

Distinguished Badges have become such a vital part of America's marksmanship culture that they have their own vocabulary.

- **EIC.** Excellence-in-Competition. The purpose of the Distinguished Badge Program is to recognize and promote "excellence-in-competition."
- **EIC Matches.** Competitions where Non-Distinguished competitors can win credit points that count towards earning a badge.
- **EIC Credit Points.** Competitors who place in the top ten percent in EIC Matches receive "EIC credit points." 30 points are required to earn a badge.
- **Leg.** An EIC credit point award won in an EIC Match.
- **Cut Score.** The score of the lowest-ranking competitor who won credit points (legs) in an EIC Match.
- **First Leather.** The highest-ranking competitor who did not win EIC credit points in an EIC Match.
- **Leg Day.** The day of an EIC Match. Distinguished competitors used this term to put more pressure on Non-Distinguished competitors.
- **Gold Leg.** The top one-sixth of the top ten percent receive gold legs.
- **Silver Leg.** The next two-sixths of the top ten percent receive silver legs.
- **Leg Out.** When a competitor wins the EIC credit points that give them 30 points—they have "gone Distinguished!"
- **Hard Leg.** Most badge regulations require that at least one EIC credit point award must be a gold or silver leg.
- **Badge Pinning.** A ceremony where a competitor's new Badge is presented by pinning it onto their military uniform or clothing.



President John F. Kennedy presented the first International Distinguished Badge to the author in April 1963.

competitors who placed in the top ten percent of Non-Distinguished competitors in designated competitions. Starting in 1963, individual leg medals were assigned points. A gold leg (top 1/6th of top 10%) was worth ten points; a silver leg eight points (next 2/6th of top 10%) and a bronze leg six points (next 3/6th of top 10%). 30 total points were required to receive a Distinguished Badge. The requirement to accumulate 30 EIC credit points to receive a Distinguished Badge is now standard for every badge.

The U.S. Distinguished International Shooter Badge

The **U.S. Distinguished International Shooter Badge** was approved by the Department of Defense in 1962. This Badge was a product of the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s between the USA and Soviet Union (USSR). The NBPRP¹ and military marksmanship leaders envisioned this badge as an incentive for U.S. shooters to challenge the marksmanship superiority of USSR shooters who were dominating Olympic and World Championship competitions at that time. President John F. Kennedy presented the first International Distinguished Badge to Army Corporal Gary Anderson² in April 1963. Anderson was selected to receive the first badge because he had won four World Championships and set three World Records during the 1962 World Championship.

¹The National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice, founded by Congress and President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 to promote marksmanship practice among U.S. citizens. The NBPRP was the predecessor agency to today's Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP).

²Anderson was a member of the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit International Rifle Team.

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David Lange, from New Jersey, had the distinction of earning the first **.22 Rimfire Pistol Distinguished Badge**, the first **Air Pistol Distinguished Badge** and the first **Distinguished Service Revolver Badge**. Here DCM Emeritus Gary Anderson is pinning Air Pistol Badge #1 on Lange.

The original criteria for earning this Badge was to win an individual or team medal in the Olympic Games, World Championship or Pan American Games. The significant difference in competition levels between Olympic or World Championship and American Continental Championships eventually made it necessary for the NBPRP to adopt a 30-point system that awards varying credit point totals for these championships (i.e., *an Olympic medal earns 30 points; Pan American Games medals earns 5 or 10 points, etc.*). To date, and now under CMP administration, 544 of these prestigious badges have been awarded. A 2009 policy change added the Paralympic Games and World Shooting Para Sport Championships to the international competitions where International Distinguished Badges can be earned. The first Paralympic athlete to receive the Badge was 1984 Paralympic Games gold medalist Roger Withrow.

Transition to the New CMP

Responsibility for deciding the rules and administering the Distinguished Badge program has always involved the Armed Services that govern their Distinguished programs. The NBPRP and the Department of the Army's Office of the Director of Civilian Marksmanship (ODCM) became involved when civilians started earning badges in the 1920s. A major change occurred in 1996 when Congress privatized NBPRP programs to establish the CMP as a federally-chartered, non-profit corporation. The CMP is



In 2001, Cadet Brandon Green, Bogalusa, LA, Army JROTC, was presented with **Junior Distinguished Badge No. 1**. Green subsequently became a member of the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit Service Rifle Team. SFC Green is shown in this 2018 photo after he won President's Rifle Match with a National Matches Record score of 400-20X.

now the lead organization in determining Distinguished Badge regulations and administering the program for non-military competitors.³

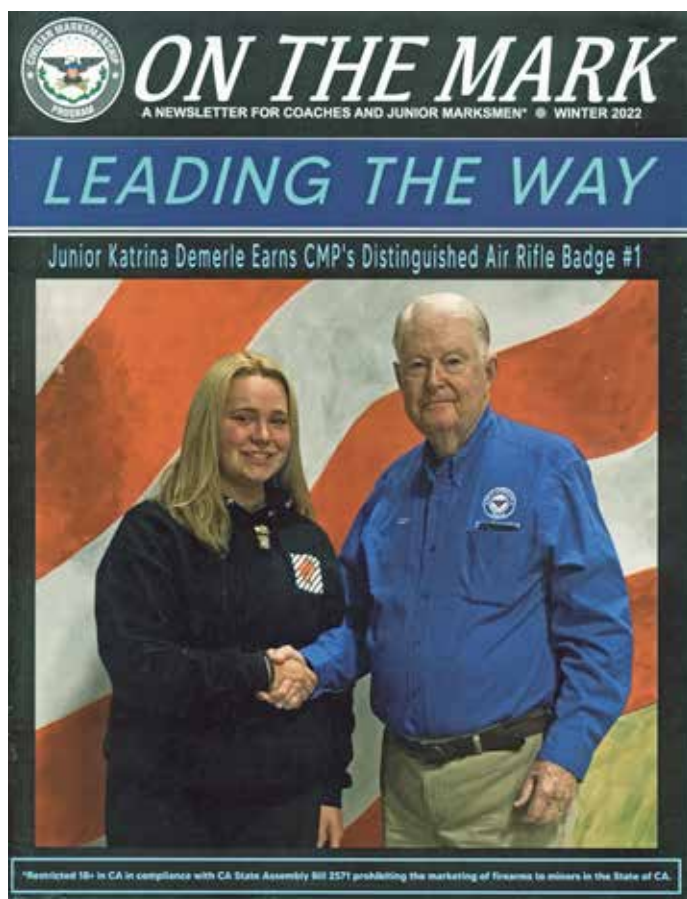
For the first 78 years of its existence, the Distinguished Badge program was dedicated to celebrating marksmanship excellence with military rifles and pistols. However, the 1962 NBPRP decision to award International Distinguished Badges introduced a change in program orientation from marksmanship with military rifles and pistols to marksmanship as a sports skill. The International Distinguished Badge recognizes excellence in Olympic and internationally recognized events that are practiced with rifles, pistols and shotguns designed solely as sports equipment.

The 1996 law that created the new CMP mandated that it **"shall give priority to activities that benefit firearms safety, training, and competition for youth."**⁴ One manifestation of that priority was the CMP's adoption of the **Junior Distinguished Badge** that is awarded for excellence by school-age juniors in Three-Position Air Rifle competitions. The first of these Badges were presented in 2001. Today, more than 1650 Junior Distinguished Badges have been presented through a program governed by the National Three-Position Air Rifle Council and administered by the CMP.⁵

³USC 36 §40722 authorizes the CMP "to conduct competitions in the use of firearms and to award trophies, prizes, badges, and other insignia to competitors."

⁴36 USC, §40724

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The presentation of the first **Distinguished Air Rifle Badge** to Junior shooter Katrina Demerle from Ohio was recognized with a cover story in the previous issue of *On the Mark*.

A significant program expansion began in 2015 when the CMP adopted rule changes designed to expand participation in bulls-eye pistol. One of those new opportunities was the introduction of a **.22 Rimfire Pistol Distinguished Badge**. Today more competitors participate in .22 Rimfire Pistol EIC Matches than in traditional Service Pistol EIC Matches.

For several years, the CMP struggled with concerns that competitors with disabilities who participate in shooting could not earn Distinguished Badges because their adaptive firing positions and equipment (wheelchairs, etc.) did not comply with EIC Match rules. In 2019, the CMP introduced a new **Distinguished Marksman Badge** that could only be earned by competitors with disabilities. Rules for pursuing this badge offer eligible competitors opportunities to earn this badge are published in the CMP Highpower Rifle, Pistol, Smallbore Rifle or Air Gun rulebooks.

The CMP also sought to respond to appeals from participants in other shooting disciplines who wanted Distinguished Badge opportunities. In 2020, the CMP introduced Distinguished Badges for **Smallbore**

Rifle Position and **Smallbore Rifle Prone**. Three more Distinguished Badges were added in 2022, the **Distinguished Service Revolver Badge**, the **Distinguished Air Rifle Badge**, and the **Distinguished Air Pistol Badge**. A U.S. Army program that recognized one "distinguished class" of competitors in 1884 has now evolved into a comprehensive CMP program with 11 Distinguished Badge programs in 2023.

The Appeal and Prestige of Distinguished Badges

Distinguished Badges awarded by the CMP and the U.S. Armed Services preserve their direct lineage with those first Distinguished Badges awarded by the U.S. Government in the 1880s. CMP Distinguished Badges are authorized by federal law.⁶ The badges' classic design is also part of their appeal. When the first Distinguished Classes were announced in the 1880s, the Army wanted to provide awards of substantial value that conveyed the prestige of this accomplishment. After consultation with famed New York jewelers Tiffany's and Jens Pedersen, and the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia, the cross bar and shield design still used in today's badges was adopted. The earliest Distinguished Badges were made of pure gold. Badge winners were authorized to wear those impressive medals on their uniforms. This enduring authorization contributes to the program's appeal for military personnel who can wear Service Rifle, Service Pistol, and International Distinguished Badges on their uniforms. JROTC Cadets are authorized to wear Junior Distinguished Badges on their uniforms. The other Armed Services adopted Distinguished Marksman Programs with slightly different badge designs, but their badges never ventured far from this original design.

Today, badges are no longer made of pure gold, but all still display the badges' traditional gold finish. Distinguished Badges have serial numbers and recipients' names engraved on their backs. The CMP maintains a master list of all Distinguished Shooters, including military personnel who earned badges. Distinguished shooter records can be looked up at https://ct.thecmp.org/app/v1/index.php?do=reportDistinguishedShootersByCriteria&filter=distinguished_type. Many badge listings include fascinating, downloadable biographies. Those records indicate that since the Distinguished Program began 135 years ago,

⁶The Council is an organization of 11 youth-serving organizations, including the CMP, that conduct Three-Position Air Rifle competitions for school-age youth.

³⁶ 36 USC § 40722 stipulates that the "Functions" of the CMP are "to conduct competitions in the use of firearms and to award trophies, prizes, badges, and other insignia to competitors."

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at least 8,400 Service Rifle Badges and just over 5,200 Service Pistol Badges have been issued. Moreover, the search for missing Distinguished Badge records is ongoing.

Distinguished Badges are the highest individual awards authorized by the U.S. Government for excellence in marksmanship competition

The formal ceremonies in which Distinguished Badges are presented is part of their appeal. Whenever possible, Distinguished Badges are presented in special badge presentations during National Match Award Ceremonies for Service Rifle, Pistol, Smallbore Rifle and Air Gun Championships. Junior Distinguished Badge presentations are staged during award ceremonies for major three-position air rifle championships. In these ceremonies, previous badge winners, often national champions, have the honor of pinning badges on new badge winners. For so many Distinguished shooters, receiving their badges from a national champion in front of their peers becomes the highpoint of their marksmanship careers.

Distinguished Badge Opportunities and Regulations

The course of fire used to determine those initial Distinguished Classes was adapted for the U.S. Rifle M1873 Trapdoor Springfield, which had to be loaded one round at a time. Competitors fired seven-shot slow-fire series in standing at 200 yards, kneeling at 300 yards and in any prone position at 600 yards. Service Rifle courses of fire changed over time as new U.S. Rifles were introduced that made rapid-fire stages feasible. Today with 11 different Distinguished Badges, each discipline has its own EIC Match course of fire where EIC credit points may be earned.

The “Distinguished Badge Program” chart (below) lists each badge, the year it was first presented, the shooting discipline, the EIC Match course of fire for that badge and the rulebook where regulations for that badge are published. Rulebooks with detailed regulations for each badge are posted on the CMP website at <https://thecmp.org/competitions/cmp-competitions-rulebooks/>. Competitors who are working to earn EIC credit points should know:

- The EIC Match course of fire—with specific firing procedure regulations to be followed.
- Specific requirements for legal rifle, pistols and



A highlight in Junior Three-Position Air Rifle Championships is the pinning on of **Junior Distinguished Badges** earned by athletes competing in those championships. Here CMP Summer Camp Counselor Addy Burrow (#978) pins badge #1632 on Camryn Camp, from the Texas Hill Country Team that won the 2022 National Precision Team Championship.

equipment that can be used in EIC Matches.

- EIC credit points may only be earned in designated EIC Matches that are sanctioned by the CMP or a military authority.
- The formula for awarding EIC credit points; credit point awards must be confirmed by CMP Competitions.
- The number of EIC Matches a competitor may fire in one year is generally limited to one or two National Championship events and a maximum of five EIC Matches.



Every year during the National Matches, shooters who earned Distinguished Badges during the previous 12 months have their badges “pinned on” by national champion shooters in especially meaningful ceremonies. This 2019 Service Rifle presenter was SSG John Cogshall, ARNG (r.), winner of the 2019 President’s Rifle Match.

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DISTINGUISHED BADGE PROGRAM				
Badge	Year	Discipline	EIC Course of Fire	Rulebook
Distinguished Rifleman	1887	Service Rifle	50-shots NMC at 200, 300 and 600 yds.	Highpower Rifle
Distinguished Pistol Shot	1903	Service Pistol	30-shots NMC at 50 and 25 yds.	Pistol
Distinguished International Shooter	1963	ISSF Rifle, Pistol, or Shotgun	ISSF Olympic rifle, pistol, or shotgun events	Smallbore Rifle or Air Gun
Junior Distinguished Badge	2001	3-Position Air Rifle	60-shots 3x20 kneeling, prone, standing	3-Position Air Rifle
22 Rimfire Pistol	2015	22 Rimfire Pistol	30-shots NMC at 50 and 25 yds.	Pistol
Distinguished Marksman	2019	Rifle or Pistol for competitors with disabilities	Varies according to discipline; approved competitors use adaptive positions and equipment	According to Discipline
Smallbore Rifle Position	2020	Smallbore Rifle	60-shots 3x20 kneeling, prone, standing	Smallbore Rifle
Smallbore Rifle Prone	2020	Smallbore Rifle	160-shots prone at 50 yds, 50m and 100 yds.	Smallbore Rifle
Distinguished Service Revolver	2022	Service Revolver	40-shots Presidents course at 50 and 25 yds.	Pistol
Air Rifle	2022	Air Rifle	60-shots standing	Air Gun
Air Pistol	2022	Air Pistol	60-shots precision	Air Gun

The Path to a Distinguished Badge

EIC and National Trophy Matches are every competitor's championship. Every Non-Distinguished competitor who places in the top ten percent in an EIC Match is a match winner! Most competitors do not expect to win national or even state championships, but everyone who competes in one of the 11 events that offer Distinguished Badges has the possibility of earning one of those gold badges. There is a common path that virtually all competitors follow in their journeys from new shooter to Distinguished. Typical

milestones on this path are:

1. Interest in Sport Shooting.

Every shooting sport adventure must have a beginning. The first decision a prospective Distinguished shooter must make is to decide that they want to learn how to shoot.

2. Learning Basic Skills and Acquiring Equipment. This starts with picking a shooting discipline. Learning how to shoot goes better if it is fostered by good instruction. New shooter clinics, Small Arms Firing Schools, or being mentored by an experienced shooter are all excellent ways to learn good marksmanship skills and get proper guidance for acquiring suitable equipment.

3. Engage in Competitions. Once a new shooter is able to complete an EIC Match course of fire, they need to

start going to local and regional competitions. It's at this step where they learn how much they enjoy participating in competitions.

4. Striving for Excellence. This is a fork in the road for competitors who earn Distinguished Badges. Their competition experiences inspire them to want to do better; they want to excel; they become excited about the idea of developing the ability to fire scores that place them near the top of match results lists.

5. Learning about Distinguished Badge Opportunities. The path to Distinguished does not start with this as a goal but somewhere during this journey, competitors become inspired by the traditions and allure of becoming Distinguished (*Competitors who are excited by this challenge can use the "Distinguished Badge Resources" chart to learn more.*).

6. Goal Setting—I Want to Go Distinguished. Most quests for Distinguished Badges succeed because these competitors made earning one of those badges a conscious goal and made a personal commitment to do the practice and competitions necessary to reach that goal.

7. Learning Advanced Skills. For most competitors in most Distinguished disciplines, the best way to learn advanced skills is by attending national competitions. The National Matches offer a treasure trove of learning possibilities. Their advanced clinics and opportunities to learn from experienced competitors are unparalleled.

DISTINGUISHED BADGE RESOURCES

If you want to obtain more information about America's Distinguished Badge programs, here are some resources to examine:

- "Distinguished Badge Program," <https://thecmp.org/competitions/distinguishedbadges/>. This CMP webpage provides basic information and answers many questions about CMP Distinguished Badges.

- The following articles can be downloaded from the CMP website at <https://thecmp.org/competitions/distinguishedbadges/>:

- o Culver, Dick; *In Distinguished Company; a history of the Distinguished Badge program from its inception in the 1880s until the beginning of the 21st century.*

- o Rocketto, Hap; *A Short History of the Distinguished Shooter Program; a detailed history of the Distinguished program with lots of supplemental statistical data.*

- o Anderson, Gary; *U.S. Distinguished International Shooter Badge History; explains the origin of this badge during the Cold War and why it is so difficult to earn.*

- Emerson, William, *Marksmanship in the U.S. Army: A History of Medals, Shooting Programs, and Training*, University of Oklahoma, Norman, 2004, pages 162-163.

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Young athletes who earn Junior Distinguished Badges have a lifetime of shooting sports challenges to look forward to. Some of them will go on to try to earn Distinguished Badges in other shooting disciplines like these Service Rifle competitors who received their badges during their 2022 National Matches Award Ceremony.

8. Motivation—Practicing and Preparing. The indispensable elements in developing the ability to shoot top ten percent scores are practice and preparation. Competitors may do this with air gun practice at home, frequent trips to the range for live fire practice, or regular dry fire sessions, but the ability to fire top ten percent scores in EIC Matches can only be achieved with a great work ethic. Equipment preparation is also part of this. In every Distinguished discipline, it is necessary to acquire and prepare rifles or pistols and equipment capable of producing top ten percent scores. Distinguished shooters earn their badges by dedicating lots of time and hard work to practice and preparation.

9. Making Top Ten Percent Match Performances. You can't earn 30 EIC points unless you go to EIC Matches and make good performances in them. Learning to compete successfully in competitions requires mental preparation, establishing and following a shot plan, goal setting, and scorebook discipline (*evaluating and learning from previous performances*).

10. Enjoying the Badge Pinning Ceremony. When you finally “leg out” and win those last points for your badge, enjoy the moment! Achieving a hard-earned goal is rewarding both because of the experiences you have along the way and because of the feeling of pride and accomplishment, even joy, you will have when they pin that badge on you!

About the Author

Gary Anderson, Director of Civilian Marksmanship Emeritus, retired as the full-time CMP Director at the end of 2009. He continues to work with the CMP as the senior marksmanship instructor. During his remarkable career, he won two Olympic gold medals, seven World Championships and 16 National Championships. He served as a Vice President of the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) from 1990 through 2018. He is a former Nebraska State Senator and Past President of USA Shooting. He served as a Technical Delegate for Shooting during the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games as well as for the 2014 and 2018 World Shooting Championships.

In 2012, the International Olympic Committee awarded Gary Anderson with the Olympic Order, its highest honor “for outstanding services to the Olympic Movement.”

In 2014, the CMP expanded its world-class air gun center at Camp Perry and renamed the facility the Gary Anderson CMP Competition Center, in honor of Anderson's contributions to the organization and the marksmanship community.

