

## 2023 at Armed Citizens' Network: The Year in Review

As we close out the year, the Network is proud to be serving 21,500+ members. Despite steady growth in numbers of members, the emergency phone line was fairly quiet at the Network during 2023. We paid an attorney to attend a hearing about possible reckless endangerment charges against a member, had another attorney oversee the legal aftermath of a fatality shooting after a man holding a gun threatened a member in a parking lot, and hired a law firm to defend a member who is facing aggravated assault charges after ejecting threatening visitors from her home. Then, in the final days of the year, we paid an attorney to meet with a member at the jail after he was shot at and returned fire, killing his assailant. Police told the member they did not expect he would be charged.



Click the picture or browse to <https://youtu.be/NryDcH3sujQ> for video of our Network President's commentary about our assistance to members during 2023.

The low number of incidents is good news for members, first because it means only four members had to face violent attackers, then deal with the possibility of arrest, and concerns about prosecution. With less work needed to defend members against criminal charges or civil litigation, we focused on member education and preparation, as well as building our own organizational strength, infrastructure, and preparation so when an attack against a member does come, all systems are idling along smoothly, ready to quickly gear up for "go."

A call for help starts a small series of questions to get the right help coming. We ask, "Do you have an attorney you prefer? Have you called him or her, or shall we? Do we need to connect you with an attorney?" In the parking lot shooting, the member's adult daughter was on the scene, telephoned us for help, and responded that we needed to find an attorney

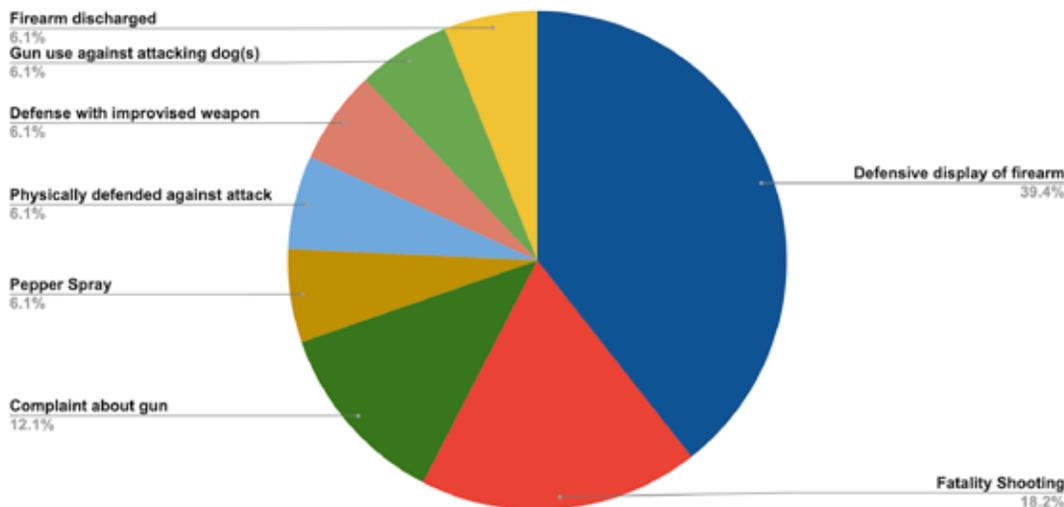
for her father. With four local affiliated attorneys available, Network President Marty Hayes started dialing. One lawyer had trusted us with his private cell phone number, and that attorney answered immediately and jumped into action without delay. He telephoned the member's daughter at the scene, spoke with our member, and talked with law enforcement officers who were there, too. Eventually, our member and his family were sent home, and a few days later law enforcement told him they did not expect that he would be charged. Now, over a month later, that has proven true.

We were impressed with our affiliated attorney's availability and how fast he went to work to protect our member, and we extend kudos to the member's daughter, too, for her very effective interface on behalf of her father. Members, if you have not discussed acting as your liaison after an emergency with your spouse, other adult family members or close associates, please review preparatory steps recommended at <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/september-2018-editorial> and implement as many steps as you are able.

Our member legal needs in 2023 followed the trend that has defined "normal" since we opened the Network in 2008. Early representation by good attorneys safely initiates communication with law enforcement, resulting in either no charges or if filed, charges dropped when the necessity of the self defense use of force becomes so glaringly apparent. To date, no member has endured trial for defending him- or herself or their family. Several members have voluntarily accepted favorable plea offers, too, but that was entirely of their own free will and

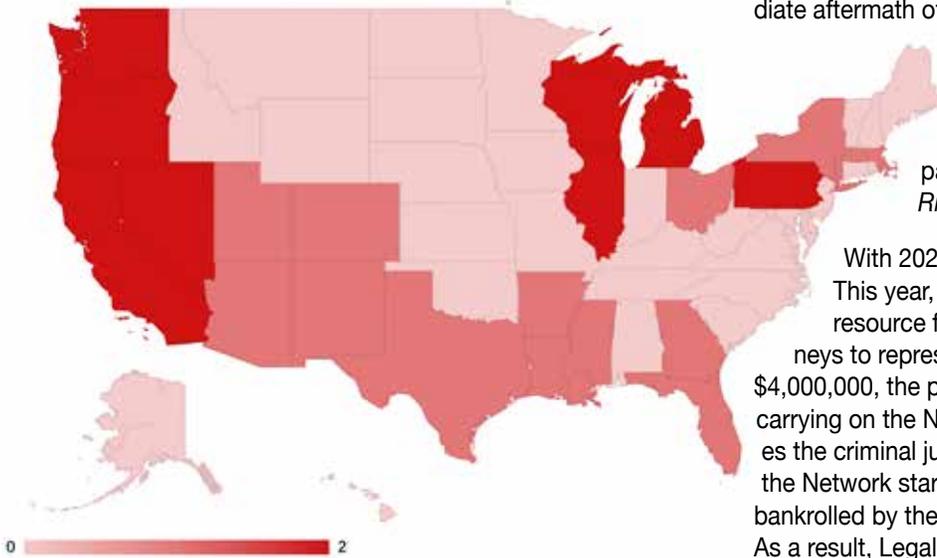
based on the explanations of the likelihood of trial and what to expect from that city or state's criminal justice system. The adjacent chart categorizes our 33 member-involved cases by type of incident and the map on the next page gives a general geographic distribution.

In about half of our member-involved cases, Network President Marty Hayes has been called upon to connect the member with an attorney to represent them; in the other  
*[Continued next page]*



### Self Defense Incidents

33 Total



member attitudes and behavior with detailed instruction on justification for use of force, whether armed, or using improvised weapons, or by non-gun means, what to expect in the immediate aftermath of self defense, avoidance through recognizing pre-attack indicators, mental and physical reactions to critical incidents, and much more. The material is delivered by video lesson and Massad Ayoob's excellent 332-page book, *Deadly Force: Understanding Your Right to Self Defense*.

With 2024 arrives a new milestone for the Network. This year, the Network's Legal Defense Fund, the resource from which we draw the fees we pay attorneys to represent members after self defense, exceeded \$4,000,000, the point at which it is fully funded and capable of carrying on the Network mission to make sure no member faces the criminal justice system alone after self defense. When the Network started in 2008, it was little more than a good idea bankrolled by the individual investments of its three owners. As a result, Legal Defense Fund growth took center stage as a primary concern in our formative years.

The first draw from the Fund for member legal defense came in 2010 when a member displayed a firearm in defense against multiple attackers at his apartment building in a large southern city. We ended that year with over \$100,000 in the Legal Defense Fund, despite that expense and boasted 2,800 members. Defense of that member, and each that has followed, has been proof of concept, and we were happy to be there to help. Except for 2012 and 2022 when there were zero member-involved cases, member legal needs have ranged from one to four member cases yearly. Over 15 years, all 33 cases have pulled almost \$300,000 out of the Fund with costs ranging from a low of \$300 to a high of \$75,000. Against expectations, legal fees in the \$50,000-\$75,000 range have not been for defense of the five fatality shootings involving members; these higher expenses have been for defense of pepper spray and hand-to-hand defensive tactics employed by members.

Throughout the various member involved cases, the Legal Defense Fund has only continued to grow, and we were always able to fund member legal needs while reserving a healthy balance for additional cases that might arise in quick succession. That is no longer the concern it once was, so with the current balance of the Legal Defense Fund exceeding \$4,000,000, in 2024 consolidation, resource management, and member education can now move even more fully to the forefront with much less attention spared for chatter about how much is available in the Fund, or fending off competitor suggestions that may be used up if several members need help simultaneously. This is a healthy, positive step in our organization's maturation.

When we introduced the concept of the Network in 2008, armed citizens wanting a means to survive the legal aftermath

*[Continued next page]*

half, members have already selected an attorney. Either way, we paid the attorney we suggested or the attorney the member selected to represent the member. As supportive of our affiliated attorneys as we are, we offer members the option to select attorneys who are unaffiliated and, in fact, after successful conclusion of several member-involved cases, we invited the attorneys to affiliate, they accepted, and we were proud to add their strength to ours.

We are proud to be affiliated with over 525 affiliated attorneys, lawyers who share our concerns as armed citizens, working in each of the 50 states and one in Puerto Rico, where we also serve members. We run yearly outreach campaigns to attorneys our members recommend, or whom our advisory board and other influencers in the gun community suggest, as well as lawyers whose names come up in our own study and research into criminal defense work on behalf of people who have used force in self defense. We contact attorneys, introduce the Network, explain its mission to these legal professionals and invite their participation. We keep our outreach professional, low-pressure, and we point out that while the Network and its members have an unusually low frequency of legal needs, we also urge members to take their more mundane legal needs like wills, traffic tickets and real estate issues to affiliated attorneys. We like to do business with "family" when we can.

In addition to our push for early representation after self defense, the historically low numbers of member-involved cases and favorable resolutions of the cases in which charges were filed result from the conservative, careful member demographic we strive to attract, combined with our vigorous member education initiative. See <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/learn/member-education-commitment>. There is great truth in the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's adage "the more you learn, the better it gets." Our member use-of-force education shapes

had only traditional insurance available. The insurance option was set up to reimburse armed citizens who needed legal representation after their trial was over and a not-guilty verdict rendered. After use of force in self defense, those policyholders had to be able to pay their own way to obtain a not-guilty verdict in court before they could tap into their policies for reimbursement. As working stiffs ourselves with our assets tied up at the time in our range and shooting school, we were all too familiar with not having cash on hand to pay attorneys, experts, investigators, bail bondsmen, and law firm support staff if we used force in self defense and needed legal defense when our actions were scrutinized by authorities.

We knew that insurance was not the answer. Nonetheless, in the years that followed the Network's introduction, a myriad of competitors would try various renditions of insurance-backed post-incident support systems to mimic what the Network was doing independently, using our own resources. Like the famous fast food drive through, millions were sold, but their results have been spotty. For ourselves, we will continue to serve members out of our own resources because that is what assures our unrestricted ability to help our members. Do you really want an insurance executive holding the purse strings when you need lawyers, experts, and investigators to explain why you used force in self defense or to defend your family?

Another reaction to the Network's launch in 2008 was a proliferation of prepaid legal contract offerings. In these programs, their client pays a monthly fee making him or her eligible for representation by an attorney the program manager assigns. Reader, when you started your chosen career, were you as capable as you are today? Of course not. Experience, continuing training and updates, confidence and skill all increase with the years. Acknowledging that reality, we strongly believe in controlling our attorney selection and we made that option a hallmark of the Network's offer to members. We would offer nothing less to members, who also have every reason to want to be able to access representation from an attorney who is at the top of his or her game.

What else is different? Fine print! Competitors have pages and pages of fine print, and sometimes that frustrates comparison shoppers who ask to see the Network's fine print. As a supportive membership organization, the Network doesn't really have the fine print common to many others, most of which have an insurance component that necessitates it. At the Network, instead of contrived limits, exclusions, and deductibles (all the restrictions that must be explained in fine print) and reasons armed citizens are left without adequate assistance, the Network simply shoulders the expenses of defending against unmeritorious prosecution or lawsuit following a member's self defense incident. The needs vary a lot from one situation to the next, but generally include attorneys' fees, the cost of private investigators to independently gather evidence and witness statements, expenses for expert witnesses, consultants, defense against civil lawsuit, expense of filing an appeal and

defending our member during a retrial, to outline likely costs. Even through our formative years, we were proud to fully fund the legal defense of all 33 member-involved cases that have come up since opening the Network in 2008. There's a good review of our work on behalf of members at <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/13-years-and-growing> that shows by example how we've provided for our members in the years gone by.

In summary, and based on questions most often asked, let me close with an outline of the support we extend to members:

- All new members receive an informative series of educational videos, comprising over a dozen hours of training, plus a comprehensive 332-page book written by Massad Ayoob. These materials ensure that members' understanding of use of force in self defense is first class. This on-line journal carries forward that mission each month and as we periodically offer educational videos to the public through our Armed Citizens' Educational Foundation, as well as distributing thousands upon thousands of our printed booklet *What Every Gun Owner Needs to Know About Self-Defense Law*.

After self defense:

- If a member is involved in a self-defense incident, we pay their chosen attorney to represent and defend them. We provide this funding as early as possible in the timeline because it is vital to get the legal defense immediately underway to assure representation during questioning and arranging for an independent investigation of the incident. If requested by the member or family, a Network official will respond to the location to assist the member in obtaining those services. You choose your own attorney or if you have not selected one, our Network President Marty Hayes helps you connect with a lawyer after self defense.
- Assistance paying for a bail bond.
- Network members receive additional financial assistance from our Legal Defense Fund to pay the expenses of a trial if they face unmeritorious prosecution for a crime or a lawsuit seeking damages after a self-defense incident occurring during their period of membership.
- Funding is provided from the Network's \$4,000,000+ Legal Defense Fund, and there is no insurance company involved to restrict how much funding is provided or limit when it is provided. The Network fully funds a member's legal expenses after legitimate use of force in self defense – at the time the funding is needed and, in the amounts, needed to stop the criminal justice system from punishing someone who did nothing more than legitimately defend themselves.

Those principles have guided the Network's assistance to members after self defense through 15 years of growth. As we start our 16th year, we look to the past and its many lessons with satisfaction and anticipate the year to come as an opportunity to provide more service to members.



## President's Message

by Marty Hayes, J.D.

Merry Christmas, happy Hannukah and Happy New year to all our members. I am writing this on Christmas day, so the greeting seems especially appropriate.

We continue our "deliberate growth" plan adding new members each month and year. We find it just as fulfilling to see people

renew, because it means we are meeting our members' needs and expectations. It is especially fulfilling to see the low numbers of member incidents again this year. More on this in our year in review article.

### YouTube Wars

Do you watch YouTube? For the past several months, I have been following the "self-defense insurance" wars, in which one company, Attorneys on Retainer (AOR), has been taking on other companies which rely upon an insurance company to supply the money to pay for legal coverage. AOR has been doing reviews on the other companies' plans and contracts with their members. While the AOR critiques of the plans are primarily opinion about what those contracts say and mean, the AOR folks always tell viewers to read the contracts for themselves. Now, it is becoming very interesting to watch as the other companies respond to what they feel are misrepresentations by AOR, and, in some cases, accusing AOR of lying outright.

Well, even though my law degree is now 15 years old, I remember pretty well the instruction on the law of defamation. You see, if someone is spreading outright lies and misrepresentations about another company, the legal recourse is a civil suit for defamation. I can assure you that if a competitor spread lies about the Network, we would be filing a lawsuit against them for defamation pretty quickly, even if the offender was a law firm, like AOR. I should quickly note that has not been a problem, and by the way, I have had many discussions with Marc Victor over the past year, and even stopped by his law firm last November when I was in Arizona (see photo). He is, of course, free to pick apart our program, too, as long as the review is done honestly. I do not expect a problem with AOR. One last thought about AOR: I really respect Victor for rolling around in the mud with the insurance-backed insurance companies. I would not have the energy to do it.

Back to this war on YouTube: it is like watching a train wreck. It is kind of fascinating in a morbid way. If lies are being told about a company, why haven't those companies filed suit? Perhaps it is because discovery might just expose information the insurance-based companies really do not want exposed. So, how does one watch these trainwrecks? Go to YouTube,

and simply type in the search bar "attorneys on retainer." The result will be many, many videos. You will have to spend a little time to sort them out, but if you have time, watching them can be quite entertaining. If you do this, hang in there long enough to read the comments after the videos. You can play the video and read the comments at the same time, just scroll down the YouTube page.

You can also do the same for Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network and we would be very happy to have you watch our videos.

### Speaking of YouTube

On Thursday, January 4 at 4 P.M. Pacific Time, we will be holding our first ever live stream, to be carried on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko35i0dn4WE> . For my first venture into live streaming, I am asking if you could email us your questions to the email below. I expect more than one or two of you may ask the same or very similar questions so I would like to be able to group topics in advance so if there are several facets to one topic of concern, I can respond to the related questions together. Please note: I will not be addressing questions about specific state laws. Instead, I will cover general questions about self defense and the law that apply to all of the states. Hope to see you on Thursday afternoon or evening, depending on your time zone.

Email your questions to [editor@armedcitizensnetwork.org](mailto:editor@armedcitizensnetwork.org) , please. Lastly, in the absence of questions either pre-submitted or submitted during the livestream, I will be discussing the state of the industry of legal help after an act of self defense.





## Attorney Question of the Month

Lawyers and law firm staff are generous, caring assets to their communities. The variety of causes and charities supported and the time contributed is amazing!

For our first *Attorney Question of the Month* column of 2024, we chose to deviate from our educational focus and put a well-deserved spotlight on the men and women who so generously serve as Network Affiliated Attorneys by asking them to tell us about their involvement in causes like their local or state pro-gun organization, Christmas food and toy drives, free plain-talk law lectures taught at the local gun club, volunteer coaching at youth sports events, stepping up to help the people at their house of worship, and all the other ways they help make the lives of people in their community better! Their responses follow.

### John R. Monroe

John Monroe Law, PC  
156 Robert Jones Road, Dawsonville, GA 30534  
678-362-7650  
<http://johnmonroelaw.com>

1. We coach the local high school mock trial team.
2. We have certified instructors that teach gun safety classes.
3. We speak at local gun clubs, ranges, and political organizations to talk about gun laws as they relate to carrying guns and using deadly force in self defense.
4. We do pro bono litigation to challenge laws and regulations that violate the Second Amendment.

### Don Hammond

Criminal Defense Heroes, P.C.  
21515 Hawthorne Blvd., Ste. 590, Torrance, CA 90503  
323-529-3660  
<https://www.donhammondlaw.com/>

I am involved in many activities all year long. I teach shooting as a volunteer instructor with Shoot Safe Learning (See <https://www.shootsafelearning.com/>). I teach a legal block as well as techniques and tactics.

I teach teen-aged cadets to fly gliders, and I am a glider tow pilot and legal officer for Civil Air Patrol.

I am the immediate past president of the Torrance Kiwanis Club. I'm in the leadership circle for the South Bay Trojans USC Alumni Club.

I volunteer as a proctor in the Teen Court program at a local high school. I volunteer at a legal clinic for the Fair Chance Project, helping with post-conviction relief and related issues.

I take on pro bono expungements for veterans through the Veterans Legal Institute®.

I help raise funds and do outreach for the Swim With Mike physically challenged athletes scholarship fund.

I may be leaving something out, but these are the things that come to mind.

### Benjamin Blatt

P.O. Box 221, South Bend, IN 46624  
574-360-4039  
<https://www.facebook.com/hoosierattorney>

I give occasional lectures on gun laws at local gun clubs, when invited, and I've taught a few classes at a local congregation.

I do the legalese for local charity gun raffles on a pro bono basis, and I've been working part time for the public defender's office on felony and misdemeanor cases for most of the past year.

### T. S. Hale

Hale Sides LLC  
505 20th St N., Birmingham, AL 35203  
205-453-9800  
<https://www.halesides.com/>

While I am loathe to talk about myself, my primary passion for the last number of years has been serving as President of two different Police Foundations, which are both 501-C3 charitable organizations. For eight years, I was President of the Home-wood Police Foundation, Inc. and since moving to Vestavia Hills, Alabama in October 2018, I have been the President of the Vestavia Hills Police Foundation, Inc. since 2020.

Our volunteer directors' and members' focus is on encouraging and facilitating better communication, cooperation, trust and economic support by and between our citizens and our local police department that currently has 110 sworn police officers. The financial support we generate through our citizens' contributions and gifts is used to meet many needs of the department and the individual officers and personnel that are not accounted for in the annual budget. We do this by our directors and members actively participating in numerous community events, and by hosting other special events like the "Signature Event" we hosted in September 2023 where we honored Alabama's longest-serving state senator, Jabo Waggoner, who is also a Vestavia Hills resident. That event alone netted almost \$90,000.00 from the individual seats, tables and corporate sponsorships that were generously donated to support our mission.

Some examples of the unbudgeted needs we stand ready to assist our police with are: (a) when an officer and his family suddenly lost everything they owned in a tragic house fire last summer, the Foundation immediately put out a blanket

[Continued next page]

request for help from the community and we raised more than \$50,000 for this officer and his family in about three days; (b) the Foundation has funded the travel expenses several times for our Police Honor Guard to attend the funeral of a police officer in another state who was killed in the line of duty; (c) the Foundation underwrote the entire expense of sending the family of another of our officers who died in the line of duty to the National Memorial Celebration in Washington, DC where his name was placed on the permanent marker honoring police who died while still in active service to their community; and (d) for the last couple of years, we have used some of our generous community contributions to buy a nice Christmas present for all of our sworn officers and personnel in the department. And, the list of other police department and personnel needs we meet is very long, I promise you.

Our Foundation has no paid employees and 100% of our net income goes to support the brave men and women in blue. We keep our expenses of printing, postage, website hosting, logo swag giveaways and other minor expenses to a minimum, so as to increase the resources we have available to support our police.

I have been quoted as saying, "Law enforcement personnel and police officers are the most highly trained, the most overly criticized, the most under-appreciated and underpaid professionals with the most difficult, dangerous and important jobs in the world. I do not know one single other attorney, banker, doctor, accountant or any other person who is willing to lay their own life on the line even once for anyone other than their immediate family, and these men and women who don the badge and uniform go out there and do exactly that for everyone else, most of whom are strangers, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, and we can NEVER, ever thank them enough for what they do for all the rest of us."

There are other organizations and causes I am involved with, like our conservative Presbyterian church where my wife of 43 years is the administrative assistant to the three pastors, and other pro bono things I do for folks, but I believe the work we do in our Police Foundation is as important as anything I do outside the practice of law.

**Justin L. Ward**

The Ward Firm

Attorneys & Counselors at Law

2121 Natomas Crossing Dr., Sacramento, CA 95834

916-443-2474

<https://www.jlwardfirm.com>

Outside of the courtroom, Justin serves the greater Sacramento region and the Sacramento legal community. On December 6, 2023, he was recognized as the 2023 Sacramento County Bar Association Distinguished Attorney of the Year.

Helping under-served and at-risk youth is Justin's main passion outside of practicing law, which is why he currently sits on the

board of directors of the Center for Fathers and Families (CFF). CFF is a non-profit agency with a strong history of responding to the needs of fathers and their families by offering programs and services that lead to family growth, enrichment, and empowerment. CFF also facilitates after-school programs at over twenty schools in the Greater Sacramento region. Justin participated in a program called "Handshakes and Ties" in which he and other professionals speak to students at schools in at-risk neighborhoods and demonstrate how to tie a tie and shake hands properly. Additionally, he annually participates in "Law Day" at local schools where he and other legal professionals speak to students about the legal profession and have the students participate in a mock trial.

Justin regularly participates in "Know Your Rights" seminars where he advises citizens on their legal rights in many areas, including: interactions with intruders in your home, self defense, and interactions with law enforcement, among others.

He is a panel attorney for the Conflict Criminal Defenders, where he receives cases from the Sacramento Superior Court when low-income defendants need representation, but the Public Defender's Office is unable to accept due to a conflict. The county pays for the representation at a rate significantly lower than the attorney's normal rate. He is also the current Greater Sacramento NAACP Legal Redress Chair. As Chair, he helps coordinate the NAACP's assistance to those unrepresented by legal counsel who have experienced racial bias, discrimination and/or retaliation in the public or private sector. He also helps coordinate the NAACP's free monthly community legal redress clinics. Justin also sits on the Board of Directors for the Sacramento County Bar Association. As an SCBA board member, he regularly participates in the debates and discussions in the meetings.

Justin is the immediate past president of the Capitol City Trial Lawyers Association (CCTLA). In that role, he helped to create CCTLA's law school outreach and scholarship programs. In the outreach program, CCTLA members provide law students insight about CCTLA and being trial attorneys. He also helped establish a CCTLA scholarship for each of the three local law schools. In 2021, he was the President of the Wiley Manuel Bar Association (WMBA) after serving as vice-president for three consecutive years. During his presidency, Justin helped navigate WMBA through the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. He put on multiple virtual programs including two bar exam preparation courses and he held a virtual Legal Fusion Gala featuring the nationally renowned USC Law Professor Jody Armour as the keynote speaker. Justin continues to sponsor multiple WMBA functions including Legal Fusion and mixers with law students.

*We appreciate the opportunity to be associated with such generous, community-minded attorneys. Next month, this column will resume the usual Q&A format.*



## News from Our Affiliates

by Gila Hayes

*In this edition, we'd like to introduce members to Wes Lagomarsino, a Sacramento-area firearms instructor whom we met 11 years ago*

*in large part because we shared a mentor, Network Advisory Board member Massad Ayoob. Wes has been telling armed citizens in Northern California about the Network ever since. Recently we enjoyed chatting about his classes. For those who prefer streaming video, there's a lengthier version of our visit at <https://youtu.be/sGbfuV5Oxxc> or enjoy this shorter written conversation with him. We started our visit with Wes by asking a little about his background and what led him to where he is today.*

**Lagomarsino:** It probably began when I was a victim of a violent crime. My grandfather and I were held hostage in a robbery at our store. When the bad guys left us alone for a minute, I was able to cut the duct tape off with a knife I had in my back pocket and get out the back door, leaving the bad guys to the police, who surrounded the building, caught and prosecuted them. The bad guys were there to execute me as a gang initiation and after the trial, that gang "put the green light on me," meaning they hunted me.

As a result, I was sold on martial arts and weapons for self defense. I joined law enforcement and worked for eight years with the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Department. I left there on great terms to go into Federal law enforcement, but my position got cut when Obama took office. A friend, a real smart man who I really respect, called me, and said, "The Secret Service was picking you up because of your weapons and tactics experience and all the classes you've taken. Why don't you teach privately?"

Fourteen years later, here I am. I got into the industry right when concealed carry in the Sacramento area was starting. I started Lagomarsino's Firearms Institute in July of 2009, just on a whim, but as a result, I've gotten to train with some of the best instructors in the world.

**eJournal:** What is your focus as an instructor?

**Lagomarsino:** I break classes into safe gun manipulations, then shooting fundamentals and after that, dynamics like movement, awkward shooting positions and such. We need to be able to complete tasks without having to put conscious

thought into it, which we do by breaking down and memorizing smaller chunks.

Starting with gun safety, I make sure people understand muzzle direction and finger placement, timing to and from the trigger and can manipulate a gun – racking the slide and putting magazines in and out – pointing in the right direction and with their fingers in the right place. I work in a lot of repetitions prior to advancing people to shooting fundamentals, which hinders my business a bit. People want to go straight to dynamics and stack up like SWAT dudes. Although I'm Italian not Japanese, I'm kind of like *The Karate Kid's* Mr. Miyagi in that respect, "Wax on, wax off" and then I tell them to go home and do the repetitions.

I do daily repetitions of the timing of finger to the trigger and finger off the trigger. I love doing reps because I know that's how to be able to perform during a fight or a competition. Once you have memorized steps to the subconscious, they're easy. You're going to need to do 10,000 repetitions over a six-month period preferably with no days off in between the sleep cycles – about 60 reps a day will get you there.

**eJournal:** You mentioned so many interesting shooting components, but for today, we should pick just one. Let's explore the human eye using pistol sights.

**Lagomarsino:** With iron sights, you align the front sight compared to the inside corners of the rear sight and then align the sight picture into the center of the target. Lining up the top edges of the front sight or the corners of the top is the most important thing. In my opinion, that's the easy part. When we move the trigger and the gun goes off, the sights go extremely blurry but if you're gripping really well, they don't move much and will probably realign. What are your eyes supposed to do post-detonation and during the detonation? First of all, we have got to avoid blinking and we should even back up maybe another step into keeping one eye or both eyes open when you're shooting. So let me do that first.

**eJournal:** Much conflicting advice has been given about both eyes open.

**Lagomarsino:** It is not as simple as always just keeping both eyes open. I hear that a lot and I disagree. When you have both eyes open and looking at your sights, your dominant eye is aligned with the rear sight, the front sight, and the target. If your other eye is open, you're going to have double vision that looks like a superimposed target off to one side or so far apart that they separate instead of overlap. Unless you're really, really experienced and you've done thousands and thousands of

*[Continued next page]*



reps, I don't think that you should be challenging your brain to differentiate one from the other during a fight. When in doubt, squint an eye!

Treating my range as a laboratory, I get experience keeping one eye open versus keeping both eyes open. Ten yards for body shots is about where people start to need to squint an eye on an 8-inch target. Squint an eye for difficult targets; for easy targets, keep both eyes open. It doesn't take that long and usually the eye will squint while the gun is extending, so there's no delay unless your timing is bad.

**eJournal:** After instruction in correct technique, timing can be polished during practice – what you've been calling "reps." What other refinements for using pistol sights do you teach?

**Lagomarsino:** How to avoid blinking! If there's an explosion in your hand 20 inches in front of your face, your brain says, "Danger!" and you want to blink. I teach flexing the muscles around the eye to where it can't blink. It is the same thing we do when we catch a baseball. It looks like a scowl.

Next, we should be tracking the front sight in relation to the rear. Is it going up and right or up and left? Is it dipping right before the shot? After the shot, where is it recovering to? Most right-handed shooters do not contract up their right triceps and deltoid muscles very hard when they shoot, so their gun tracks up and right when they fire. You fix that by flexing those muscles a little harder and then you'll watch your gun go straight up, straight down.

When you practice and do reps, extend the gun out in front of your face and scowl. Do your reps and make sure that you flex those muscles on a regular basis.

**eJournal:** How does that apply to multiple shots?

**Lagomarsino:** When we're tracking the sights, that data the eye gathers tells us when to shoot the next shot, especially for rapid fire or shooting a volley of shots. Tracking the sights also tells us what muscles are contracted correctly or incorrectly. You can fix that during multiple shots if you messed up and didn't flex the muscles right.

After the shot, make sure that you realign the sights and focus on them again. You should not shift your eyes from the sights over to the target to see your hits and then back to the sights. What a waste of time that is! Go look at your hits after you're done with the volley, after you bring the gun back to the ready position. That's a nemesis that I still work on regularly when I'm shooting bullseye. My mantra is grip, sights, trigger, and then off trigger, off sights, off grip in that order. When I'm doing a drill, I'm telling myself, out loud, "Track the sights, track the sights, track the sights," so even if I get other fundamentals wrong, as long as I track the sights during recoil, I know what I need to do. Maybe I flinched and the sights dipped, so by tracking the sight, I see what I need to practice and do to develop good habits.

If you do your reps, you're going to end up being able to piece together all the little pieces that are memorized to the subconscious so that you won't have to think through each step when you have to perform.

**eJournal:** How do you respond to nay-sayers who say you can't watch your sights in a fight?

**Lagomarsino:** I hear that nonsense from people that don't shoot very often. They'll say that they got into a shooting and say, "I didn't look at my sights." I have to ask, how often do you put a gun in front of your face? Guys like Massad Ayoob, Mike Seeklander or even myself, put a gun in front of our faces every day and I do dry practice three to five days a week. The rest of the time, I'm out on the range discharging guns, so, of course I'm going to put the gun in front of my face and look at the sights, regardless of the level of danger.

When IPSC shooter BJ Baldwin and his girlfriend were attacked, how did he make 10 of 10 effective hits from 20 yards when he'd never been in a fight before? It was because he's a master level USPSA shooter and he shoots about 50,000 rounds a year, same as me. He puts the gun up in front of his face every day. He doesn't know how not to look at the sights.

**eJournal:** Let's take a minute to talk about the classes you teach. How do you get people started right?

**Lagomarsino:** I teach all-day classes. The first covers basic fundamentals, and the next is the accuracy development class. From there, I have classes covering movement, one handed shooting, awkward shooting positions and more. They're at <https://www.lfiguns.com/courses> along with my phone number and email. I do have Facebook and Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy7c8A2LUVt/> and <https://www.facebook.com/lfiguns> but I don't really answer questions there. I'm a people person! I'd rather people call me. I might give a lesson right there on the phone because I want the good guy to win if ever attacked. That's my passion.

**eJournal:** Call Wes at 209-401-0907, and readers, this is a guy you should turn to for training, both with him, as well as when he hosts our Advisory Board member Massad Ayoob, or other big-name instructors like Mike Seeklander, or go to Wes for reciprocal carry permits from NV or AZ or UT. What else should we know about your classes, Wes?

**Lagomarsino:** The classes are really small right now. That's a huge benefit because I spend a lot of one-on-one time and I don't send you home early just because the class is small. I'm the guy who's always saying, "As long as you want to stay, I'm out here. We'll stay out here 'til midnight." We can shoot in the dark at my range, too. It is really fun. I'm just 20-30 minutes south of Sacramento, off of the 99 corridor.

**eJournal:** Members, you can't beat coaching from an instructor with such a love of the subject matter! Thank you, Wes, for being there for our CA readers' education, training, and practice.

## Book Review

### ***Winning a Gunfight: Securing victory ethically, mentally, and tactically in a gunfights***

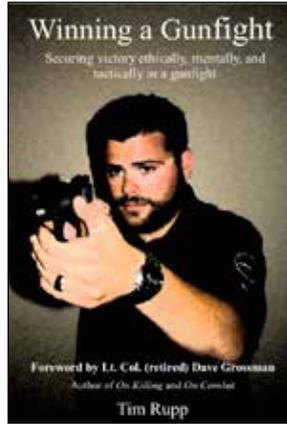
By Tim Rupp

Published by The Strong Blue Line (Oct. 11, 2016)

ISBN 979-8478372286

[\\$13 paperback; \\$4.99 eBook at Amazon](#)

*Reviewed by Gila Hayes*



Men and women of faith who are also armed citizens struggle with erroneous messages abhorring violence coming from their fellow parishioners and sometimes from the pulpit. Failure to distinguish between violence used to stop evil and violence used in perpetuation of evil has long troubled law enforcement professionals, those in our armed forces, and citizens who are armed for defense of themselves and their families. Retired San Antonio police officer Tim Rupp has made dispelling that error and ministering to the needs of those who go armed for defense of the innocent his mission.

Rupp writes that “Whether you believe the Bible or not, all of us recognize that there is more to who we are than a mere body. There is a physical, a mental, and an ethical aspect to each one of us.” He defines three elements: spirit, soul and body. Historically, surviving violence has been thought of as keeping the body alive and as unharmed as possible, in his words, “Surviving means you continue to exist.” He makes an argument for winning, because, he writes, “There is more to a human being than a physical body.”

In Rupp’s interpretation the spirit defines right from wrong, while the soul provides intellect to drive decisions, then the body takes action based on that input. “You can imagine these three working together through this simple picture: a situation requiring a decision is facing you; your spirit quickly filters through the possible options and chooses the one that agrees with your ethics; your soul takes that choice and uses information gained through experience or training to formulate a plan of action; your body takes that plan of action and implements it to finalize your decision.”

The body, he continues, is amazingly durable, and he identifies firearms and tactics and instructors of those arts as bearing the responsibility of teaching warriors how to keep the body alive.

The soul is the part of a human being that thinks, makes decisions, and “is your personality, and the seat of your emotions.” Mental health is to the soul as physical health is to the body.

Much has been written and studied about PTSD, which Rupp explains is a good example of injury to the soul stemming from a shooting.

Rupp believes, “The spirit says, ‘It’s right or it’s wrong.’ The spirit informs the soul (or mind) of what the principled implications are to a decision.” While his approach is Bible-based, he notes that “Anthropologists confirm that throughout all cultures there is a moral code inside every person.” A common response after violating codes of behavior, embedded in us since earliest childhood, is guilt which he discusses at length, explaining it “is a healthy emotion when it drives us to do the right thing.” We can also be erroneously convinced we are guilty, if told that we are responsible for something we did not do, an unintentional or accidental action, or, if others do not agree with justification for our actions, as is all too frequently true when law enforcement officers and armed citizens shoot to stop criminal violence. Rupp calls this unhealthy or false guilt.

Humans, whether due to enculturation or other causes, hesitate to take the life of other humans. Rupp explains how some of our cultural taboos against even justified killing may stem from mistranslation of the Bible’s sixth commandment, and shows that the original wording was actually a prohibition against murder. “Kill is to take the life of another. Murder is to do so with malice, that is, with evil intent,” he defines.

Rupp points out that determining whether one can end the life of an attacker is a necessary prerequisite to going armed. Those who can take life in defense of innocent people are essential, because, he observes, societies cannot survive without members willing to kill those who come to attack their families and communities.

He clarifies that, “In the event you must use lethal force the goal is to quickly neutralize (that is to stop) an armed aggressor before the aggressor is able to harm any innocent person. To quickly neutralize is key. Response to an armed aggressor must be immediate and effective. To neutralize a threat is to nullify it. While the goal is to end the threat, it may cost the aggressor his life. Those willing to carry a gun to defend life must be willing to take it.” Rupp acknowledges that some believe any killing is wrong, but adds, “what you must understand is that neither the Bible, nor America’s laws support that position.”

Mental preparation for self defense means abandoning pre-conceived ideas about race, gender, and age. Rupp quotes Jeff Cooper who observed that few have come to grips with the depth of “human savagery.”

*[Continued next page]*

Scenario-based training, coupled with shooting skills, is part of the solution. Even if training doesn't trigger it, instructors and coaches need to warn students about sensory distortions present during critical incidents, he continues. Problems like tunnel vision can be broken up by turning the head in a full, intentional visual scan after shooting, and should be included in training, he explains. Knowing what others have experienced is as important when recovering after a shooting as it is if phenomena like auditory exclusion or time distortion occur during an incident.

The role of training, alertness and mental focus during an attack lead a discussion of levels of alertness, understanding baseline behaviors that are normal for the location, reactions to deadly danger ranging from fright, flight or fight, and combat breathing, all of which are covered in an important chapter of *Winning a Gunfight*. Rupp strongly recommends realistic training that can, to the degree possible, create the psychological and physiological reactions to danger as a way to learn to remain in a "fighting mindset," without tipping over into ineffectual panic, he explains.

He goes on to detail gun safety, shooting skills, tactical gun handling like the safety circle concept, cover, concealment, the value of movement, and discusses alternative techniques to get hits fast when the danger is very close. The book closes with discussions of ammunition, handgun selection, holsters, lights, night sights and other accessories.

Rupp reminds readers that humans are multi-faceted beings. "Our spirit gives us a sense of right and wrong; it's our ethical part. Our soul gives us our mental capacities; it's our intellect and where we make decisions about which specific actions to take. With the body we take action based on the decision made." All three need care.

After a fight, the initial concern is whether the body was injured, but the aftermath also has to explore whether the decision to shoot was correct, and then internally, spiritual recovery weighs the justification for taking a life. Lots of outside forces will be accusing you, Rupp explains. "Avoid getting caught up in false guilt. Also, keep in mind the five basic stages to killing: (1) the concern stage, (2) the actual kill, (3) exhilaration, (4) remorse, and (5) rationalization and acceptance. The last three come into play after the gunfight is over," he writes.

I ordered *Winning A Gunfight* after a Network member who serves as a chaplain asked if I had read another of Rupp's books entitled *Moral Injury in Policing*. I was drawn to that title because I had been first exposed to the term "moral injury" in an interview with a now-retired police officer who had endured a lengthy USC § 1983 action (allegations of depriving a person of their civil rights under color of law) for whom recovery included counseling to address injury done to him in the aftermath of an on-duty shooting. Drawn to Rupp's book on that subject, I found that he had written extensively about armed use of force both from his experience as a police officer and from his Christian viewpoint. Check out all of Rupp's titles at <https://thestrongblueline.org/resources> .



## **Editor's Notebook** **Strangers at the Door**

by Gila Hayes

Advance preparation for strangers coming to our homes has been on my mind lately after researching news reports about contract delivery drivers. Some are professional, uniformed, hired, trained, and vetted by national delivery

businesses; others, not so much! Some of these workers are sent to private residences in unmarked cars, trying to contact the homeowner to deliver orders. If a signature is required, closer proximity than is safe or comfortable becomes necessary. We find ourselves interacting with delivery drivers who may or may not wear a company vest or even cap, although logo clothing is too easily misappropriated by burglars or those who might be scoping out a home invasion, so logo wear is not good reason to trust a stranger knocking on your door.

As employers continue to struggle to staff their workforce, I doubt the professionalism of package delivery is going to improve. As with other crime trends, study and strategizing is more essential now than ever, for several reasons. The first, of course, is avoiding blindsided attacks by criminals who pose as legitimate delivery drivers to get inside your defenses. Next, we need to be prepared long before the doorbell or driveway alarm sounds. Nothing but trouble awaits if we resort to greeting strangers of unknown intent with a gun in hand or shouting a verbal threat if, caught by surprise, we react with undue alarm. Work out strategies for strangers at the door in advance!

Like all aspects of personal safety, a little inconvenience may be necessary to create a stronger buffer against danger. Do you really need home delivery for goods ordered online? How inconvenient would it be to pick up merchandise at a delivery counter or package locker? Whenever possible, that's my preferred strategy.

Sometimes surprise deliveries arrive from friends or family who don't understand or choose to honor our reservations about strangers driving up to our doors. Maybe your attention is deep in a book or other restful activity and dialing it up to Condition Yellow when a stranger comes to the house is a challenge. Before that happens, do some mental rehearsal, and play out several options for responses along the lines of "If A happens, I'll respond with B," mentally envisioning each step flowing into the next to put yourself in a confident, solid defensive position. You have to put in the mental preparation for that to happen.

Think long and hard about the many problems relating to answering a knock on the door with a gun in your hand. Way back in 2017, our Advisory Board member Massad Ayoob suggested that was a bad idea in an interview at <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/armed-at-home-strategic-realities>

which merits review. In addition to his arguments against having a gun in your hand when it is police at your door, consider news reports that illustrate how reactions can cascade out of control if a caller believes you endangered them with a gun.

It can help to see both sides of the problem. Do a web search on terms like "delivery driver dangerous job," or related terms. Delivery drivers are calling law enforcement agencies to report both legitimate fears and unsubstantiated accusations that they were threatened by armed residents at addresses to which their employer sent them. In an environment where false accusations can lead to visits from the SWAT team, it is in our best interests to figure out how to live safely without alarming others. Why provide reasons for fear? Get rid of all gun-centric signs, "Don't honk, I'm reloading" stickers on your car and aggressive slogans on your t-shirt, and have your gun holstered and concealed under a shirt or in a pocket holster out of sight.

If your Spidey-sense was accurate and your visitor is not a legitimate delivery driver but instead a predator exploiting good, decent people's need to interact with delivery drivers coming to their door, what preparations have you made for security of the home? As Jim Wilson suggested in his August interview at <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/back-to-basics-safety-in-the-home>, can you keep a pet dog that strangers believe may bite, even if you know it's a pet with no fighting spirit whatsoever?

If you have to sign for a package, realize you're under no obligation to look down and render a legible rendition of your signature. Can you install a fence or locked gate to serve as a barrier between yourself and delivery drivers while still providing required signatures? Even if it is inconvenient to go down a driveway to the gate, that barrier could be extremely important.

If you need to go outside to interact with delivery drivers, are you corralled on a stairway, or have you stepped down where an even footing allows quick, sure movement if the delivery turns out to be a ruse? Do you have good exterior lighting, and can you see whether there are unexpected accomplices nearby?

If implementing protective steps to manage strangers who come to your home does not seem practical, return to option one, and explore if you can rent a Post Office box or have your purchases sent to package lockers, delivery counters or private mailbox store fronts.

The pandemic and recent years' riots and violent protests turned many toward the perceived safety of home, although not all were able to shore up home safety. Likewise, not everyone recognizes that food and package delivery, while convenient, creates its own hazards. We fell into the easy habit of having our purchases delivered to the door and may not have implemented protections against criminals exploiting this opening. Likewise, we may have failed to take steps to avoid false accusations by a simple driver our behavior or language alarmed.

Work out those strategies now to smooth out future problems.

## ***About the Network's Online Journal***

The *eJournal* of the Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network, Inc. is published monthly on the Network's website at <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/our-journal>. Content is copyrighted by the Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network, Inc.

Do not mistake information presented in this online publication for legal advice; it is not. The Network strives to assure that information published in this journal is both accurate and useful. Reader, it is your responsibility to consult your own attorney to receive professional assurance that this information and your interpretation or understanding of it is accurate, complete and appropriate with respect to your particular situation.

In addition, material presented in our opinion columns is entirely the opinion of the bylined author and is intended to provoke thought and discussion among readers.

To submit letters and comments about content in the eJournal, please contact editor Gila Hayes by e-mail sent to [editor@armedcitizensnetwork.org](mailto:editor@armedcitizensnetwork.org).

The Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network, Inc. receives its direction from these corporate officers:

Marty Hayes, President

J. Vincent Shuck, Vice President

Gila Hayes, Chief Operating Officer

We welcome your questions and comments about the Network.

Please write to us at [info@armedcitizensnetwork.org](mailto:info@armedcitizensnetwork.org) or PO Box 400, Onalaska, WA 98570 or call us at 888-508-3404.