

Guns invited to Town Square

Police prepare for display of rifles, sidearms on Independence Day.

By Sarah Linson

A part-time Jackson resident who has invited others to carry guns at several town events July 4 said Monday his intent is to educate people, not make them uncomfortable.

Bob Culver wrote an e-mail and posted a flier online last month asking people to join a group that plans to carry sidearms and rifles at the Street Pancake Breakfast, the Howdy Pardners Fourth of July Parade, into Grand Teton or Yellowstone National Park, and at the town's fireworks display.

The idea came up during a dinner gathering last winter and naturally grew to include the parks because of recent federal legislation that made it legal to openly carry there, he said.

Jackson Police Chief Todd Smith said Monday that he contacted Culver by e-mail when he heard about the plans and the two have scheduled a meeting the week before the Fourth. Smith said he wants to answer Culver's questions and let Culver know that safe gun handling is important.

"The carrying of the gun is not a violation of the law; in fact, it's supported by the Wyoming Constitution," Smith said.

Many of those involved won't cause any problems, Smith said, but he worried there might be a few who choose to mix alcohol with guns or try to make people uncomfortable enough to call police.

When officers respond in such cases, they often face criticism for allegedly harassing gun owners, according to comments at the Web site Opencarry.org.

"We're hopeful that doesn't happen, but law enforcement has to be prepared," Smith said.

Culver said he would discourage behavior intended to push the envelope during Jackson events.

"It's a natural concern, but my questions would be who would want to push the envelope and for what purpose," he said. Information Culver has distributed says the intent is to spread the word that "guns and gun owners are not evil."

"The goal is to smile a lot, chat with the public explain Second Amendmen issues, provide information and sources, give directions to the public [restrooms etc.], take pictures for people, etc.," the flier says.

"Us simply responding doesn't mean someone has committed a crime, but we have an obligation to go and investigate," Smith said.

Culver said he would leave a store if the business owner doesn't want people to bring guns in. "I don't think many of the people will be going into businesses," Culver said.

"The idea is to be out there in public to talk to people."

Smith said the law allows people to enter businesses while carrying a gun even when a sign has been posted asking them to stay out. Police would respond if the person were asked to leave and refused because it would become a trespassing issue, he said.

Culver said he hasn't yet applied to march in the Fourth of July parade and that it depends on how many people are interested. He also wasn't sure where in the parks a group might go.

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NEWSGUIDE PHOTO / FRIZZ CHAMBERS
On July Fourth, there will be more than show guns, seen here in the nightly shootout act, on the Town Square. A part-time resident is inviting fellow gun owners to show up on Independence Day with their arms to educate others about constitutional rights.