



CSTS podcast series
Let's Talk About Your Guns
episode 203: GUN SHOPS WOULD LIKE A WORD

DR CURT WEST: Welcome to let's talk about your guns, a podcast where we explore how to have tough conversations about storing firearms safely, conversations that could save a life. I'm Curt West, associate professor of psychiatry and scientist at the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress at the Uniformed Services University.

In 2023, nearly 15.9 million firearms were sold legally in the United States. In that same year, almost 43,000 people died from gun related injuries; over half of those deaths were suicides. Today we will be asking the question of what role gun retailers can play in suicide prevention.

In this episode, I'll be talking with Jacqueline Clark who co-owns Bristlecone Shooting Training and retail center in Lakewood, Colorado.

I'll also be talking with Caleb Morse, owner of the Rustic Renegade in Lafayette, Louisiana.

Today's conversations is about the point of sale and the role those conversations make a difference in suicide prevention and safe firearm storage.

DR CURT WEST: Jacqueline. Caleb. Thank you so much for joining me today.

JACQUELINE: Thank you for having me.

CALEB: It's a pleasure to be here.



DR CURT WEST: Jacqueline, one of the things I'm curious about and I think our listeners would like to hear about is, tell us a little bit about Bristle Cone.

JACQUELINE: Sure. So, Bristle Cone is an indoor shooting range, firearms retailer training facility, gunsmiths, lots of things under one roof. We've been operating for 10 years. It's me and my husband that own and operate it. It's a 20,000 square foot facility.

Our goal really when we opened it was to create a really non intimidating, friendly environment for shooters of all levels. So, from the people we hired to our instructors to the vibe and the paint colors, we really wanna make sure that people that come in, receive a very high level of customer service but also feel comfortable.

Guns are intimidating enough and so we try very hard to remove as much intimidation as we can.

DR CURT WEST: So Caleb, can you tell us a little bit about your background and, the Rustic Renegade?

CALEB: I didn't grow up around firearms. My mother was, is scared to death to this day of firearms. So I didn't have one in the house, went hunting with friends and their dads. And when I was 17 years old I started working at a gun shop and I was there until I joined the Army.

Fast forward, left the military, went work overseas for a little while, came back and a great buddy of mine I had met through a Bible study, offered me the opportunity to use his building to kind of open my own shop. And then it just progressed into where we are today.

Our store is about 5000 square feet and we've just built this community of people that, that aren't exactly like minded, but they're like hearted if that makes sense. Our, our ethos, our motto at the shop is, is showing the grown boys of Acadiana and, and what



grown men look like. We believe in leading from the front and we believe that you have to be who you say you are. So if we want to be pillars in the community, we do things in the community.

We don't just work with firearm industry, related projects such as ducks, unlimited and everything else. We've invested ourselves in our community and neighboring communities to make it a better place where most of the gun shops that I grew up going to, you know, they were there to sell wares.

DR CURT WEST: Okay, so both Bristlecone and The Rustic Renegade offer the ability for people to come in and store their firearms on site. One of the things that we talk about in this podcast is having that plan for alternate storage of your firearms when you hit a rough patch when you don't think you should have them around. What experiences led you to offer this service to your customers?

JACQUELINE: We got involved with the Colorado Firearm Safety Coalition pretty quickly after we opened and, and that is a group of involved and interested firearms retailers, range owners and also some mental health professionals, folks with firearms injury prevention initiative, the University of Colorado. So a large group of people who definitely have different political views, but everybody agrees we need fewer gun deaths in the state of Colorado.

And being involved with that group really opened our eyes to the level of need that was out there. So we began offering storage because we wanted to make an impact locally to again take that trusted community feel to the next level and offer something that was clearly needed in the community.

DR CURT WEST: What about you Caleb? What got you started offering storage for your customers?



CALEB: I had a good friend of mine that I served with and he was going through this existential crisis. And just shows up with all of his firearms and he's like, hey look, I want you to hold these firearms. I want you to take these firearms I don't need anymore.

And one of the things that you learn through the military is, hey, look, if someone starts trying to give away their stuff, that's a big clue. So I talked to him and I'm like, look, man, let's, let's figure this out because I think you're going through something right now that, that we need to talk about.

So, I told him I was gonna grab some coffee for he and I went in the back, grab coffee and he was gone and he left his firearms.

So I took his firearms in, put them in my inventory and started trying to call him and he never answered the calls. And that kind of snowballed into probably a week, two weeks later, someone came in, they were like, hey, I heard you held firearms for a friend of yours. I'm going through a problem. Would you mind helping me? I'm like, well, sure we can, I can do that. We'll figure out a way.

And it just kind of built upon there where word got out that I was doing things in the community to help people and the good word spread fast.

DR CURT WEST: So that is just fascinating. You did this for one person and it was just a spontaneous thing and suddenly you build it and they came.

Jacqueline. Caleb. What kind of storage options do you offer?

JACQUELINE: We offer two different types of storage at my shop. We have lockers which has one type of procedure for the customers. And then we also have a, a regular temporary storage program where the guns are stored with the rest of our inventory. It just depends on availability and space and what the customer's needs are. in terms of what solution we pair them with.



CALEB: I don't do the lockers. Just because I technically have the space for it, but I don't know how it, how it is in Colorado, but the average person in Louisiana owns quite a few firearms. And if they're going through some kind of instance, one locker is not enough.

So we do our temporary hold where he goes throughout books, goes the entire legal process and we have some verbiage in a contract that we sign with the individuals stating that we are required to give them their firearms back.

DR WEST: So I'm curious when somebody comes in and they say, look, I want you to hold these or I want to store these with you for a period of time. Can you tell me what the process is like?

CALEB: So for us, it's never someone that just walks in and says, hey, look, this is it time up for safety. I need you to hold my guns. That has never happened.

People normally come in and they're like, look, ok, I have a friend and he's going through a divorce or she's going through a divorce and this is what's happening and if they wanted to use the program, how would it work?

My staff has had some training and everything else but for that kind of stuff, they're like, well, we'll let you talk to Caleb, I'll talk to him and I'm like, well, this friend of yours, are they about 6 ft tall with a beard? Yeah. Yeah. You know, it's me and this is what I'm thinking about and, and they probe you in the beginning to see if you are who they assume you are because they want to know they can trust you because they want to make sure they can get their firearms back.

So it's always that conversation at the beginning and it's look, yeah, we're here, we can hold your firearms, but that's not where it stops. I wanna get you help. And look, I'm not required to do that. That's just, I believe that we need to do something more than just hold them.



And normally, it's about a week long process, where they come back and forth a few times, and then they get comfortable enough and they say, ok, look, I want you to hold my firearms. And, they come in and they can come in anywhere from one firearm to the most. We've had someone come in, come in with well over 100.

And we try to have a timeline set up for the bigger, the bigger quantities sit down and do it in private because it's, it's an emotional roller coaster and I, I don't want to embarrass anybody and add to that roller coaster. So we make sure that it's, it's very, personal. It's a very personal moment in time. We wanna make sure someone feels comfortable out and we wanna make sure that we're giving them more help than just a place to store 'em.

So we stay in communication with most of the people after the fact. Once they come back and pick the firearm, firearms up, we talk to them like, hey, how's life going, what's going on now? Are you still doing this? Is this going on? Because we want to make sure that people's lives are better.

JACQUELINE: We have a little bit of a different process. One of the things that I purposefully train my staff to do is not to ask a lot of questions.

So I think that sounds like the biggest fundamental difference between how we run our temporary storage and, and what Caleb's doing. And it's for a variety of reasons.

We have about 25 people on staff and we have a, I think average amount of turnover for retail operation. We provide them with training but they're not, you know, highly trained mental health professionals.



So if we don't always know why someone is storing firearms with us, it does remove some of the liability for us on the back end in terms of giving them back to the customer. It also in my mind can help reduce some of the stigma.

So if somebody comes in with some firearms, they wanna store great. You know, we train our staff not to ask any questions and to take them in and, to talk to them about which solution would fit them better. Either the locker and they explain the difference between the procedure with the lockers and then the procedure with the other temporary storage program that we have in place where the firearms are stored with the rest of our inventory.

All that being said, sometimes people do offer why they want to store their firearms. And I would say in, 95% of the situations where they tell us why they want to store them, they're very mundane reasons.

You know, my grandkids are coming to town and I don't have a good place to put my guns in my house while they're staying with me for two months or I'm being deployed or I have a new roommate and I don't know, you know how they feel about guns. So I want to store them for a couple of months till we figure it all out.

And then there are times where someone will offer that they are in trouble or their loved one is in trouble and then that's where the training that the staff has comes into play.

We want to be able to put those folks in touch with the right resources and make sure that they're getting the help that they need beyond just storing their firearms.

We had one pretty memorable situation where a mother came in with a bunch of guns. They were her son's. He was a vet and he was going through a rough patch and she wanted him out of the house because she was really worried about him.



And there were a number of them so we couldn't put her in a locker. So our, temporary storage procedure, that's not, the lockers requires the customer to sign an affidavit saying it's their guns and they weren't her guns. So we had this little bit of a procedure hang up, you know, in the face of somebody who really was in crisis.

We ended up working it out. Her son came back to the shop and he didn't want to come inside because he thought it would be triggering. So we met him in the parking lot, he filled out the paperwork, we took the guns and, and, you know, he was on his way to, to get some help and, and felt good about the solution that was there for him.

You know, it becomes a little bit scary for a dealer to give those guns back. Because we're not really qualified to determine whether or not that person has gotten the right amount of help in the 30 60 90 days that they've been storing the guns.

DR CURT WEST: I'd like to shift the discussion to what you both do to stop firearm suicides.

So my assumption and my experience in speaking with retailers that I've spoken with is that nobody wants to know that they sold someone a firearm that was then used in a suicide.

So I just wondered if you could talk about, the role of your business in reducing the risk that that firearm you sold is going to be used in a suicide

JACQUELINE: You're absolutely right. Everybody agrees. We don't want more suicides. We don't want any suicides. We don't wanna be the dealer that sells the gun to somebody who is used for that reason.

When we came into the firearms industry I had no idea what the suicide statistics were within the firearms community. I was just shocked when we entered this industry, what the numbers were.



And it's not, it because people in the firearms community have more mental health problems. It's because they have more access to guns in a, in a time where they are in crisis that becomes a really lethal means.

Probably the biggest thing that we do to prevent that from happening with firearms that we transfer or sell are the conversations. So, you know, a customer comes in to buy a gun the signs that indicate that they're in a state of mental crisis can be similar to the signs that they might show for a straw purchase, which is something that our staff is highly trained around.

So, you know, people that don't want to engage in a conversation, they're not really interested in, in trying the gun first before they buy it. They come in with a bunch of cash that they're in a hurry. They just wanna get something and get out, not really engage, those are all warning signs.

We take a very conservative approach and if a staff member is not comfortable making a transfer or making a sale, we absolutely don't do it. We always ask him to get a second opinion because we can sell guns to people that, you know, maybe don't mesh extremely well with the salesperson or, you know, aren't their same personality type.

So we tell them to get a manager to come over and talk to that person or, or give him a second opinion, but we're not gonna sell or transfer a firearm to anybody that we have any concerns about. Period.

CALEB: Oh, yeah. And to reiterate, no firearm dealer wants to have a, a firearm that was used in any homicide and suicide is self-homicide.

So the way we impact it is having those difficult conversations. We've become a place where people will come in into our shop, maybe not necessarily one of storing their



firearms just looking for help and they'll come in, talk to the staff and, and all of my staff has gone through multiple training sessions with the VA on suicide prevention and how we have these conversations and what we've learned for our customer base.

It's very direct conversations and the people that I've had the discussions with, they appreciate the directness because when they try to talk to their family, their family is like, it's ok, we're all, it's, it's ok. You'll be fine tomorrow. And the truth is you may not be fine tomorrow. You're not guaranteed, you're tomorrow if es especially if you're in that point. So we have the conversations with people.

It's showing people that look, we're here no matter what.

DR WEST: This podcast is about promoting conversations about safe storage. What are the conversations that you and your staff have with individuals purchasing firearms? What are the conversations that you have about storing those weapons safely?

CALEB: So, when we're selling a firearm, it's a different type of conversation, right? Because if they come in and they're like, look, I want a handgun, we're not gonna go up to the wall and be like here buy this, we call it fitting someone for a firearm. It's, well, ok, what role do you want it to fill?

And then we have these conversations where they come in. They're like, look, I'm recently divorced and I hate my soon to be ex-husband and I need something. I think he's gonna attack me.

Well, ok, well, then we have a conversation before we have a conversation, right? To see where they are maybe and kind of direct things. And we've told people, look, I don't think right now it's the best time for you to buy this firearm.

How about we sell you some pepper spray and then we look at training and, and we kind of go that direction that's happened more often than, than them just coming and buying something.



DR WEST: So it sounds like to me is you're recognizing somebody's looking for a sense of safety. They're looking for a sense of control over a situation where they feel unsafe.

You as the firearm dealer recognize this may not be the safe situation in which you should introduce a firearm.

CALEB: It's, you know, we all have a certain amount of tools, we all have a certain amount of things we can go to and the firearm should always be the last thing, right?

DR WEST: And what about how they store them at home? So, in other words, when they take them home from your shop, and so this is kind of a question for both of you about, what do you talk about in terms of how do you keep this weapon safe in your home environment?

CALEB: So federal law mandates that new firearms are shipped and come with a lock in their box and that you use firearms, you provide a lock with them. That being said, most of the locks that come with your firearms are trash.

So it's look, if you want to have quick access to it for security and for safety, look at these different methods of storage, be it a gun vault or concealment furniture, we do custom furniture.

So we have all this other stuff that we go with it and then it's, well, how do you balance securing it and access to it? And we have multitudes of conversations with it and I'm sure it's very similar to what you do.

JACQUELINE: It's a good analogy because I have this personal experience recently, you know, if somebody comes in for a firearm, they need much more than the firearm, they need all of the, the things that help it, you know, work and be safe and, and help them understand how to use it.



I went to Home Depot recently to buy a screen door. I don't know anything about screen doors or I knew like the dimensions I needed, but I, I didn't know anything.

I asked for help from an associate and the guy sold me a screen door. I got home. There was nothing, there was like no hardware to install it. There wasn't really good directions. I was so mad that I left that store without what I needed to, to make this thing work. So our staff, we do and, train them and incentivize them to sell everything that a person needs with the gun that they're buying. So that includes ammunition training, a cleaning kit and storage.

So they do ask questions about, what they're gonna be using the firearm for. Is it something they're gonna keep at home? Are they gonna get carried on them? Is it something that's gonna be in their car? And then we have a variety of different storage options that, are good solutions depending on how they're using it, where they're keeping it and who else is in the home.

There's also a law in Colorado they passed, 21. I think that requires people to store firearms safely in their home and it requires retailers to post different signage in addition to the locks that are federally required to go out with every firearm. So, people in Colorado are starting to be more aware of the need for secure storage in the home.

CALEB: In Louisiana, they had talked about mandating to where you had to have a safe, like a state approved safe. And then our senators came out and said, well, we already require them to do unauthorized person access and prevention. And what that means is whatever the homeowner wants. Like if you want to store it in your top drawer, if your address or drawer, that's fine. But you have to, you have to some way, shape or form, prevent others from getting access to it. And what that, that honestly means is you're in charge of your house, right?



So it's up to you, how you want to store them. It's up to you, how you want to have access to them and, and a lot of people do gun cabinets in South Louisiana, they do safes to do everything else, but it's the individual homeowners, right? And their ability to do what they want in their own home.

So a lot of the times when we have that conversation, it's with the individual, say, look, man, if you wanna have access to it in, in a hurry because you're worried about a lot of break ins in your neighborhood or this and that this is a great way to do this. But at the same time, you need to recognize that you're not always on your a game every day of the week.

And if that's the case, then we might want to add a few more layers in there just to give yourself some, some safety and benefit from yourself because the threats aren't always outside. Sometimes they're inside as well.

DR CURT WEST: Jacqueline what are your thoughts about the safe storage and putting in barriers to suicide?

JACQUELINE: Luckily the, the types of customers that come into my shop, ~~the types of customers that come into Caleb's, they,~~ they want to be responsible firearms owners. You know, they're in it for the education.

One of the ways that we have that longer conv conversation is in our classes. So we teach intro to pistol, intro, you know, level classes across all three platforms, concealed carry classes, other general firearm safety classes. And we have a couple of slides that are in every one of those classes that talks about, the suicide statistics in Colorado because they're higher than the rest of the country, and what it means to have access to lethal means and how safely storing things and keeping unauthorized people away from a firearm can make a difference.

And it's interesting to see people make that connection. I don't think a lot of them automatically make it without someone talking to them about it.



DR CURT WEST: What about if they've got kids at home? How emphatic are you in the discussion about safety?

CALEB: We have those conversations daily. Oftentimes when we're talking to someone buying a firearm, we talk about their kids and if they want to hunt with them, if they want to go shooting with them, if they want to target practice and it's removing that stigma. But still at the same time letting them know that they're still children.

My kids at very young ages could disassemble reassemble load and unload almost every firearm in the shop. But they're still kids.

When I was very young I was in gifted mathematics class. And I'm still the same kid that put a pine needle in an electric socket. Right? So just because you're smart, doesn't mean that you should do everything and anything.

So it's realizing that the same capacity they have for everything good in us, our children have the same capacity to be just complete and utter morons every once in a while.

JACQUELINE: Yeah, and I think not only kids but aging adults can become unauthorized. You know the need for secure storage and who's authorized and unauthorized might change over time.

So I think that's another part of part of the conversation that's important. Your need for storage now might be different than what it is in 10 years when your family situation changes.

CALEB: I love that you brought up aging adults because I've had multiple customers come in and one that stands out, he's a lawyer and he's like, look, my mother has dementia and she doesn't want us to take her gun away. It was his dad's growing up and it's been in her family for this long and he's like, hey, can you just sell me some blanks. And I was like, do you want me to sell you blanks?



He goes, yeah, that way she feels safe. I'm like, you know, that's a great idea. We will give your mother a way to protect herself. Load it with blanks and the day that she needs it, she'll produce it and it does nothing. And now you've put her in a horrible position. I was like, wouldn't it be better to have a conversation with your mom today? And he was like, oh, I really didn't want to do that and it's just we have to be comfortable being uncomfortable.

DR CURT WEST: I wanna throw just one, broad question out and just, I, I'm interested to hear your ideas. Are there, are there additional things that gun dealers should be doing that will help reduce firearm suicides?

CALEB: Well, shouldn't, ought, are two different terms, right. So, like, I believe there are things that we ought to do. I don't like should because should means that in my mind that the federal government has to mandate it. So there are things that we ought to do on our own.

We have very serious conversations with people that others are afraid to have very serious conversations with. At the end of the day, we have to find that balance and I think the best thing that we can do as firearm dealers is just be open to have a two way dialogue and to communicate with our customer base.

JACQUELINE: Yeah, I would agree with Caleb. I think the firearms industry has come a long way, definitely in the last 10 years, of having more dealers being open to talking about secure storage and having materials about suicide prevention, injury prevention out in their shops.

It's a difficult thing because the Second Amendment community hasn't always been open to conversations about secure storage because, it can be connected to things that, the Second Amendment doesn't always agree with.



I think that's changing, but when it comes to using secure storage to keep people safe, everybody agrees that that's a good idea.

DR CURT WEST: If someone's listening and they are a firearm dealer and they're curious about creating this capability to store firearms for their customers, say it's in a time of crisis or for whatever reason, what advice would you give them?

JACQUELINE: I would say to a dealer that's thinking about doing this type of work you do have to, to understand the liability. You have to understand the laws that are at play in your state and make sure that you're comfortable with everything that's involved.

CALEB: In Louisiana, we actually had a law passed that absolves you or moves any implied or explicit liability for a gun shop specifically to hold a firearm for somebody. We call it just a temporary hold. We didn't say what it was for. We just had a temporary hold that way, gave it opened it up for so many different subjects.

And it passed unanimously. And since doing that, we've grown from four shops to 13 across the state of Louisiana to do this. So for us removing that liability was a huge step because when I've talked to other shops, everyone's concerned about the liability and that is the first hurdle a shop has to overcome is, am I ok with any liability that comes with this and be it implied or explicit? Does the law offer me a does the law afford me protection and my business protection?

And then it's realizing that look, this does cost money, you know, whenever we take firearms in, I clean them, we maintain them, we repair them at no cost to the customer. So then the storage, the time, the processing, the inventory, all of that is going to is gonna weigh on your books as a shop.

But it's if you really care and if you really want to make a difference, is this worth it to you?



JACQUELINE: I'm always happy to talk to dealers. I know Caleb is too, because this type of work is important to us. But I think I would also tell them there are other ways to be involved. If you're a dealer who wants to make a difference, but you don't have an appetite for that type of liability. Maybe you take a step by including information about secure storage and the connection with time and space and kids and aging adults in your training classes.

There are training slides that you could incorporate and just provide education to the community. There are other ways to, to get involved that and, and help you make a difference that don't involve the level of liability that, that we're talking about.

DR CURT WEST: Any other last thoughts that you would want to share?

CALEB: This is hard. That's probably a good thing to share. Trying to make a difference, trying to make a change, doing just the firearm storage even it, it is hard.

JACQUELINE: I do want to add though that there are benefits to the dealers, you know, it's not all, oh, this is hard and, and it's risky. It is all those things, but we've seen tangible kind of parallel benefits to the business itself. And I think it's important for dealers to understand that as well if they're thinking about engaging in this type of work.

We've really found that because we're involved in this type of work with the community, staff members really get into it.

And a lot of ours are veterans just like Caleb's, they like working for a place that's connected to the community. They feel important. They, they, they like talking to customers about initiatives like this. It means something, you know, they're not just shovel and French fries.

And it also, you know, sheds a positive light on your business and let's be frank, the firearms business is not always viewed in a, in a super positive light by everyone in the



community. But people wanna do business with companies that, are engaged and, and do the right thing and, and so we've taken on new customers and new members and, you know, gotten five-star reviews for what that's worth because people find out about these programs and they're like, oh my gosh, this is great.

So there are some true business benefits I believe to this work aside from the gratification you get knowing that you, you are making a difference.

DR CURT WEST: Well this has been an exceptionally good conversation. I feel like I've learned a lot about the interactions that go on between gun dealers and purchasers. And there's clearly a role for dealers to play in creating safer environments in the home. It's because they're a trusted source of information and that is a powerful voice when it comes to getting people to store more safely.

Responsible gun ownership means storing guns securely to prevent unauthorized access. Sometimes that's you. Storing securely might just give you the time and space to change your mind and live another day.

DR CURT WEST: Thank you Jacquelyn and Caleb for being a part of this discussion.

PRESENTER: You've been listening to Let's Talk about Your Guns.

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