

“It’s a family thing”: NRA members look forward to Atlanta convention

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April 26, 2017

Darnell C. Shinholster has been a member of the National Rifle Association for six years but this weekend’s convention in downtown Atlanta will be his first. He doesn’t necessarily expect to see a lot of members who look like him – but he’s looking forward to spending time with folks who think like he does.

“It’s overwhelmingly white,” said Shinholster, who is African American. “It’s not a very large group of African American members. But I enjoy being a member of the NRA because I agree with them on so many issues.”

A welder who lives in Atlanta and works in Mableton, Shinholster is particularly looking forward to hearing from **President Donald Trump** and hopes his address will stress the Second Amendment.



Metro Atlanta welder Darnell C. Shinholster is a six-year NRA member looking forward to this weekend's

“I believe there should be background checks. Not everyone should have a gun; clearly not people with mental illness,” he said. “I don’t like gun violence. If you’re able to legally own a gun you should be able to. There’s so much crime in Atlanta. I don’t have a lot of stuff but I work for a living and I don’t want someone to come take it without me being able to defend it.”

The NRA expects 80,000 convention-goers who agree with him. **The 146th NRA Annual Meetings and Exhibits**, as the gathering is officially called, runs from Thursday to Sunday at the Georgia World Congress Center. The event features seminars, demonstrations, exhibitor booths and entertainment, including a concert by **Hank Williams Jr.**

Speakers include U.S. Sen. **David Perdue**, Georgia’s junior senator, along with Interior Secretary **Ryan Zinke**, Florida Gov. **Rick Scott** and Texas Sen. **Ted Cruz**.

Celebrity hunting and shooting instructor **Kristy Titus**, a brand ambassador for Cabela’s and a number of other concerns, was headed to Atlanta from Oregon Wednesday morning. [She’ll lead seminars](#) and participate in a number of events during the convention. A key part of her focus is helping women learn to handle firearms safely.

“Women are the leaders in homes,” she said. “Getting women comfortable with firearms is important.”

She grew up familiar with and eventually proficient with firearms and has been an NRA member for as long as she can remember.



Celebrity hunting and shooting instructor Kristy Titus.
Photo: Chandler Photography

“Our Constitution is precious,” she said. “Preserving the right to keep and bear arms is of first and foremost importance. I’m a strong believer in the Second Amendment and the right to keep and bear arms.”

The planned gathering has attracted detractors as well as supporters. “Scores of angry, anti-government gun addicts will converge in ATL this (weekend) the protest group Betsy Riot tweeted, tagging the U.S. Secret Service’s official handle in the post. “Remain vigilant!” The group Resist Trump plans a “die-in” protest at Woodruff Park.

Kris VanOrden, who’s coming up from Florida with his two oldest children, is happy for the protestors to exercise their First Amendment rights while he exercises his Second Amendment ones.

“I’m happy that they have the right to protest,” said VanOrden, who’s making the trip up from Florida, where he’s stationed with the U.S. Coast Guard. “Good. Voice your opinion.”

He’s bringing his 13-year-old son and 11-year-old daughter, [both of whom shoot competitively](#).

“It’s a family thing, spending time with the kids in a positive environment,” he said. “This is going to be our first NRA show.”

He has three younger children, and firearms safety is something he’s stressed from early on.

“Guns are just tools,” he said. “Having guns in the house it was really important to teach this is how good they can be, this is how bad they can be, taking away the mystery.”

He is looking forward to meeting exhibitors and session leaders and hopes whatever protest movements arise will lead to productive dialogue instead of shouting matches.

“If you want a gun, cool. If you don’t want a gun, that’s cool too. Just don’t try to take someone else’s rights away,” he said. “Let’s have an educated conversation about it, not a violent one.”