I have a feeling that the story of how Claudia and I started up our own archery program will seem very familiar to some of you. It started out as yet another after dinner discussion session with friends. The topic—there just weren’t enough archery programs for kids. All we had was a 4-H shooting sports program that met once a month and shut down for the summer. I remember looking across the table at her when it struck. What struck me was the fact that complaining wasn’t going to get us anywhere. That was the point that started us getting our coaching credentials and eventually our quite successful JOAD program. It was a real “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” affair. I hear some of you nodding...yes, it was like that for you, too.

Really, if there were a youth archery program in your area, you could just go volunteer to help and get some on the job training. But, if there is not, there is not even someone to help you get started. How do you do this, if you have no help or guidance? What if you are a local parks and recreation director who thinks archery would be a nice activity for your communities’ youth? How do you start? Where do you go?

Well, curl up in your armchair, because we’ve been interviewing a lot of people about this very topic, and along with our own experience, let us show you how to set up your own youth (or adult) archery program, or 2. you are a local parks and recreation director who doesn’t know the first thing about archery, and you just need to know how to “get it going.” We will keep both of you in mind as we show you how to “start from scratch.”

Finding or Training Coaches

Even if you are a certified archery coach, you aren’t going to do this alone. For one, archery is a social activity. For another, it isn’t safe! You need at least two qualified coaches along with other staff (or helpful parents) around. So, how do you “get” archery coaches?

There are two ways—import them or grow your own. Either way, the best first step is to contact the National Alliance for the Development of Archery (NADA). They can arrange for your own staff or volunteers to be trained or help you find archery coaches in your area who are already certified. Not only will NADA help you arrange

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your training, but they will also supply most of the archery equipment (bows, arrows, etc.) for the training if you have a minimum of at least six paid participants. Our recommendation here as elsewhere in this endeavor—don't reinvent the wheel—use established training resources like NADA. Other organizations provide similar services, but at this time, NADA's are the most extensive and well-organized. The training they offer certifies you under both the National Archery Association (NAA) and the National Field Archery Association (NFAA).

Your Curriculum

Again, we recommend that you don't reinvent the wheel. Instead of creating your own curriculum, use one already in existence that has a long and successful track record. For kids, you can't beat the NAA's Junior Olympic Archery development (J.O.A.D.) Program. Not only is the program already structured, but there are tournaments all the way up to the U.S. national level for the kids to participate in. That's right! The NAA puts on a national tournament just for kids! And one of archery's most endearing qualities (to me, anyway) is that the national tournaments are "open" tournaments, meaning you don't have to qualify to participate.

Contact the NAA's J.O.A.D Coordinator for more information.

Equipment

Well, now you are ready to start building the infrastructure for your program; first off is . . . equipment. There are a number of categories and we will address each below, but realize there is help at hand! You will find archery program equipment readily available from NADA and commercial enterprises like AIM Archery and Lancaster Archery Supply, but don't leave out your local archery pro shop. Look in your local Yellow Pages if you aren't aware of any archery shops nearby. I have yet to meet an archery shop owner who wouldn't bend over backward to try to help you out when you tell them you are starting up a beginner's or kid's archery program. Do realize that many of these shops are set up to serve bowhunters and they either may have little knowledge of, or interest in, target archery. But if they do serve target archers, you will likely find an ally in your efforts.

Oh, and be sure to pick up a copy of Ruth Rowe and Alan Henderson's book, "Simple Maintenance for Archery." Everything you need to maintain your equipment is in this handy, little, how-to book.

Here we go!

Bows There are three basic kinds of bows: recurve and long bows, compound bows, and crossbows. For beginners we recommend wooden handled recurve bows of around 20 pounds of draw, and we recommend the Genesis compound bow. Both of these are inexpensive, sturdy, reliable, and safe. You may choose just recurve bows, just compound, or a mix.

Arrows There are oodles of arrow sizes, styles, materials, etc. The safest/most cost effective are aluminum and all-carbon arrows. If you can afford all-carbon arrows up front, they are very sturdy and virtually never get bent. If all-carbon arrows are too pricey, aluminum arrows (for example Easton's Jazz youth arrows) are sturdy, safe, and inexpensive, but they will get bent and will
require straightening. Many programs have an “arrow angel,” someone who straightens and/or repairs arrows for your program (as their contribution to the cause). If so, aluminum arrows are great. If not, you may want to consider the higher initial cost of the all-carbon arrows, to save maintenance later.

**Targets and Target Mats** For beginner’s programs there are various paper targets to shoot at as well as balloons and other materials; just don’t shoot at anything hard! The paper won’t stop the arrows by itself, so you need target mats (sometimes called target butts). Sturdy, durable, lightweight, and weatherproof target mats haven’t been invented, yet. (If you get any ideas, call me; we could get rich!). The next best thing is EthafoamTM. There are “foam” targets available in any numbers of sizes and shapes. They are lightweight, easily stop arrows from light draw bows, and are reasonably economical. Check with your supplier about the pros and cons.

**Miscellaneous Tackle** You will also need finger tabs (or consider “No Gloves,” little foam cushions that fit right on the string, eliminating the need for a tab), quivers (either belt or ground—note: ordinary highway safety cones make great ground quivers; your highway department may donate a dozen to your program), and armguards. Armguards are a must! Again, there are many different styles and sizes, so consult your supplier.

There is a lot to recommend in standardization! For example, NADA sells various “bow boxes.” One of these consists of a very sturdy case (which doubles as a bow rack) containing twelve recurve bows (or compound bows or a mix, you pick), arrows, quivers, finger tabs, and armguards. All of the strings fit all of the bows. All of the arrows fit all of the strings. All of the equipment works together. Equipment that isn’t adjusted or sized to work together is awkward and possibly dangerous. Arrows with nocks that are loose on a bowstring can slide around at full draw, possibly resulting in an arrow being launched who knows where. If you are a Parks and Rec Director and know little of archery, be sure to either get good technical advice before purchasing equipment or buy complete sets like the ones NADA offers.

**Site Requirements** If you are a Parks and Rec Director, you are in luck. Archery fits on most multi-use fields and buildings. To shoot indoors, you only need to add archery safety netting behind the targets and protect the floor from stray arrows, if needed. Outdoors, you just need enough room to set up the targets, a shooting line, and enough room behind the targets that stray arrows will have no chance of hitting spectators.

If you have a local archery club with a range sponsoring you, you are also in luck as the facilities are provided. Our J.O.A.D Program is at our local field archery club, for example.

Don’t forget your local archery shop! If they have indoor lanes, they may be thrilled to have you operate a program at their lanes. They usually charge for use of their lanes, so be prepared to negotiate a price.

**Show Us the Money!**

If you are a Parks and Rec Director, you will likely be charging for your program. If you are doing it for your church, maybe not. Let me just say that archery isn’t free. Somebody pays the lane fees, for the equipment and supplies, for the coaches’ certifications, for the insurance, etc. As an example, we needed a number of new bowstrings for recurve bows for this season’s programs. Since I didn’t have the time to make those strings, I stopped off on my way home at our favorite shop and bought them. They gave us a very good price, but I paid US $80 out-of-pocket for those strings. These expenses add up. Ask yourself, “If each of these participants went to see a movie, what would they have paid?” We think you can charge at least that amount per session in good faith.

We recommend that you charge a fee (per session, per lesson, whatever), that you open a separate bank account to handle the money, and that you keep records!

**Insurance**

If you are a Parks and Rec Director, you will want to check with your insurance carrier to find out whether archery, as a sport, is specifically covered. If you need a rider, then you have to factor in that cost.

If you are arranging separate insurance, again don’t reinvent the wheel! One of the benefits of a small annual fee to run a J.O.A.D. program is liability and medical coverage for the participants. We highly recommend membership in NADA, as it comes with liability coverage for coaches. Also, as I have mentioned, our field archery club, the host for our program, has insurance and the participants are covered under it as well.

Under no circumstances should you go uncovered! Also, everyone who participates needs to fill out a medical release form, which allows you to act on a participant’s behalf if they require medical attention. We have one on file at the range for every person who participates in any of our programs.

**Marketing**

If you build it, they will come! Before we got our program up and running, we fretted over how to market
it—newspaper ads, fliers in pro shops, school newsletters, etc. etc. We put a flier up on our archery club's bulletin board and were overwhelmed by the turnout. All of our classes filled and two more had to be offered! (Really! These people wouldn't take "No!" for an answer!)

Of course, if you are a Parks and Rec Director, you will have your catalog, newspaper inserts, etc. But don't forget to market directly to the archery community through any local shops or clubs. Also, a major untapped market is home schooled kids. Often their school district has funds to pay for their "PE" classes.

Conclusion
It's a lot of work, but very satisfying. Once a program is up and running, it is much easier to keep it going than it was to start it up.

Our final recommendation—don't try to do it alone; you need a posse, a committee, a band of brothers, a team. You may have to train them all, but they will be there to help. Our most staunch advocate is a gentleman who coaches our competitive J.O.A.D team. When we first approached him to be team coach, his reply was, "I didn't retire to be somewhere at a particular time during the week." His most recent comment (to the team members) was, "When I was away on vacation I missed all of you."

If you build it, they will come.

Contact Info
National Archery Association
(719.866.4576, info@usarchery.org, www.usarchery.org)
National Field Archery Association
(800.811.2331, www.nfaa-archery.org)
National Alliance for the Development of Archery
(352.472.2388, NADAemail@aol.com, www.teacharchery.org)
AIM Archery
(860.423.8609, www.aimarchery.com)
Lancaster Archery Supply
(717.394.7229, www.lancasterarchery.com)
"Simple Maintenance for Archery"
(available at www.qproductsarchery.com)

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