Blackburn and Whorton said they intend to use their guns not just for protection but for fun, too.

“I don’t buy guns; I don’t buy boats,” Blackburn said. “This is a new little hobby.”

The pair are examples of a growing trend: More and more women are becoming interested in guns and learn how to shoot.

Numbers rising

According to statistics from the Kansas State Firearms Agency, from 2001 to 2011, the number of concealed-carry licenses applied for increased 43.8 percent from the previous year.

Patricia Spink, owner and instructor at Target Master Shooting Academy in Bonner Springs, says she’s seeing more women in her beginner classes and on the range.

“One or two years ago, there would be one or two women and six men in a range,” Spink said.

Now the ratio is reversed.

“When you’re dealing with it every day, it’s obvious to see the increase of women shooting,” she said.

Spink, who is also the president of the Kansas State Rifle Association, attributes the growing numbers of women and guns to a “concerted effort” by the National Rifle Association and state associations to help women become more comfortable and well-versed in the sport of guns.

One way for women to learn about guns is a Women on Target, an institutional gun clinic for women-sponsored by the NRA and its state affiliates.

“Instructors teach (women) through, and give them a taste of what it’s like to shoot,” Spink said. “They meet other women and get to explore and enjoy the sport of shooting safely and comfortably.”

The pair are examples of a growing trend of female customers.

When you’re dealing with just men, you have to learn how to shoot different guns. Although she is afraid of guns, Smith, who chose the Bullseye because of the different options the class offered, said “I was too afraid to try out different weapons, which is something I wanted to do.”

“Just based on what we are here, probably one kind of guns is more feminine,” Pugh said.

Pugh thinks the increase of female shooters is due to something else about guns, as well as in changing climate of women and more interest in home defense. It also doesn’t hurt that stores and gun manufacturers are targeting women between demographics.

“Marketing for women has increased drastically over the last couple years,” Pugh said.

Guns and the outdoors

Women are becoming interested in more than just hand guns and concealed carry. Numbers also are up insigning sports and hunting.

According to data from the National Shooting Sports Foundation Association, female participation in target-shooting increased in the past year from 3.3 million to 5.5 million nationally from 2001 to 2011, and female participation in hunting increased from 1.8 million to 2.6 million during the same time span.

At Bullseye, there is an effort to “soften” up the store to make women feel comfortable.

“Before they get to shoot, the women in a class at Bullseye Shooting Range practice their shooting stance, grip and aim with plastic pistols. No one actually gets to shoot, they practice it,” said Sarah Holman.

“We’ve seen a lot of women who used to come with their husbands and then now they come alone,” said Holman.

She said she is a fan of the growing trend of female customers.

“I definitely want to come back and shoot some more,” Holman said.

Reach Sarah Tucker at 316-268-6514 or stucker@wichitaeagle.com.

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