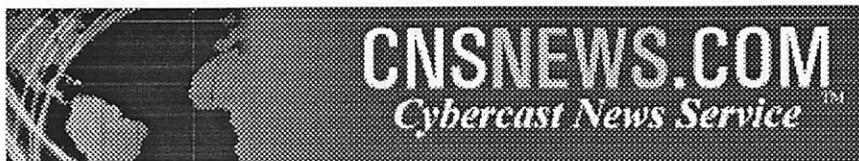


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## Culture

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### Coeds Want to Pack Heat

By Michael L. Betsch

CNSNews.com Editorial Assistant

January 31, 2002

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**(CNSNews.com)** - At a women's liberal arts college in the liberal, anti-gun state of Massachusetts, something appears to be out of sync. A campus group called the Second Amendment Sisters is lobbying for students' right to carry firearms.

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The Mount Holyoke chapter of the Second Amendment Sisters (SAS), now in its first year, is a recognized on-campus organization with a membership approaching 50 women.

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Christie Caywood, the student who organized the Mount Holyoke chapter, said she basically stumbled upon the Second Amendment Sisters at last year's Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC).

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Caywood, now a junior at Mt. Holyoke, recalled

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seeing some SAS buttons while attending the 2001 CPAC convention with her fellow College Republicans. After participating in a hands-on firearms demonstration at the Smith & Wesson firing range, she asked the SAS about bringing their pro-Second Amendment message to her campus.

SAS spokeswoman Maria Heil said her organization was more than eager to help Caywood start up a chapter. Heil said promoting self-defense on the all-female campus of Mt. Holyoke is a priority.

"For many, many women, it's their first time out on their own, and it's the first time that they'll ever be actually responsible or semi-responsible for their own safety," Heil said. "They need to have this knowledge that there is a way to defend yourself and it is that firearms are the most effective means of self-defense."

But SAS campus outreach efforts are off-target according to Nancy Hwa, a spokeswoman for the anti-gun [Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence](#).

"I don't know where they get the idea that it's the number-one self-protection method," Hwa said. "It's unfortunate that these groups are spreading misinformation about the usefulness of firearms for self-protection."

Heil responded that [SAS' main message to women](#) is that self-defense is a basic human right. "If your right to own a firearm is infringed or delayed, it could cost you your life," she said.

"I'd assume these young women have enough sense to weigh the risks themselves and won't get sucked

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into propaganda from an extremist organization," Hwa remarked.

But Caywood, pointing to a "series" of rapes in the five-college area that includes Mt. Holyoke, insisted that firearms might have helped the women fend off their attackers.

Caywood believes that unarmed students are "almost completely helpless." She explained that the the only protection Mt. Holyoke's campus security provides is a safe ride in a van for students who don't feel comfortable walking across the wooded campus, especially at night.

"Why wouldn't they want us armed?" Caywood asked. "I'm at a women's college and they talk about empowerment. We shouldn't have to depend on others to take care of ourselves, and that's what it's left at right now."

Caywood, who does not currently own a gun, says it is highly unlikely that students on the "liberal" Mt. Holyoke campus will be allowed to carry concealed weapons or keep them in campus housing anytime soon, so she is trying to arm Mt. Holyoke's campus police instead.

"If SAS can get campus security armed, then maybe we might be successful in trying to start a campaign to have students be able to arm themselves if they're properly trained and licensed," Caywood said.

Heil stressed that the Second Amendment Sisters organization is not responsible for training these young women. "Second Amendment Sisters advocate firearms safety education, but we don't advocate making it mandatory for anyone."

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SAS says mandatory firearms training violates the Second Amendment by delaying a person's ability to purchase firearms. "That's not going to help a woman who's being stalked," she said.

But the Brady Campaign's Hwa considers that an extreme position. "Even the National Rifle Association supports gun owners to get training," she said.

"If they're going to promote gun use, then the only responsible thing to do is also to promote the training for the women or anybody that decides to purchase a gun," Hwa added. "It's bad enough that they're spreading misinformation about the usefulness of a gun in self-defense, but on top of that, to not even encourage these same women that they're encouraging to carry guns to get some training is ludicrous."

Caywood said although the SAS organization does not mandate firearms training, such training is readily available if anyone chooses to take advantage of it. "Everywhere we go there are people who are trained and can help train," Caywood said.

She added that the "gentlemen down at Smith & Wesson" have been helpful answering questions, and a local police department will host a concealed-carry course for any members interested in attaining a license in Massachusetts.

"Whether people agree with us or not," Caywood concluded, "we all agree that people who use guns should know how to use them properly." That's "one big selling point to the administration and to the other students," she added.

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While Mt. Holyoke is the first campus to open an SAS chapter, it may not be the last. Michigan State University may be the next place to open an SAS chapter on campus, Caywood said. Caywood said she is involved in the effort to expand the group on college campuses nationwide. **E-mail a news tip to Michael Betsch.**

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