

# AMERICAN SHOOTING JOURNAL

## MODERN-DAY ANNIE OAKLEY

DEB SULLIVAN: From Carry Class  
To Competition To Ammo Co. Owner



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# DEB SULLIVAN: A MODERN-DAY ANNIE OAKLEY

From concealed-carry class attendee to successful team competition shooter to sole owner of an ammunition company, one woman's inspiring journey through the firearms world.

STORY BY PAUL PAWELA • PHOTOS BY JEN MCCANTS

America is still the greatest country in the world for allowing anyone to make their dreams come true through enough hard work, ambition and a never-ending devotion to their vision.

For instance, consider the historical life of Annie Oakley. The 19th century female trailblazer became America's sweetheart as one of the greatest shooters of all time. At a time when women were largely confined to home and their family, Oakley generated huge audiences across the country by showcasing her impressive shooting skills, all while overcoming life obstacles. She would routinely outshoot all her male competitors during shooting demonstrations or competitions. Oakley was so popular that she eventually became one of the main attractions in "Buffalo Bill" Cody's Wild West Traveling Show, and was so impressive with her shooting skills that famed Indian Chief Sitting Bull nicknamed her "Watanya Cicilla," which means little sure shot.

In truth, Oakley was a feminist way ahead of her time. She urged other women to participate in sports, especially the shooting sports, which were dominated by men. During the Spanish American War, Oakley volunteered her services by offering to personally organize and train 50 female sharpshooters to serve in the war, but her offer was rejected because women were not allowed to serve in combat roles.

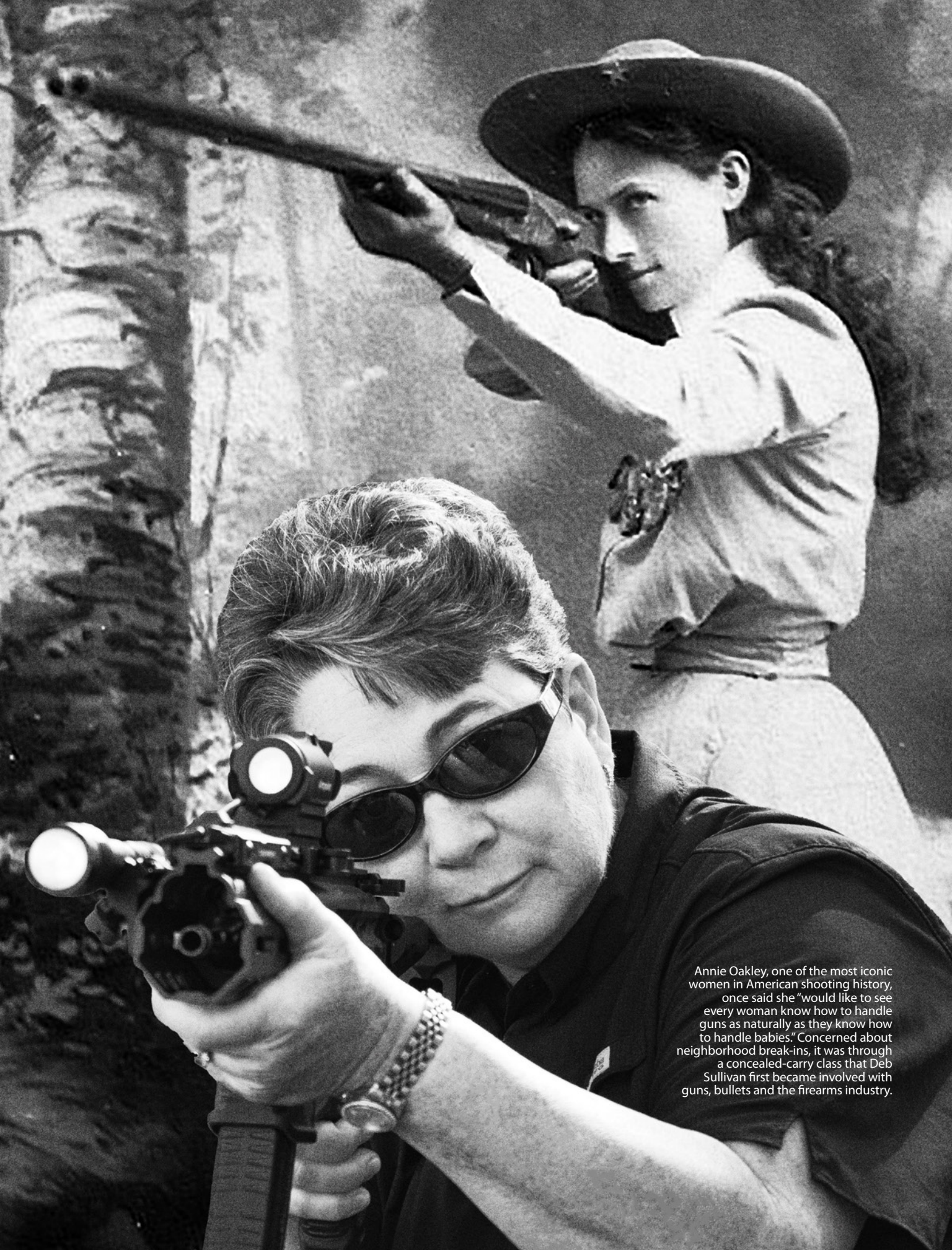
Later on, Oakley and her husband, Frank Butler, would work for the Union Metallic Cartridge Company, a major bullet manufacturer of that time. The ammo company sponsored Oakley and Butler to give shooting exhibitions across the country. When World War I broke out, Oakley once more offered shooting lessons for American soldiers but was denied by the government. So she took matters into her own hands and traveled

the country giving shooting lessons to soldiers anyway. Oakley simply was not afraid to show off her hard-earned shooting skills and she became a symbol of the American female spirit at a time when most women were limited to careers as domestic workers, teachers or housewives.

Due to abuse incidents she suffered early in her life, Oakley nursed a simple dream: "I would like to see every woman know how to handle guns as naturally as they know how to handle babies."

**FAST FORWARD SOME** 94 years into the future, where another woman is breaking down barriers and stereotypes as the sole owner and operator of an ammunition company.

For dedicated readers of *American Shooting Journal*, you might remember seeing Deb Sullivan in the pages of the November 2018 issue for an article on "Wo Man Camp" by Tara Dixon Engel. She was also featured in the July 2019 edition as



Annie Oakley, one of the most iconic women in American shooting history, once said she "would like to see every woman know how to handle guns as naturally as they know how to handle babies." Concerned about neighborhood break-ins, it was through a concealed-carry class that Deb Sullivan first became involved with guns, bullets and the firearms industry.



A single mother of three who ran a horse ranch, Sullivan had the genes to be a good shooter – her Army officer father was on a rifle shooting team and reported to be “a very good shot.”

the only woman in a 16-man T.A.P.S. class taught by ex-Delta Force operator Pat McNamara. Sullivan distinguished herself in that class by being in the top three shooters, and she might have finished even higher, were it not for technical issues with her rifle. Indeed, the only other shooter to really best her was an officer in charge of a Special Forces battalion.

Deb Sullivan's story is that of a single mother of three managing a horse ranch and courageously stepping into the firearms industry. Sullivan did not grow up around firearms, and guns were never a topic discussed in her family. Her father was an officer in the Army when she was a very young child, but she had no recollection of his service, just the memory of his stories. She was inspired that he was

on a rifle team, and reportedly was a very good shot.

Late in 2014, Sullivan noticed a newspaper advertisement for a concealed-carry class held at a local gun shop/range. There had been several break-ins in and around her neighborhood, so she worked up the nerve to attend her first concealed weapons license class. Surprisingly, Sullivan turned out to be a shooting savant, despite never so much as holding a gun!

While waiting for her CCW license to arrive, she felt driven to take more lessons and to become the most proficient shooter she could possibly be.

To achieve that goal, Sullivan began competing in GSSF, or Glock Sport Shooting Foundation, competitions. Her group, which was an all-female

team, dominated the competition. The team often took first place in the ladies' division, and sometimes took first and second in overall team competition. The ladies were eventually sponsored by T1 Ammunition because that was the ammo the women preferred, due to its low recoil which was an asset in a competition setting. T1 Ammunition would later become a major part of Deb Sullivan's life.

### **SULLIVAN'S PASSION BLOSSOMED**

into a desire to help women become empowered to take their safety seriously and be responsible for themselves. Along with several friends, she started a business that focuses on self-defense and personal protection topics for women. Women Training Females, or

WTF, was born to help women learn basic self-defense skills and tactics, including hand-to-hand and ground fighting skills; less lethal skills, such as pepper spray training; and varying levels of firearms training, ranging from handguns to pistol-caliber rifles for home defense. And all of the course curriculum was designed for women by women, and is taught by women.

Fueled by a desire that women, young and old alike, take responsibility for their own safety, Sullivan has pursued her own personal growth by seeking out training from the best instructors in the country – those with backgrounds in Delta Force, CIA, law enforcement and more.

Sullivan would also serve as a pillar of strength for a good friend whose daughter survived an attempted kidnapping by using lethal force, an experience that stays deeply in one's soul forever.

**LIFE COMES FULL** circle, as the saying goes, and as one door closes, another one opens. When the



T1 Ammunition began business in 2013 in Florida and was purchased in 2019 by Sullivan. Before staffing up, she was a veritable “one-woman show” serving as buyer, machinist, inspector and shipper.

previous owner of T1 Ammunition had enough of the firearms industry and wanted to get out, Sullivan applied her business savvy – learned from owning and operating a horse farm by herself – in order to make T1's owner “an offer he could not refuse.”

Like any endeavor, running an

ammunition company is not easy and success comes through hard work, dedication and sheer force of will. From the very start, Sullivan became a one-woman show, not only buying all the component parts to make the ammo, but working on the machines that produced it, inspecting each and every round produced, and packaging/

“Instead of focusing on too many different calibers, she has wisely concentrated on the two most popular calibers that were favorites in her female competition shooting circles: 9mm and 5.56 NATO,” writes author Paul Pawela, a self-defense and training expert who also endorses Sullivan's company's ammo.





T1 offers 124-grain 9mm Luger TMJ rounds for pistol-caliber carbines, along with 147-grain 9mm Luger TMJ bullets for competition and 55-grain .223 Remington FMJ cartridges for rifles, all in 50- or 250-count boxes.



shipping all orders herself.

She routinely put in 12-hour days at T1 and then added four more when she went home to do her ranch work.

Sullivan took a crash-course in pistol and rifle ballistics and quickly earned an A-plus. Instead of focusing on too many different calibers, she has wisely concentrated on the two most popular calibers that were favorites in her female competition shooting circles: 9mm and 5.56 NATO.

Sullivan's purchase of T1 earned her some public ridicule from those who thought she would fail miserably in her venture. After all, she had purchased a business whose owners and customers were primarily men. As the only one-woman ammo company in the country, she faced a tireless uphill battle, learning valuable lessons about who she could count on – and who she couldn't.

Still determined to push forward with a great deal of fortitude, Sullivan headed to the 2020 SHOT Show

with big dreams and high hopes to see what kind of business she could drum up. The majority of the male consultants she sought advice from gave her gloom and doom input, offering her little encouragement or hope for success. Sadly, she got a similar response from most of the women in the industry, as well.

Following her gut instincts, Sullivan kept a positive attitude and stuck to her guns, literally, as she pressed on in making the company a success.

**IT IS SAID** God loves people who keep the faith and maintain a never-give-up attitude, and Deb Sullivan is one of those people. In fact, as of this

writing, in one of the nation's worst pandemics, Sullivan's T1 Ammo is not only still in business, it is flourishing, and she now has a full-time crew and all the necessary machinery to meet the demands of her ever-increasing customer orders.

Sullivan still makes sure that T1 Ammunition has multiple systems checks for quality and uniformity. Every round is still hand-inspected for defects, fit and finish.

T1 is constantly working to improve its products, especially for women, while maintaining current pistol formulas for competition, as well as ammo with low recoil that can be used for defensive purposes. In the

future, Sullivan hopes to add .380 for carry purposes and .38 for those who still prefer revolvers.

It was said about Annie Oakley in her time that there was never a sweeter, gentler, more loving woman, and her endurance and strength in the face of adversity remain something to be admired even today. It is also true that the spirit of Annie Oakley must surely dwell in Deb Sullivan, as those exact words can be said of her! Sullivan is one of those determined and hard-working manufacturers who make America great! ★

*Editor's note: For more information, go to [T1Ammo.com](http://T1Ammo.com).*

Sullivan is aiming high. She hopes to add two new ammunition lines in the future, .38 and .380, for concealed carry and revolvers.

