



Written by [T. Dan Tolleson](#) on June 11, 2013

Shoring Up Second Amendment With “Armed Citizen Project”

A Houston-based nonprofit organization —  the [Armed Citizen Project](#) — is offering free gun training and free shotguns to selected residents of Oak Forest, a high-crime neighborhood in Houston, Texas. The founder of the organization — Kyle Coplen — plans to expand the Armed Citizen Project to high-crime cities throughout the country.

According to Thomas Jefferson, “The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government.” While the most important purpose of the Second Amendment is to protect the right of citizens to oppose governmental tyranny, a strong subsidiary purpose is to protect the right of citizens to defend themselves against criminals. In the words of the Kyle Coplen,

“[We’re coming](#) — and we’re going to get shotguns into the hands of responsible citizens,” said Kyle Coplen, who founded the nonprofit Armed Citizen Project in January.

“When criminals fear the citizenry, it deters crime,” the 29-year-old added.

In a personal interview, Kyle Coplen explained why he is enthusiastic about the training provided by the Armed Citizen Project:

I’m a constitutionalist, and I take pride in helping to create the next generation of freedom-loving Americans who are trained to use a shotgun and to understand and appreciate the Second Amendment of our Constitution. The training we provide with the shotgun helps to make the Second Amendment tangible, and we see the shotgun as a “gateway weapon” that opens up the possibility for citizens to learn how to use a handgun, to get a concealed handgun license, and even to learn how to use a semi-automatic weapon.

The first implementation of the Armed Citizen Project is now taking place in the Oak Forest neighborhood of Houston, Texas:

Kyle Coplen, the project’s 29-year-old founder said his group expects to [train at least 50 Oak Forest residents](#) and put up signs saying the neighborhood is armed.

“When we have a crime wave, we don’t just say let’s just increase police and that’s all we do. We do multiple things. I see this as one aspect of what we can do,” said Coplen, who graduated from the University of Houston with a master’s degree in public administration.

It costs the organization about \$300 to arm and train an individual and about \$20,000 for an entire neighborhood. All costs are paid through donations, said Coplen, though he declined to say how much his organization has raised so far.

The training process is very thorough. Coplen assured this reporter that each resident to be trained must first pass the standard background check, and the subsequent training in ownership and responsible use of firearms is conducted by experts:



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[Dan] Blackford, the firearm instructor in the Oak Forest training, said the group is teaching residents [not only how to handle and store a weapon but also when to use deadly force](#).

"The sad part is most people think if you're pro-gun, that you've got this gunslinger attitude, that you are walking around looking for a gun fight to get into and that is so far from the truth," said Blackford, a former Secret Service agent.

To many Americans, this is apparently a new idea in the fight against crime, and the Armed Citizen Project has plans to expand, first to other cities in Texas, and then to cities in other states:

While many cities have tried gun buy-backs and other tactics in the ongoing national debate on gun control, the nonprofit and its supporters say [gun giveaways to responsible owners are actually a better way to deter crime](#). The organization, which plans to offer training classes in Dallas, San Antonio, and Tucson, Ariz., in the next few weeks, is working to expand its giveaways to 15 cities by the end of the year, including Chicago and New York.

In May, Coplen traveled to New York City, where he was promoting his plans to expand the Armed Citizen Project. But some political leaders in New York City made it clear that they are opposed to this idea of arming citizens to defend themselves against crime. For example, two New York City reporters working on his story told Coplen that NYC Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly had threatened to prevent the arming of citizens with shotguns. How? By means of New York City's stringent weapons permitting process. Kelly's threat was stated obliquely, but still very clearly, in a May 6 *New York Daily News* article:

His [Coplen's] gun giveaway may get shot down by the New York City's permitting process, however.

The NYPD has broad discretion in denying gun licenses, and Kelly is not impressed with Coplen's crime-control theories.

["You need a permit ... so obviously you won't be able to do it here,"](#) Kelly told the *Daily News* on Monday.

"I don't think that's ever (been) proven, the notion that increasing the number of armed citizens is somehow going to reduce crime," added Kelly. "I don't think that bears the test of experience or logic because it just hasn't proven to be the case."

The NYPD says the fee to apply for a shotgun permit is \$140.00, plus a fingerprinting charge of \$91.50.

The agency can deny permits to those who fail background checks, have a criminal history, have a poor driving record, or have committed other infractions. It also can say no if investigators decide an applicant "lacks character."

But Coplen is not backing down:

[Coplen said he'll ask New Yorkers](#) for donations to help low-income city applicants who can't afford permits on their own.

"I guess the Bloomberg administration doesn't want poor people to be able to defend themselves," Coplen said about the pricey permits.

He wasn't worried that the NYPD would rubber-stamp rejections on applicants linked to his group.



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“That’s a legal fight I’m definitely willing to engage them on,” he said.



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