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FEATURED

New gun sales driven by want of concealed weapon permit

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Jun 21, 2026

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Doug Kevilus gives instructions before shooting at 2nd Amendment Firearms Academy in Fairfield. Kevilus is certified concealed carry weapons instructor. (Courtesy photo)

FAIRFIELD — The desire for a concealed carry weapons license appears to be driving new gun sales in Solano County.

In fact, ASP Armory owner Chelsea Gutierrez said nine out of 10 of the new customers she sees at her Vacaville shop are looking to get one. She has had the store since 2008.

Doug Kevilus, a certified CCW instructor who runs the 2nd Amendment Firearms Academy with his son, Ryan Lewis, added that it is not unusual for clients to show up to their application training with a gun that still has its manufacturer hang tags on it, and therefore has never been cleaned and lubricated, and is not ready to be fired.

Since starting his business in 2023, he has trained close to 1,100 clients around the Bay Area. He is based in Fairfield.

He said his father, an Army drill sergeant, trained him on guns since he was young, but it was not until Covid that he started to go out to the range more – mostly out of boredom – and that led to competitive shooting, and eventually offering CCW training.

Solano County has 12, soon to be 13, certified trainers it uses for CCW applications.

There are about 121,000 active CCW licenses in the state. Solano has about 4,800 active permits. It gets about 600 applications a year.

Of those applicants who follow through, only about 15 to 20 are denied, said Joe Pender, the deputy in charge of the CCW program in Solano County. He has been the program lead for 10 years, a program initiated by then Sheriff Tom Ferrara. Pender has been a sworn officer with the department for more than 20 years.

Some of those application denials have been because applicants were medical marijuana users, Pender said, adding the Sheriff's Office was following federal directives.

That may have changed with the very recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, which narrowed a federal gun control measure that had prohibited drug users from owning or possessing guns.

The court essentially said that the law was too broad, meshing recreational drug users in with drug addicts who posed a public safety danger.

“We appreciate that drugs and guns can sometimes make for a dangerous mix,” Justice Gorsuch wrote. He added, however, that with the historical standard, that gun control benchmark “fails under every measure it asks us to consider.”

Pender said he still has to look into the ruling more closely before knowing how it could impact Solano County's practices.

Gutierrez said if she smells alcohol or marijuana on a customer, she asks them to leave the store.

"I don't think those two things belong together," said Gutierrez, reacting to the court ruling, but like others, said she still needs to be educated more on the decision.

Sheriff Brad DeWall, like the sheriffs who came before him, is a staunch 2nd Amendment advocate.

He said if a person is not a criminal – with a handful of exceptions, such as mental health capacity – then that person should have the right to own and possess a firearm, and have access to a concealed carry weapons license.

However, a person arrested for driving while impaired is prohibited from applying for a license for five years whether convicted or not. That extends to five years beyond probation if convicted of a DUI. There are other similar examples such as a person under a court-ordered restraining order.

Like Gutierrez and Kevilus, DeWall would like to see new gun owners – especially those who have little or no experience with firearms – to become more educated and more familiar with the use of guns before applying for a CCW.

Gutierrez thinks it should be a requirement.

"I think there is a huge misconception in the public that you can come in, buy a gun and stick it in your pants and go about whatever you were doing," Gutierrez said.

She clarified that to mean the non-gun-owning public.

The actual CCW training is eight hours in the classroom and eight hours on the range. Renewal training is eight hours, and there is a push – especially by larger counties, DeWall said – to extend renewal requirements to three years instead of the current two. He agrees.

Kevilus is an advocate for ongoing training for gun owners and trainers. He said he and his son are constantly taking courses to improve their knowledge and skills.

"If we don't do our job correctly, someone could become seriously injured or end up in jail," said Kevilus, meaning CCW permit holders have serious responsibilities.

Kevilus likes to tell his clients that if there is a place they feel is too dangerous to go into without a gun, then they should avoid going into that place with a gun.

"There is just no room for ego and firearms. You have to leave your ego at the door," he said.

Gutierrez thinks the primary reason individuals want a CCW is "to feel safe," a generic reaction to what is going on in the community or society in general, and it has increased since Covid-19.

Regulations regarding concealed weapons licenses have changed significantly in recent years, so providers – usually counties, but some cities – need to be educated too.

Solano County has become a leader in that arena.

The Sheriff's Office has hosted a CCW Coordinators Conference for seven years, and according to Kevilus, has become the go-to county for how permit applications should be handled.

And while some of the new regulations have removed the discretion from the counties and cities – there is still some local circumspection.

Alameda County, for example, requires a psychological examination on all applicants before a CCW license can be granted. Solano does not have that requirement, and DeWall is not a big fan of the idea.

Kevilus also thinks Alameda has gone too far, and a psych exam should be limited to a case-by-case basis. The extra cost alone could be prohibitive.

Gutierrez said she has never seen someone come into her store who immediately raises red flags. However, she is wary of people who come in and do not seem at all interested in the price or other common questions. That does raise red flags.

Solano allows concealed carry weapon applications to be filed before a person actually has a registered weapon. Most counties require gun ownership to apply. However, in Solano, that person must own a weapon prior to starting the application training.

In California, a CCW license allows a person legally to carry a concealed, loaded handgun in public or in a vehicle.

The gun must be registered in the name of the person who is carrying it, and while three guns can be listed on a license, only two can be on the person. The size of the magazine can be limited depending on time of permit application.

There are a number of "sensitive places" where the weapons are not permitted: Schools, colleges and university campuses; government buildings, courthouses and polling places; public transit; establishments that sell alcohol for on-site consumption, including the parking areas; medical facilities; places of worship; airports; and any private property where the owner has clearly posted signs prohibiting firearms.

Also, they are prohibited in what is termed sterile zones: secure, gun-free areas.