

# Gun sales shoot up after riots

## Merchants at shooting ranges increase by 30 percent

By Dexter H. Klm  
Korea Times

In the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots, weapons sales at Western Gun Shop have increased five-fold, according to manager David Joo.

Also, the Korean American clientele at Los Angeles Gun Club pistol range has shot up by about 30 percent, said owner Elias Yidonoy.

While other Korean American stores lie in ruins from the riots, business for these two Korean American-owned establishments has never been better.

Prior to the riots, Western Gun Store on South Western Avenue sold three to four guns a day, said Joo. They now sell about 15 to 20 guns in a regular day.

As the most prominent gun dealer in

Koreatown, Western Gun Shop attracts a high percentage of Korean Americans. Joo estimated 80 percent of his customers were KAs prior to the civil uprisings. He speculated that number is now up to 90 percent.

Although many gun dealers were targeted by looters during the riots, Joo said he and his employees were able to ward off thieves with weapons from the store. In fact, Joo drew a great deal of media attention after television cameras captured him firing into the ground in front of rioters.

As did the employees at Western Gun Shop, many Korean American merchants and volunteers in Koreatown and South L.A. took up arms to protect their businesses and properties during the four days of rioting.

Because of their fears of a new outbreak of arson, looting and violence, Joo said many Korean Americans are continuing to stock up on firearms.

Why Korean Americans are still buying guns one month after the riots, Joo observed, is "just simple, in order to protect their lives and their property from looters or whoever tries to harm them.

• See Guns, Page 8

## Guns

continued from page 1.

"I don't think the riots are totally over," he said, nor do his customers. "If they thought the riots were totally over, they wouldn't buy so many guns."

Joo said his Korean American customers tend to favor shotguns and pistols with magazines, which can fire a high number of shots before reloading, as opposed to revolvers, which usually carry only six or eight shots.

Because military service is mandatory for Korean men, he said, most older first-generation Korean American men have some familiarity with weapons, but many younger Korean American men do not.

Few Korean American women are his patrons, Joo said. "Usually they come in with their male partners. The [Korean American] women are scared of gun stuff."

Among his Korean American customers, Joo estimated 60 to 70 percent are first-time gun owners who have no experience with firearms.

Because of his jump in business, Joo has less time to spend with his customers instructing them on the safe use of their weapons.

"Before, I had enough time to train each individual, but now

Although Joo urges first-time gun owners to learn the proper method of firing their weapon at a shooting range, he said he could not be certain how many of them took his advice.

At the Korean American-owned Los Angeles Gun Club, an indoor pistol range and gun dealership in downtown L.A., Yidonoy said his Korean clientele has increased from approximately two percent before the riots to about 30 percent since the riots. The number of Korean American clients at L.A. Gun Club has jumped so dramatically, said Yidonoy, he has been forced to take on another Korean-speaking employee.

According to Yidonoy, most of his Korean American clients are merchants, and more than half are first-time gun owners. Before and after the riots, he observed, many of the Korean Americans who come looking to buy a piece seem ignorant of gun laws.

"A lot of Koreans really didn't know that they could own guns," he said. "Some come in here and say, 'Is it OK if I buy two guns?' and I say, 'Mister, you're in the United States, you can own as many guns as you can carry.'"

At L.A. Gun Club, which both sells and rents guns as well as provides safety instruction in their 30-booth range, Yidonoy said the best sellers among Korean Americans are the 13 to 15-shot semi-automatic pistols.

While he acknowledged that the first-generation Korean men who have had military training have some experience with firearms, Yidonoy has found that even many of them are not familiar with the weapons they are buying.

"A lot of them have been in the South Korean military so

they know how to work let's say a semi-automatic Colt 45, but a lot of them are not familiar with the new 9 millimeters that are out," he said.

As a consequence, "a lot of them show familiarity with [their new gun], but they're not accurate with it."

Yidonoy said he stresses to all his customers, Korean American or otherwise, the importance of practice as well as a working knowledge of the mechanics of the weapon they are purchasing.

"If you're going to buy a gun, then damn it, practice and know what the heck you're doing so that you can hit a football-sized target from 20 feet," he said, "and if you can't do it, then don't buy the gun."

At the same time, Yidonoy maintained that owning a gun and knowing how to use it can be invaluable.

"It's a hobby that can also save your ass," he said.

In addition, Yidonoy said the riots taught Korean Americans a lesson they will not soon forget.

"What this riot did to a lot of Koreans is say, 'Hey, if you want to protect what's yours, either get out of the areas that are bad, or protect yourself,'" he said.

"A lot of them had faith in the judicial system, the police and the higher standards of decent people, but they're finding out that civilization is a very, very thin veneer."