

## Poconos gun maker Justin Kook Jin Moon's vision: an AR-15 for every American

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*Justin Moon, owner of Kahr Arms, talks in the retail shop at the company's headquarters.  
David Maialetti / Staff Photographer*

GREELEY, Pa. -- An AR-15 semiautomatic rifle sits perched on a rack, higher than all the other things that decorate Justin Moon's office in the Poconos.

He built the rifle himself, and it rests above his diplomas from Harvard and the University of Miami and shelves jammed with thick economics textbooks and business guides. Last week he sat at a desk beneath it, discussing a dead-serious plan to make that black gun even more ubiquitous in America.

"I mean, every American should really have an AR," Moon said. "It's America's rifle."

Justin Moon, owner of Kahr Arms, talks about an AR-15 in the retail shop at his corporate headquarters in Greeley, Pa. The gun was made by his company.

Moon, 47, is a son of the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon, founder of the controversial Unification Church in South Korea, but makes a living as a firearms manufacturer. Kahr Arms, which he founded in 1995, makes tens of thousands of pistols and rifles each year from facilities in Minnesota and Massachusetts, including a semiautomatic version of the Thompson submachine gun, the "Tommy Gun" that [mowed down Chicago gangsters](#) in the 1920s.

Moon canceled plans to build a plant in New York state, where his headquarters were located, after more restrictive gun-control measures were passed there in 2013 that expanded bans on military-style weapons and limited magazine sizes. He looked to Pennsylvania, which he described as "very gun-friendly." In 2015, local and state elected officials [helped him cut the ribbon](#) on his new headquarters and retail store in a 620-acre industrial park he purchased off a winding road in Pike County.

"I think I share the values of many Pennsylvanians," Moon said. "I fish, hunt, camp, you name it. Pennsylvania has a strong rural population with strong values. They love America. They love freedom."

Last month, Moon's brother, Pastor Hyung Jin "Sean" Moon, [brought worldwide attention to rural Pennsylvania](#) when he encouraged couples to bring their AR-15s to a marriage blessing at his World Peace and Unification Sanctuary Church in Newfoundland, about 20 miles from Kahr Arms. The Bible references Christ ruling with a "rod of iron," and Sean Moon believes that rod is the AR-15, which is not made from iron.

"His reading of [the Book of] Revelation and the rod of iron makes sense to me," said Justin Moon, a church member.



*Devotees hold their rifles during a marriage blessing ceremony at Sanctuary Church in Newfoundland, Pa., last month. The rifles represented allegiance to the principle of defending family and community.  
Tim Tai / Staff Photographer*

Next to his office is the Tommy Gun Warehouse, his retail store, where many of his brother's followers came shopping before the marriage blessing. Moon stood in front of a wall of AR-15s, only a few of which bore the "Greeley" stamp. But soon, when the adjoining manufacturing plant is fully fired up, Moon said, he'll roll out a "Thompson AR-15," priced just under \$700, in larger numbers. He currently employs 25 people in the office, store, and web shop.

"I'm going to make a standard AR-15 with my brand on it," he said. "The AR-15 is the most popular rifle in America. It's the most common rifle in America."

The NRA estimates that eight million Americans own an AR-15. It has also been used in five of the six deadliest mass shootings in the nation in the last six years, most recently in the Parkland, Fla., massacre.

Moon said he follows state and federal firearms laws but does not support age restrictions, limitations on specific guns, or even bans on the bump stock, [an attachment that uses a semiautomatic rifle's recoil to fire even faster](#) -- the reason why Stephen Paddock was able to kill so many people in Las Vegas last year. In fact, Moon believes the Founding Fathers intended the Second Amendment to evolve with the times, that citizens should be allowed to own any firearms they can literally carry in order to match the government's firepower.

"We should have the right to have the same arms the military has as soldiers," he said.

Moon donates to candidates, organizations, and causes countrywide that support the Second Amendment, and his politics have no middle ground.

"It's not a secret. I support the Republican Party. I'm conservative. I'm not a liberal. Never pretended to be," he said. "I would be one of the deplorables, clinging to gods and guns. That fits me pretty well."

A Hillary Clinton bobblehead, dressed in prison garb, sits on a shelf in a Kahr meeting room, next to a bobblehead of the man to whom she lost.

Moon, a married father of seven, came to the United States from South Korea when he was 3, and although he embraces his heritage, the American dream is dearer to him.

"America is the greatest and the freest nation on earth, and I hope it stays that way because I want my kids to grow up in a free nation with opportunity," he said. "Koreans do well in America because they work hard and take advantage of opportunities. They don't go on welfare."

Moon's hatred of communism and socialism has direct roots in North Korea, where his father was [imprisoned in a labor camp](#) for five years, accused of being a spy for the South Korean government.





*Part of the gun display in the retail store at Kahr Arms' corporate headquarters in Greeley, Pa.  
David Maialetti / Staff Photographer*

"Socialism is basically making the whole country a prison," he said. "In a prison, everyone is equal. They get the same cell, same food; they get the same health care, and only the government employees have guns."

Sun Myung Moon later became a self-professed messiah and started the Unification Church in 1954. Though it [has been called a cult by its detractors](#), it considers Sean Moon's church a "breakaway group," and Unification Church officials said last month that firearms play no part in its doctrine.

While in Miami's MBA program, Justin Moon drew up plans for a small, powerful pistol that became the Kahr K9. The prototype was an instant hit, Moon said, and he started producing the guns in 1995. According to a [2011 New York Daily News article](#), Kahr sold 5,000 K9s to the New York Police Department for off-duty use, though it later ordered its officers to stop carrying the gun because the trigger was too light.

Pennsylvania is home to dozens of gun manufacturers, some of which make just a handful of guns, according to Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives [statistics](#). One Northumberland County manufacturer specializing in smaller rifles made for younger shooters sold just over 49,000 firearms in 2016. Moon has purchased several other manufacturers over the years, combining many of them into the parent company Saeilo Inc. ATF statistics show Saeilo produced 40,274 pistols and 9,086 rifles in 2016. Those guns were made in Minnesota and Massachusetts, but production of AR-15s will soon ramp up in Greeley.

"They sell a lot, and they manufacture a lot," said Edwin Gragert, a member of the [Delaware Valley Democratic Club](#), which protested the Sanctuary Church's weeklong festival last month.

Gragert lives in Milford, 14 miles from the Tommy Gun Warehouse, and he happens to have a [master's degree and Ph.D. in Korean and Japanese history](#). He knows the Moons well. He said he believes Sean Moon's doctrine is dangerous and frets that his brother will be manufacturing AR-15s here in the Poconos.

"This glorification of assault rifles has no place here," Gragert said. "These weapons are designed to shoot people."

After Moon returned to his office, two women shuffled past rows of handguns in glass cases in the Tommy Gun Warehouse, stopping to grip models an employee recommended for personal protection. The women were surprised at how light some were and described one as "sexy." They lived together in the Poconos, and in the wake of a recent nor'easter and subsequent power outages, they were troubled by reports of break-ins. One of the large TVs on a store wall was set to Infowars, a right-wing media outlet [that peddles conspiracy theories](#).

"We live alone in the woods," Evie Ascencio, 62, said. "There's no one around, and it would take police 30 minutes to respond to something."



*Antigun protesters hold satirical signs outside a marriage blessing ceremony at Sanctuary Church in Newfoundland, Pa., last month.*

*Tim Tai / Staff Photographer*

Outside, Justin Moon's [modified Jeep](#) sat in the snow flurries, complete with a rooftop tent, propane tank, and a spine board, capable of barreling through any zombie apocalypse, or whatever else he thinks is coming.

Sean Moon has a Jeep just like it.



*The Tommy Gun Warehouse is the retail store at Kahr Arms corporate headquarters in Greeley, Pa.*

*David Maialetti / Staff Photographer*