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Sienna Ranch Continues a Natural Tradition

By Lou Fancher



Sienna Ranch's Hanna Kim (age 11, in the grey vest) and Karen Wallace assist young riders during a Horse Experience class last weekend. The Horse Experience was inspired by Hanna's love for horses, and is one of the many offerings at Sienna Ranch
Photo Ohlen Alexander

participants. Comments posted on the ranch's blog rave about the nature camps, and emails sent directly to Kim and her staff indicate that children, despite the internet and iPhones, still love to dig in the dirt, feed the chickens, study scat, and explore the great outdoors

Sienna Ranch has a comprehensive website with complete descriptions, photos and registration information. Camps are for ages 4-14 and run June 14-August 13. Go to www.siennaranch.net, or call (925) 283-6311.

Tucked into the Briones hillside, just minutes from central Lafayette, is Sienna Ranch, a child's summer fantasy come to life. Formerly known as Deer Hill Ranch, the 21-acre family-run educational gem offers year round classes and a terrific array of summer camp options.

The previous owners, whose Holding Ranch beef is sold at Lamorinda's Farmers' Markets, moved north and sold their land into the wise, capable hands of the Kim family. Sara Kim is Sienna Ranch's Program Director. Last year, the family continued the legacy of Deer Hill Ranch, hiring an outside organization to run the camp operations. "I found they were really far removed," Kim says, "so that's why this year we had to run it ourselves." She and her staff will put their personal touch on every summer day. "We try to make it homey for the kids," she says, sounding sincere, rather than quaint, "and there's no automatic payment. That way, I think I interact with every parent who comes here."

The camps are split into two sections, with a full-day option available. Morning camps are nature and farm focused, offering broad exposure to surviving in the wilderness, caring for farm animals, or physical adventure challenges where team building plays a major role. Specialty camps, (Archery, Horse Experience, and Art and Animals,) are held in the afternoons. The structure is the same for all the camps: experienced instructors (imagine educated adults with the awestruck enthusiasm of six-year olds,) lead children in deep, respectful interactions with nature and living beings. Coyote Mentoring is the approach the staff has adopted: "It's a way of leading kids in nature without telling them stuff," Kim explains. "The kids feel like they've discovered things by themselves."

Surprisingly, Sienna Ranch's fees are nearly twenty percent less than the rates charged in previous years by Deer Hill Ranch. Kim, gentle and unassuming in tone and appearance, possesses impressive entrepreneurial skills. She knows what will attract quality staff: "I pay more because I value what they are doing and I want them to stay around," she says. And, believing that "all kids should have some piece of land that they really connect to," she prices the camps competitively, offering numerous enrollment options.

To be sure, Sienna Ranch is a for-profit venture, but a top line item on the budget sheet is clearly the response Kim gets from



There's a right horse for all riders Photo Ohlen Alexander

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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