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Children in Nature

Submitted by Kathy Barrett



Photo provided

Sunday April 17th, the Wagner Ranch Nature Area was brimming with children and their families celebrating Earth Week. The Nature Area is 18 acres of meadow, forest, ponds, and streams owned by the Orinda Union School District. Local wildlife columnist Gary Bogue launched the event with a tribute to outdoor experiences, commenting on the Nature Area's importance to education and connecting families with nature. Children created colorful leaf designs on Tee shirts while others explored the trails in a scavenger hunt. Students from the Academy of Language Arts and Music provided inspiring background music for nature games, pond and creek explorations, and hands-on experiences with the Lindsay Museum's gentle snake.

Guests were mesmerized by Jenny Papka's live raptor show, which inspired the audience with the beauty and ecological importance of birds of prey. Youngsters carried wildlife passports through the festival to receive stamps from each activity station. Steve Gentry and his bees provided free honey sticks for full passports. As one boy received his dragonfly stamp, he pointed out that they are his favorite insect and explained how they actually eat mosquito larvae.

At the entrance, adults lined up to test drive Winter Chevrolet's new electric car, the Volt. In addition to its Earth friendly zero emissions, drivers were impressed by the car's quiet and user friendly interior design as well as its sleek look. More than sixty people in the region are now the proud drivers of this alternative to gas guzzlers.

Willa and Scout, ARF golden retrievers, lured many families into the garden area for a very special reading session. Local children's author and community leader, Ginger Wadsworth, has taught her lovely dogs to promote the Orinda Library's PAWS program. Children shared their early reading skills with their patient canine buddies.

Nature Area naturalist, Toris Jaeger, chatted with her large fan club of students, and thanked visitors for donating to support outdoor programs like Pioneer Days and Native American studies, two of the five curriculum-connected programs for elementary school children in the district. Two dozen students from Orinda Intermediate School's after school clubs, Others First and The Green Team, volunteered because of their cherished memories of the Nature Area programs that Jaeger taught.

Another favorite educator, Jenny Maguire, taught Math in the Garden to eager youngsters, and coordinated more than 25 students from Saint Mary's College who led hands-on activities at a dozen activity tables. A number of adult visitors said they came to the festival because they had loved the Nature Area programs when they were in grade school. One such alum is a mom who won a fabulous collection of Gary Bogue's nature books to read to her son. Participants generated more than \$2000 to help the Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area support Nature Area programs.

Visit www.fwrna.org. to learn more about these programs.

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