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12th Annual Wagner Ranch Wildlife Festival Promises Afternoon of Fun

By Laurie Snyder

In celebration of the 41st anniversary of Earth Day, Bay Area residents will have a special opportunity to get up close and personal with nature from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday, April 21, as the Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area host their annual Wildlife Festival.

Now in its 12th year, the wildly popular event promises an afternoon of fun for history enthusiasts, tree huggers, and lifelong learners of all ages - and maybe even a bit of reverence by attendees for their beautiful surroundings. "The olive grove is thriving, including a newly planted row of young olive trees," says FWRNA president Steve Gentry. "The flora and fauna will be furiously using the abundant moisture of spring to prepare for summer."

Wagner Ranch has been a key source of environmental education for Orinda youth for more than 30 years through such programs as Native American Studies, Pioneer Days, Rancho Days, Animal Studies, and First Thanksgiving, which are presented by a retired school district naturalist and nature aides.

The area boasts 18 acres of ponds and streams, meadow and forest. Festival goers will be able to relax and enjoy music and food under old growth oaks, engage in wildlife-themed arts and crafts, play games and, best of all, learn more about the cool critters which call the Lamorinda area home. Local wildlife expert and columnist, Gary Bogue, will be on hand for this year's festival, as will Lindsay Wildlife Museum representatives, and Jenny Papka of Native Bird Connections (www.nativebirds.org/), who will present a raptor show. Hear the buzz from bee guy Gentry, test drive an electric car, or get the latest dirt from the Soul of Soil, Dick Strong.

The grounds are also rich in history. Theodore Wagner, accorded the title of "General" for his role as a Surveyor General, acquired a substantial portion of land in the beautiful valley area now known as Wagner Ranch through his marriage to a member of the Sandow family. He built an impressive home on the site in 1882 - for a reported \$140,000. The foundation is still visible.

Wagner was also known to throw a good party, and would likely have enjoyed himself at this year's event. To learn more about Wagner Ranch, become a member of FWRNA, or volunteer, visit: www.fwrna.org.

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