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A Eurasian eagle owl spreads its wings, perched on the arm of Native Bird Connections owner, Jenny Papka, during the April 19 Earth Day/Wildlife Festival at the Wagner Ranch Nature Area in Orinda. Photo Ohlen Alexander

A Great Way to Celebrate Earth Day

By Laurie Snyder and Jennifer Wake

Finding the 14th Annual Earth Day/Wildlife Festival last Sunday wasn't difficult. You just needed to follow your ears. The deep tones of Native American drums reverberated through the old growth oak trees at the Wagner Ranch Nature Area, thanks to Chester Miner and the Native American Singers who have been playing their drums at the festival for the past four years. "We just like to play," said Miner. "It lifts everyone's spirit." The group of nine men and seven women, including

Steve Dady, Gary Lamb, Dale Idris and Tiona Bosteck, sang some prayer songs and even a rendition of the Spongebob Squarepants theme song to connect with the kids.

"The best thing about drumming is it brings people together," said Dady. "When we all do that from the same place in our hearts, that's what really counts."

"It's all about the people," said Miner. Adults learned how to cook with solar ovens and mastered

the art of composting while kids had their faces painted, ambled through nature-infused scavenger hikes, learned the ABCs of recycling, and looked into the eyes of raptors. Jenny Papka, owner of Native Bird Connections, was there with a few of her 15 non-releasable raptors, such as an American kestrel, which is an imperiled species, and a Eurasian eagle owl, one of the largest owls in the world.

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Bleak Outlook for Lafayette's Baseball Fields

By Cathy Tyson



Lafayette Maintenance Supervisor Greg Travers, left, with Public Works Director Mike Moran admire the green, for now, grass at Buckeye Fields. Photo Cathy Tyson

Now four years and counting into California's drought, it's clear that we are all in this together, even Little Leaguers. "We are in super crisis mode," said Maintenance Supervisor Greg Travers, who is in charge of Lafayette's public baseball fields. Since March, Lafayette Little League has had players large and small on both the Buckeye Fields baseball diamonds and at the Community Park.

Declaring a severe drought emergency last week, the East Bay Municipal Utility District ordered customers, municipal and residential, to cut back landscape watering to two times per week. Use less, pay more: starting July 1 rates will increase 8 percent and a special drought surcharge of a maximum of 25 percent will be levied on household bills. The problem is that historically during the warm summer months, the grass at Buckeye gets watered five days per week to keep up with warm temperatures and a constant parade of baseball players. The city has an investment in these public fields, which were paid for by taxpayer dollars – the fields that thousands of local children have enjoyed over the years.

Starting in October of 2014, Travers proactively met with EBMUD, sports leagues' staff, and the Parks Trails and Recreation Commission to discuss this situation, noting that the fields were at a crisis point already, three years into the drought. "There is just no good news," said Travers, who is very sympathetic. He played baseball as a kid. With a two day a week watering schedule, he predicts the grass – even the more rugged and drought-tolerant hybrid Bermuda grass at Buckeye – will be in marginal shape, possibly making the fields unplayable. With hundreds of kids running around on the grass week after week, there are compaction issues and inconsistent surface that can morph into safety hazards the moment a ball takes a bad hop.

"We'll evaluate the safety of the field at that point," said new Public Works Director Mike Moran. "It certainly won't be as alive as we would like it." ... continued on page A3

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