

Sienna Ranch offers normalcy in stressful times



Photo Annette Dale, Sienna Ranch

Outdoors and masked, these kids are learning and connecting with nature, while playing, exploring and just, well, being kids.

By Pippa Fisher

The challenges of 2020 have been intense for everyone – most businesses have had to creatively up their game to survive the closures and restrictions imposed on them as a result of COVID-19 and children have had to adapt to learning from behind a computer. More than ever it has been crucial to give kids a break from screen time and get them into nature. One of the first places to offer that safely is right here in Lafayette – Sienna Ranch.

But it has not been without challenges.

Sienna Ranch lies tucked into the northeast corner of Deer Hill Road, backing onto Briones. The ranch, whose mission is to connect youth to nature through its array of educational

outdoor programs, was shut down in the spring for eight weeks. The small family-owned business established in 2008, offers programs to children from PreK up to ninth grade, including horse riding, archery, wood shop, pottery, gardening, art, and animal education.

“We just continually see firsthand how important outdoor education as a field is,” says Sienna Ranch Business Director Julie Sanders. “It is a sense of normalcy in a time of high trauma.”

“When they (students) come to Sienna Ranch they get to slide down hills, make woodshop-free build projects, build with clay, pet and interact with animals,” says Sanders, noting that at a time when kids may be feeling isolated, they make new friends and are reminded how to socialize.

Sanders explains the challenges of

the shutdown and the subsequent re-opening. The ranch has had to evolve the business structure. “We have seen operation costs increase due to COVID and also have had to be really creative and fluid and adaptive with our offerings in order to create new revenue. We have had to struggle balancing making revenue while also maintaining the safety of our staff.”

The ranch was forced to reduce hours during the spring to half time or less for all employees, managing to stay afloat with a PPP loan. At the end of the summer they had to do a series of layoffs and restructuring.

Initially in the spring the Ranch pivoted to online options for their classes, retaining about 70% of its enrollment, using Zoom for shorter sessions with instructors. Sanders says they created take-home kits for the classes to be able to do at-home challenges and activities with their teachers on Zoom, still using their hands and experiencing nature whether in their backyard, at a local park, or from inside looking out of their window.

“We had woodshop and pottery classes all building projects with their teachers over Zoom,” says Sanders. The only classes they were unable to transfer to the online model were horse and archery classes.

And Sanders is proud of Sienna Ranch for being one of first camps to develop in-depth COVID policies and procedures – one that other organizations and camps looked to for example.

“We are open about sharing our policies because we want others to be able to see them and use them as a framework to create their own,” she says. “We’ve continually adjusted our policies to adapt to the information we are learning about the virus and how our local health agencies are responding. Being agile and proactive has allowed us to adjust to the ever-changing landscape.”

Sienna Ranch classes have always focused on small student-to-teacher ratios and now those classes are offered in stable cohorts for 4-week sessions. Since COVID-19 started they have altered their cleaning routines, implemented temperature checks, provided guidelines and safety protocols for parents and a health and safety pledge for them to sign before joining any program.

Sanders has noticed that at first some kids have challenges remembering how to socialize with their peers. She says the need for these sorts of programs is greater than ever.

“There is a lot of anxiety from kids who are worried about the virus and we saw a lot of separation anxiety after being home for so long with only their parents. In the first couple of days of our in-person classes there were a lot of students who struggled emotionally with reintegrating into a group setting with peers,” says Sanders.

This has led to an adjustment of approach and ways in which the team connect with students. “We also have seen our mission and purpose shift,” notes Sanders. First and foremost a place to connect young children to nature, they have seen their roles as educators evolve to help provide social and emotional well-being also.

Parents interested in the full list of classes available can go online (see link below). Camp enrollment is extremely popular and camps sell out quickly. Currently Holiday Camps are available, but filling up fast.

As one third-grade student put it, “This is way more fun than my Zoom school – I love Sienna Ranch!”

Sanders takes the thought one further. “This place and our activities are a lifeline for kids who are living in highly isolated times.”

More information on Sienna Ranch can be found at <https://www.siennaranch.net/>

Hailey Coder is Mixologist of 2020

By Sora O'Doherty

Justin Cole of Joy in Motion was the Master of Ceremonies of the first virtual Art of Mixology competition on Oct. 16. All five finalists came away with awards, but the top honor went to Hailey Coder of Bar Cava in Martinez

for her cocktail, Two Faced. She won \$500 and a trophy.

The Audience Award, with a trophy and \$200 went to Independent Mixologist Brian Gamble for his cocktail, Fall'ifornia Dreamin. Second Place Sade Stamps of Sobre Mesa in Oakland received a certificate and \$300 for her

cocktail, Betty's 7 p.m. Ben Dimond, of Bardo Lounge and Supper Club, also in Oakland, took third place for Smog in the Noggin, taking home a certificate and \$150. Local mixologist of Canyon Club in Moraga, Mike Whipple's Chipotle Bloody Mary earned him fourth place, a certificate and \$100.

You can watch the winner making her cocktail at www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4yl-C97WEz0, and kits for all the winning cocktails may still be ordered until Oct. 30 from the Lamorinda Arts Council on their website, <https://lamorindaarts.org/mixology>

Boy Scouts emphasize “Zoom free” activities during pandemic



Photo provided

Assistant Scoutmaster Paul Mason instructs Scouts for the golfing merit badge.

Submitted by Dean Smith

Boy Scout activities during COVID-19? No problem for Troop 243 in Lafayette!

Troop 243 Scouts were out recently practicing their swings, drives, and chips, while sporting their masks and being physically distanced from each other. The golfing merit badge is an example of one of the many outdoor “Zoom free” Scouting activities organized by the Scouts during the pandemic of 2020. While some groups have emphasized Zoom meetings and remote learning programs, Troop 243 has tried to provide Scouts with a safe program to interact with their fellow Scouts in an effort to allow the Scouts to keep their bonds intact.

Paul Mason, assistant Scoutmaster for Troop 243, is the golfing merit badge instructor for the council. Two patrol meetings were dedi-

cated to learn the basics of golf, in addition to first aid and safety related to the merit badge. The Scouts are required to play 18 rounds of golf to complete the merit badge. This activity is an excellent example of a Scout related activity, conducted outdoors, and in full compliance with COVID-19 protocol. Each Scout brings his own clubs, and masks are mandatory at all times.

COVID-19 presented many challenges for camps, group activities and schools, but Troop 243 has addressed these incredible challenges by dividing up into small patrols and focusing on outdoor activities. With the county guidelines always being the roadmap for groups gatherings, the troop has strict activity options and the Scouts keep coming up with new ideas to keep them busy and working on advancement. Future plans for the patrols include Scout-

ing for Food, hiking local trails, mountain biking and community service projects.

“We feel strongly that students spend enough time online. Scouting can be an escape to meet in person, as long it meets local county and Scouting COVID-19 protocol,” said Dan Rogers, committee chair for Troop 243. “Over the last few months, four patrols have met weekly outdoors doing a wide range of activities. We are confident our formula is working, as the Scouts are excited to attend to get out of the house and see their friends!”

Since its formation in 1955, over 210 Scouts from Troop 243 have been awarded the Eagle Scout rank. Troop 243 is based at the Lafayette Christian Church at 584 Glenside Drive in Lafayette.

If you would like more information about joining Troop 243, please email Troop243CA@gmail.com.

Moraga Art Gallery Announces a new art exhibit



Debby Koonce, “Atop Old Borges Ranch,” Acrylic on Canvas



Angélica Samame, “Friends,” Acrylic on Canvas Images provided

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Starting in November, don't miss the gallery's Holiday Boutique, which will fea-

ture handmade gift items created by local artists including glass items, ceramics, beautiful wooden bowls, small paintings, decorative pillows,

holiday cards and jewelry. Moraga Art Gallery is a cooperative featuring the work of eighteen established local artists and artisans and five guest artists whose work

includes painting, sculpture, jewelry, print media, ceramics, photography and wood-working.

To safeguard gallery staff and visitors, everyone visiting

the gallery is required to wear a face mask and to maintain social distancing by keeping at least six feet apart. The gallery has hand sanitizer for guests to use when entering the gallery and gloves will also be available at the front desk for handling prints and ceramics. We are limiting the number of customers to four people at a time.

You will find the link to join the Open House reception on the Moraga Art Gallery website: <https://moragaartgallery.com>. The Moraga Art Gallery located at 432 Center Street, Rheem Shopping Center is open Friday through Sunday, noon to 3 p.m. Starting in November the gallery will be open Thursday through Sunday, noon to 3 p.m. For more information, visit the website, call (925) 376-5407 or email moragaartgallery@gmail.com.