



# Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area

## Spring 2017 Newsletter

The Wagner Ranch Nature Area is an 18 acre nature preserve and historic site located adjacent to Wagner Ranch Elementary School in Orinda.

### 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Wildlife Festival

A record 1000+ people of all ages streamed into the Wagner Ranch Nature Area on Sunday April 23<sup>rd</sup> to celebrate Earth Day. Soon children were catching water boatman bugs in the pond with dip nets, while others were feeding grass to the friendly goats. Gorgeous parrots from the Contra Costa Avian Society were riding on shoulders, and families were cooking biscuits in solar ovens with Wendy Helms and The Trust in Education Institute. The splendid weather and mesmerizing drumming and singing by Chester Miner and the Native American Cherokee Elders contributed to an atmosphere of adventure.



Photos by Wade Barrett

The Biodiversity Garden was teeming with butterflies and the tunes of the Orinda Ukulele Band. Under the trees, the Ruth Bancroft Garden team was guiding children to make paper flowers to take home. Students have been installing conservation projects in the 18-acre Nature Area, owned by the Orinda Union School District, for 30 years. This year, Girl Scout, Lizzie O'Dell, displayed her new Mason Bee Project for her Gold Award. Across the garden, the O.I.S. Green Team was teaching children eco-projects, and Lilana Spindler was leading garden explorations.



Photos by Wade Barrett

For years the Friends of the WR Nature Area have been inviting the community to enjoy the environmental wisdom of local groups like Friends of Orinda Creeks, Parents for a Safer Environment, and Sustainable Contra Costa. Young artists paint ceramic tiles for the entrance bench, make nature crafts and wear the beautiful tattoos by Coyote Brush Studios and face paintings by the Orinda Juniores.



Photo by Wade Barrett

At 3:00, UC Berkeley professor emeritus Reg Barrett welcomed families around the pond to watch him release Yertle the Turtle, a second Western Pond Turtle that has come to live in the Nature Area. From his log in the sun, Mr. T, the turtle released last year, watched the crowd. If the two turtles do well over the next year, the Nature Area Pond may qualify to receive a female turtle. Rescued female Western Pond Turtles are placed in breeding programs to increase turtle numbers. The Red-eared Turtle (an eastern species), which was introduced by the pet trade has spread throughout California and is displacing the native Western Pond Turtles.



Photos by Wade Barrett

Columnist Joan Morris invited visitors to ask questions about wildlife and had them observe the structures of several abandoned bird nests. Cricket, of Raw Soap, offered samples of her organic olive oil soaps, and groups of curious children were asking Orinda Bee Man, Steve Gentry, a million questions about the demonstration hive.

The Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area support stewardship of the Nature Area, with an emphasis on high quality educational programs that benefit Orinda students, teachers, and community partners.

The Nature Area is owned by the Orinda Union School District.

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## We Thank our Donors, Presenters, Volunteers & Sponsors



The popular *Nature Art* station was led by Mary Ghildella, Susan Crawford and Peggy Dodds Photo by Wade Barrett

A highpoint for the five and under crowd was the *Critter Hunt* designed by retired teacher Marjie Musante. Excited youngsters took home toy grasshoppers, praying mantis, beetles and butterflies! Nearby, Plein air artists were painting from nature.



Photos by Wade Barrett

More than 100 volunteers and presenters helped: teens and youth from Scout programs, Others First at Orinda Intermediate School, Miramonte High School, Orinda Juniores, St. Mary's students, the National Charity League, and many community volunteers. For more details about the Friends visit our website [www.fwrna.org](http://www.fwrna.org).



Professor Dan Phillips and Frontier Chemistry Photo by Wade Barrett



Photo by Wade Barrett



If you were weary, you could be revived by massage artist, Derry Calay, or with lovely music played by students of ALMA, the Academy of Language Arts and Music. Other energetic souls joined John Helms for tours of the Nature Area, visiting the old ruins of the Wagner homestead. Terry Murphy and Bob Thompson of the Orinda Historical Society displayed artifacts from the historical site and photographs of the elegant three-story home.



Photo by Wade Barrett



Parents for a Safer Environment

### Mission

The Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area support the conservation of the Nature Area as a natural environment and its preservation as an historical site, with the goal of enhancing environmental education programs for schools and the community.

### Nature Area Programs

Students have a direct connection to their natural world and cultural heritage through hands on observation and activities:

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

**Animal Camp**—Hikes in the Nature Area introduce local animals and plants, their relationships and general topics in natural history and the environment.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Native American Studies**—Native American uses of the environment for food, shelter, medicines and recreation.

**Rancho Days**—Expression of the first European civilization on the ranchos with representative shelters, foods and crafts.

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

**First Thanksgiving**—Experience the life of the pilgrims, and celebrate the cooperation and contributions of both Native Peoples and Europeans with an historical feast.

**Pioneer Days**—Customs and experiences of the pioneers and 49ers coming to California, such as cooking over an open fire and panning for gold; local history is included.

### Other FWRNA Activities

OIS, Others First – Sunday Volunteers  
Scout Projects

Earth Day - Wildlife Festival

July 4<sup>th</sup> Activities

### Olive Festival October 1<sup>st</sup> Fundraiser

Maintenance of trails, meadows, ponds

FWRNA Board of Directors is recruiting people who are committed to improving the educational, historical, and natural resources of the Nature Area, which is the property of the Orinda Union School District.



C.C. Avian Society