

Napa Valley Register

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Kids, parents alike enjoy Harvest Festival



Four-year-old Gianna “Gigi” Giorsetto knows about miniature donkeys, Minnie and Cupcake.

“Don’t stand behind them because they might kick,” she said Saturday, as she brushed the animals inside a barn at Connolly Ranch.

“You also need to brush them. You can pet them, too. But you can’t stand behind them,” she said.

Gigi and her father, David Giorsetto, were among the 200 kids and parents who ignored the rainy weather to come to Connolly Ranch’s annual Harvest Festival. The open house allows families to show up at the ranch without an appointment to visit the donkeys, cow, bunnies, sheep, goats, rabbits, pot belly pig, chickens and other lovable animals, all for free.

Kids fed alfalfa hay to goats and corn to ducks, geese and chickens on the 12-acre ranch as parents and volunteers watched.

“This is a fun day for the kids,” said Thom Arcadi, ranch manager at Connolly Ranch as he helped Kaylie Cross, 8, of American Canyon and other kids grind corn inside the main barn.

Kaylie and her family have come to Connolly Ranch on various occasions. But others, including 2-year-old Ella Pedersen and her mother, Kelly, said on Saturday they were visiting the ranch for the first time.

Ella liked the bunnies and the chickens, her mother said.

“It’s been nice,” said Kelly Pedersen said.

Jeff Feeney came with his 3-year-old son, James. Unlike his son, Jeff Feeney was enjoying Connolly Ranch for the first time.



“He’s a lot braver than I thought,” said Jeff laughing, after he and his son left the pond area, where James watched the geese and the ducks enjoy a feast of corn from young, enthusiastic visitors.

Joanne and Jeff Conklin and their 7 1/2 year old daughter, Aiya, said they were first-time visitors too. They have lived in Napa for six years.

“This is very nice,” Joanne Conklin said. “It’s impressive, the gardens,” she said, as her daughter sat at the wheel of the ranch’s tractor.



The garden produces seasonal produce for the various programs at the ranch.

Connolly Ranch operates on \$275,000 a year with two full-time and three part-time employees and the help of 10 to 25 volunteers, Executive Director Bob Pallas said.

The ranch is usually available for school-sponsored field trips for educational purposes. The staff is too small to have Connolly Ranch open to the general public, Pallas said.

Usually, the open houses draw about 500 people, he said. He suspects the rainy weather and the World Series may have kept some people away this time.

The Napa County Land Trust oversaw the ranch between 1991 until last year, when Connolly Ranch became its own organization.

The next open house is in June 18, the Saturday before Father’s Day.