

Napa Valley Register

10 Questions for Michael Lauher of Connolly Ranch

It's easy for Michael Lauher to talk about his favorite things about working at Connolly Ranch, a working farm offering hands-on educational programs. "I like a lot about my job," he said.



As education director, Lauher works with all the school groups that visit the ranch, and develops farm-based environmental education programs for visitors and educators.

Lauher said he especially enjoys working with kids. "I love teaching and gardening. I love doing the beekeeping classes."

What about cleaning up manure?

"I don't have a problem mucking stalls. It has a purpose — making compost," he said. "Sitting in the office isn't my favorite," Lauher conceded. And, "cleaning out the chicken coop is pretty gross."

Lauher and his wife and two girls, ages 11 and 6, also live on the ranch as caretakers.

Which three people would you most like to have dinner with?

My wife, Brandi Lauher.

My mom, Bonnie Lauher.

Charles Darwin.

What's the biggest misconception about Connolly Ranch?

People think it's a petting zoo. It's so far from it. We are a diversified farm. We teach classes (about) the animals, gardening and cooking. We go on hikes. We teach about the Native Americans. It's much more diverse than just the animals.

What's new at the ranch?

We have a new camp program called Dirt To Dine with Chef Michael Chiarello where children attend week long camps to learn the cycles of an organic farm and how to cook with fresh food in the kitchen. We also have a fundraiser on Sept. 4 called the Napa Valley Tomato Festival (Napavalleytomatofestival.com).

How many kids a year visit the ranch?

Around 3,000 kids a year, mostly from Napa County but some from (places like) San Francisco.

What job would you like to try/not like to try?

I think it would be exciting to work for a travel guide book company and write about all the interesting places around the world to visit.

I would not want anything to do with the oil industry.

What was your first job?

My first job was at a recreation department on a military base in Germany. I was a maintenance hand, which was cool, (but) not so cool that once a week I had to dress in a Barney costume and entertain the kids.

If you could change one thing about your business, what would it be?

I wish we had more staff around the farm to work on the facility and more naturalists so we could run more programs.

What's your favorite gift to give?

Depends on the season but a few of my favorites are compost, honey, eggs, seeds, and veggies.

What's something people might be surprised to know about you?

I don't own a TV.

What other business person(s) would you like to see featured in "10 Questions for..."

Rob Keller, Napa Valley Bee Company.

Amy and John Mautner, Napa Valley Apothecary.

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