



The Capistrano Dispatch

OUR COMMUNITY, OUR VOICE



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FOUNDED IN 2002

SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO AND RANCHO MISSION VIEJO

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First-graders from Ambuehl Elementary School got a closer look at local flora and fauna on the Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo through the new "wildlife investigators" program. Photo: Allison Jarrell

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YOUR NO. 1 SOURCE FOR LOCAL NEWS, EVENTS, SPORTS AND MORE

Natural Wonder

The Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo expands nature programming for young students

BY ALLISON JARRELL,
THE CAPISTRANO DISPATCH

The first graders bused in from Ambuehl Elementary School were ecstatic.

On a recent spring morning, the young students pointed as birds of prey flew over the towering trees. They carefully assessed every beetle, caterpillar and ladybug that crossed their path—their noses inches away from each specimen. They stopped to smell the sweet perfume of trees speckled with orange blossoms, and noticed bees buzzing around with pollen on their legs.

And that was all in between their outdoor lessons, where they learned about how animals use camouflage and warning colors to survive in their habitat, and about biomimicry and how people can use nature as inspiration for designing solutions to everyday problems.

The school was invited by The Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo to take part in their new educational programs for kindergartners and first-graders—“nature explorers” and “wildlife investigators”—which were recently added to The Reserve’s current second through fifth grade educational programming.

The Reserve is made up of about 21,000 acres of land owned by Rancho Mission Viejo, designed to be a permanent open space for habitat and species protection. Habitats such as coastal sage scrub, oak woodlands and vernal pools can all be found on the land, as well as seven endangered or threatened species, like the endangered arroyo toad and the coastal California gnatcatcher.

Laura Coley Eisenberg, vice president of open space and resource management for The Reserve, said The Ranch’s community outreach programs, student programs and monitoring of wildlife are all a part of The Ranch’s “culture of care,” which centers on being a good neighbor to the community at-large. She points to one of Ranch CEO Tony Moiso’s favorite quotes: “Take care of the land, and the land will take care of you.”

As the Ambuehl students roamed The Reserve headquarters, each experience seemed brand new to the young explorers. And after more than five years of drought in California, they probably were.

“The kids who were born during the drought, they’ve never even seen a green Orange County,” Eisenberg said.

Leeta Latham, education and public programs manager at The Reserve, noted



The Reserve’s “wildlife investigators” program allows first grade students to participate in hands-on activities along an interactive trail on which they learn about plants and animals. Photo: Allison Jarrell

that this year was also likely the first time the students saw San Juan Creek flowing behind their own school.

Standing in the vast open space, surrounded by fields of tall green grass rippling like waves in the wind, it’s hard to think of a better place for the students to be immersed in greenery in South Orange County.

Each year, The Reserve plays host to thousands of students from across Southern California. During the last school year, The Reserve hosted 48 field trips with a total of 3,279 students participating, in addition to 36 school assemblies. Seventeen of those schools came from Capistrano Unified School District, 12 came from other Orange County schools and five schools traveled from outside the county, some travelling more than 60 or 70 miles.

Latham said it was when Reserve leaders met with CUSD that they realized kindergartners and first-graders were in need of more outdoor learning opportunities. After discussions with the school district, the Reserve staff got to work on designing two new programs for younger students that align with the Next General Science Standards to which schools are transitioning.

At the kindergarten level, “nature explorers” observe San Juan Creek to learn about the relationship between plants and animals and where they live. They learn about earth’s natural resources, and how weather and sunlight affect plants and animals.

First-graders learn about animal families, about the different parts of a plant and even get a hands-on comparison of animal skulls in order to determine how different teeth and beaks are used to eat different types of food.

Latham said having students make

connections to what they’re learning about in the classroom with the natural world around them also gives them the opportunity to develop skills like teamwork, problem-solving and critical thinking.

Eisenberg added that it’s important for young students to learn hands-on in nature because they’re the future stewards of the land.

“If we don’t connect them to the land when they’re very small, they won’t necessarily care about it when they’re older,” Eisenberg said. “If we want to have clean air, clean water and preserved open space, future generations are going to have to know what it’s like to walk through a field of shooting stars and see yellow flowers for as far as the eye can see.”

For information on scheduling a field trip during the school year, call 949.489.9778 or email education coordinator Bonnie McQuiston at bmcquiston@rmvreserve.org. **CD**

Upcoming Events at The Reserve

April 15 • Butterfly Walk 9-11 a.m. at the Richard and Donna O’Neill Conservancy. Ages 12 and up. \$10 for adults, \$5 for kids.

April 18 • Bird Walk 8-11 a.m. at the Richard and Donna O’Neill Conservancy. Ages 10 and up. \$10 for adults, \$5 for kids.

Lecture Wildflowers from A to Z: 7-8:30 p.m. at the Ranch House in Sendero. Ages 8 and up. Free.

April 22 • Earth Day Wildflower Walk 9-11:30 a.m. at the Richard and Donna O’Neill Conservancy. Ages 8 and up. \$10 for adults, \$5 for kids.

May 3 • Volunteer Orientation and Training 6-9 p.m. at The Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo Headquarters. Free.

For directions or more information, visit www.rmvreserve.org, email staff@rmvreserve.org or call 949.489.9778.

Sudoku

BY MYLES MELLOR

Solution:

5	1	9	6	3	2	7	4	8
6	8	4	5	1	7	9	2	3
2	7	3	4	8	9	6	5	1
8	9	6	2	7	4	3	5	1
4	3	7	9	5	1	8	6	2
7	6	4	3	9	8	5	2	1
1	2	8	5	6	3	4	7	9
9	7	2	1	5	6	4	3	8
3	5	8	2	1	4	7	9	6
4	8	1	5	7	3	2	9	6

Each Sudoku puzzle consists of a 9x9 grid that has been subdivided into nine smaller grids of 3x3 squares. To solve the puzzle, each row, column

and box must contain each of the numbers 1 to 9. Puzzles come in three grades: easy, medium and difficult. **Level: Medium**

		1					9	6
9	7			4	1	8		
				8				1
2		8				7		
	1	3	4		7			6
			8			3		
		6		1	5			
4				9				5