

Historic state park celebrates 40 years

Wilder Ranch 10-20-14

Celebration coincides with annual
heritage harvest festival on Oct. 25

By Samantha Clark

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SANTA CRUZ » Wilder Ranch State Park is turning 40 years old. Fitting for a birthday celebration, one docent tells visitors that the park's history is rich like a tiered cake.

"You have a layer for the Native Americans, you even have a layer before that for the natural history," says Charlie Kieffer, a docent at the park for 25 years. "Then you can turn around and have layers for the Spanish and Mexican periods, and a fifth layer for when the Americanos came."

At Wilder Ranch State Park, an Ohlone midden rests next to an early 1800s adobe and a Victorian farm house.

The 7,000-acre park offers 34 miles of trails winding through valleys and coastal terraces. Visitors can also explore Victorian homes, barns, shops, gardens and the Bolcoff adobe.

The 40th anniversary celebration coincides

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IF YOU GO

What: Wilder Ranch State Park 40th anniversary celebration, annual Heritage Harvest Festival

When: Saturday, October 25, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Where: 1401 Coast Rd., Santa Cruz

Cost: free admission, \$10 parking

Park

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with the annual heritage harvest festival on Saturday.

The family-friendly event offers a cornucopia of fall activities.

In addition to traditional festival fare, there will be hand-cranked pumpkin ice cream and rare heirloom apples to taste.

"We're just sharing a slim selection of thousands of apples," said Michael Kusiak, president of the Monterey Bay chapter of California Rare Fruit Growers. "The many varieties show a wide range in textures and complex flavors. Some are light, some are dense. Some sweet, some sour. Some of the apples are pink inside. Some apples are best eaten fresh, and others a best baked."

Festivalgoers can also enjoy live music, draft horse rides, living history demonstrations and square dancing. Children can paint pumpkins, do crafts and play old-fashioned games.

Wilder Ranch has another layer of history for Kieffer's cake analogy: how it became a state park. In 1972, 10,000 houses were slated for development on the property, which would have doubled the size of Santa Cruz. After people rallied against the proposal, the state acquired the ranch



KEVIN JOHNSON — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL FILE

Chase Yahn-Kraft, 10, from left, Kyle Schaeffer, 10, and Ethan Schaeffer, 6, taste test slices of freshly picked apples at Wilder Ranch State Park in October 2013 during the Harvest Festival.

in 1974.

However, it wasn't until 1989 that the park opened before closing briefly due to the Loma Prieta earthquake.

In the mid-1990s, the state's proposal for an RV park met opposition and people organized to add Gray Whale Ranch to the park. Then the governor proposed to close the park in 2009.

"Once you acquire a park, that's not the end of the story," said Bonny Hawley, director of Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks. "People

have to stay involved and keep the vision."

In partnership with the state, the nonprofit funds interpreters, repairs and programs.

There will be a reunion lunch for past and present docents, volunteers and state park staff from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Saturday's event. A ceremony will be held after to honor the Wilder State Park community and dedicate the newly painted horse barn.

Up for auction is a watercolor painting of the Wilder

Ranch Victorian, painted in the 1970s by Marilyn Simandle, shortly after the park was acquired. Only 500 raffle tickets for \$10 will be sold until Dec. 13 at the Holidays on the Ranch event.

The money benefits the Paint the Victorian Fund, which needs \$30,000 to repaint the farmhouse. Raffle tickets are available by calling 831-239-6012.

Author Eric Henze will be signing copies of his book, "The Complete Guide to Wilder Ranch State Park." Proceeds go to the park.