

Fun for the young



Joel Rosenbaum/JRosenbaum@TheReporter.com
Gregory Buchanan, 10, of Sacramento, uses a net to try and catch small fish from Putah Creek on Saturday. He was one of about 40 kids taking part in the fifth annual Kids Camp Lake Solano Park.

Lake Solano Park hosts annual camp

By Richard Bammer
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It is an American tradition since the mid-19th century, and, most researchers say, it improves the lives of children, making them healthy, enabling them to grow to be caring, contributing and successful members of society.

And each year, from California to Maine, from Washington to Florida, some 10 million children join in this summertime rite, most of it just plain fun and all of it always edifying. How could it not be?

Camp today may not be what it was for baby boomers, but, for the fifth time in as many years, Kids

Camp Lake Solano Park filled an important need for several dozen Northern California special-needs children, ages 3 to 12. Most were from low-income families, in foster care or dealing with physical, mental and emotional challenges, such as autism and Down syndrome. And, as with outcomes at any camp, the children learned to be independent thinkers, to explore and appreciate nature and to cultivate social skills, all while getting exercise.

Sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Fairfield, the first day of the two-day camp, which started Saturday at the park near Winters, was all about many no-surprise

activities: games, educational projects, a barbecue lunch, a nature hike, sing-along hour, a marshmallow roast by a campfire, camping under the stars, and, for some perhaps, dreams of fish, catching them and eating them, the main attraction today.

But by 12:15 p.m. Saturday, a small gaggle of kids busted themselves making rope, with adult mentor Terry McCurdy of Fairfield, guiding them each step of the way under a blue pop-up tent.

At a nearby table, Megan Harris, an organizer of field trips for WaterWays, a University of California, Davis, water education

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Joel Rosenbaum/[jrosenbaum@TheReporter.com](https://www.instagram.com/jrosenbaum/)
 Volunteer Terry McCurdy works with a group of campers as they make rope Saturday during Kids Camp Lake Solano Park. About 40 kids are taking part in the two-day event.

Camp ...

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 program, smeared tempera paints on rubber stamps of fish, then urged the children to press them onto paper, creating a fossil-like image. Some were later arrayed on a nylon line to dry, fluttering like pennants in a mild breeze under a near-cloudless sky and temperatures already climbing past 85 degrees.

Later, at the park's Nature Center, children gathered to carve soapstone, as Harris and other volunteers set up chairs for a mid-afternoon cool-down and a game called "creek bingo." It incorporated words related to Putah Creek, she explained.

"It's a vocabulary builder and reviews everything" they saw and heard during the morning, she said, adding that late-afternoon activities would include water balloon games.

Harris, who never attended camp herself as a youth, quipped that Kids Camp makes up for that missed part of her childhood.

"I look forward to it all year long," she said. "We're like a big extended family."

Meanwhile, under the Pleasants Valley Road bridge, a dozen excitable children, wading in the creek and looking intently at the shadow-darkened waters, caught small fish and waterborne insects, placing them in wash tubs for observation and identification, by all accounts, a popular activity.

Across the road, at the Alvin Bonifacio Memorial Fishing Pond, Boy Scouts from Fairfield Troop 100 fished to earn some merit badges. Earlier in the day, they helped event co-founder Mike Johns of Fairfield set up camp.

Johns, aka Capt. Mike to just about everyone, said the event this year cost nearly \$6,000, the funding coming from individual donations and sponsors, among them Travis Credit Union, United Parcel Service, Pacific Gas and Electric, Solano Garbage and California Inland Fisheries,



Grace Hutton, 8, of Fairfield, carves soapstone while trying to make a necklace.

many of them listed on the nonprofit organization's web site, www.kidsdayoffishing.org.

Donations have lagged a bit this year, but somehow the bills get paid, noted Johns, an experienced fisherman.

If anything, the camp represents something special, said volunteer Richard School, 79, of Fairfield.

"It's about the good it does for kids who don't get a chance to go fishing," he said.

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