

Education

## Connolly Ranch's new barn is for the birds

Jennifer Huffman

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Andy Beckstoffer raises his arms and lets out a shout after he and his wife Betty, left, successfully cut the ribbon to the Beckstoffer Grapegrowers Barn at Connolly Ranch on Wednesday afternoon. Applauding at right is Connolly Ranch manager Thom Arcadi.

J.L. Sousa/Register

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**T**he chickens have come home to roost at Connolly Ranch.

On Wednesday, the working farm and educational ranch in west Napa hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the completion of its latest addition.

Called the Beckstoffer Grapegrowers Barn, the new building is purely for the birds – chickens, that is.

The project was made possible by a \$100,000 donation from the Beckstoffer family and others who contributed their time and efforts.

“It feels great” to officially open the chicken barn, said Andy Beckstoffer, a grapegrower and philanthropist. .

“We want to honor the grapegrowers” of the valley, he said. “The lifeblood of this valley is agriculture.” Plus, “we love chickens,” he said with a smile.

“This place is about kids, education and farming,” Beckstoffer said. “It doesn’t get much better

than that.”

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“We’re thrilled to have the barn now open — number one for our chickens and also for our visitors,” said Connolly Ranch Executive Director Jennifer Fotherby. The ranch welcomed 9,000 visitors last year from Napa and all over the Bay Area, most through its free and subsidized field trip program, she said.

The chicken barn will allow the ranch to offer heritage poultry education, provide space for increased programming and enhance opportunities for visitors to learn where food comes from while experiencing life on the farm.

The barn will become home to several heritage breeds, including Rhode Island Red and Plymouth Rock chickens. The ranch may also raise Java, Jersey Giant and New Hampshire breeds.

Wednesday afternoon, after a red ribbon in front of the barn doors was snipped, crowds of young and older visitors streamed through the 575-square-foot barn, which has room for 60 chickens or chicks.

This is no ordinary chicken coop. The sparkling clean barn — nary a chicken dropping was in sight — has high ceilings and plenty of space for both birds and humans.

More than 200 people attended the ribbon cutting, including Napa mom Cheryl Brown, her mother Donna Holt and Brown’s 9-month-old baby Kelsey Brown.

“We absolutely love” Connolly Ranch, said Cheryl Brown. “Kelsey loves the chickens and roosters so to see them getting a new home is very exciting.” Connolly Ranch teaches the kids the importance of nature and taking care of animals, she said. “It feels like going back in time.”

Sarah Hansen, owner of Model Bakery, is on the Connolly Ranch board. “There are very few farms accessible to the public,” she noted. “It’s something I think all kids should experience.”

Miles Henry, 9, of Napa, was also at the ceremony.

“I like the goats,” said Miles. His favorite is a goat named Sebastian. “It’s cool he has one horn,” he said. “It makes him look like a tough guy.”

His mother, Julie Henry, a blacksmith, created the metal sign that hangs above the new barn. “This is one of my favorite places in Napa,” she said. “There’s just nothing like it.”

By Jennifer Huffman

Business Editor

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