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EDUCATION

Connolly Ranch to begin construction of chicken, education showcase barn

Grapegrower Beckstoffer donated \$100,000 to effort

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Connolly Ranch, the farming and environmental education center in Browns Valley, will receive a new showcase in the coming months.

Work will begin next month on the Beckstoffer Grapegrowers Barn, which will become home to the ranch's collection of heritage-bred poultry. The 576-square-foot wooden structure will host

hands-on demonstrations for children, and double as a second indoor space for classes and lectures, particularly in the rainy winter months.

Funded by a \$100,000 donation from Napa Valley winemaker Andy Beckstoffer and his wife Betty, the barn project will break ground Sept. 2, according to Jennifer Thacher Fotherby, executive director of Connolly

Ranch. Construction is expected to last six weeks, weather permitting, with a formal grand opening planned for the spring of 2016.

Inside the barn will be incubators and brooders, around which visiting children can view the chickens and observe their life cycle, according to Fotherby. The interior will include a large assembly space

Barn groundbreaking

Connolly Ranch at 3141 Browns Valley Road will hold a ceremony at 4:30 p.m., Sept. 2 for the groundbreaking of the Beckstoffer Grapegrowers Barn, the new home of its heritage-bred poultry program. The program includes farm tours, a wine reception and refreshments.

For a free RSVP, visit <http://bit.ly/1JwStAr>. For more information, contact Connolly Ranch at (707)-224-1894 or connollyranch.org

that can be used whole for classes, lessons and field-trip groups, or divided into smaller sections for hands-on education.

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Submitted graphic

Groundbreaking on the Beckstoffer Grapegrowers Barn, at Connolly Ranch in Browns Valley, is scheduled for Sept. 2, with a formal opening planned in the spring. The wooden barn will house the farming and ecology center's population of chickens from historic breeds.

RANCH

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Connolly Ranch hosts its heritage fowl, and its learning visits for children, in a fenced outdoor pen with chicken houses near the barn's future site. Ranch directors say the upgrade will allow instructors to expand their ambitions to include adult-oriented education, including lectures and presentations on environmentally sustainable food growing.

"For the kids, we ID breeds, teach them about life cycles and creating an environment for natural production," Fotherby said. "It's a great learning tool for kids but also a great shift for us as a facility - to become the best in class in sustainable farming and the farm-to-table movement, to host speakers and workshops on the topic."

In addition, the Beckstoffer barn will become a second indoor venue for the ranch, enabling it to more easily host a variety of events in the rainier winter months. Fotherby said the space will host activities for the Harvest Festival in November and Earth Night in April, as well as activities during the ranch's monthly Walk-In Wednesdays.

While Connolly Ranch

has envisioned an indoor poultry center for several years, planning began in earnest after the Beckstoffers visited the center in May 2014.

"We went down there and saw what they were doing, and saw this sea of kids playing with goats, lambs, looking at bugs, looking in the gardens," Andy Beckstoffer recalled.



Andy Beckstoffer

"And I thought to myself, 'Jesus, this is something really interesting and I would like to be a part of it.'"

In July, the couple pledged money for the barn to Connolly Ranch, which hired the Napa architect Terry Tracy - designer of the center's main barn in 1999 - to pen the new building.

Though the barn will carry the name of its benefactor, Beckstoffer said he insisted that the building also acknowledge the farmers of Napa County's wine industry - not only as a tribute but as a call to action as well.

"It is the grapegrowers' barn, and I hope it encourages other grapegrowers to get involved," he said. "This is our (territory) - educating kids to know what being outside and being with animals and growing food is all about."