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Trail Fest celebrates river

Community gathers to raise funds for American River Conservancy

By: Loryll Nicolaisen, Journal Staff Writer
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Coloma-area residents realize what a gem they have in the American River.

The river's churning, gurgling, rushing South Fork provided a proper backdrop for the American River Trail Fest Monday evening at the EarthTrek Expeditions Camp, a fund-raiser for the American River Conservancy.

"The idea behind it is to have a community event and to have the money go to a worthy cause," said Coloma's Kelly Ahola, while having a strawberry painted on her cheek.

Nearby, kids of all ages wielded paintbrushes and contributed to a community painting of a river scene, which was to be auctioned off later in the evening. Last year's painting sold for more than \$600.

"Everybody and anybody gets to help," Ahola said. "The scene is from one of the parcels the ARC has bought. We took a picture from a spot down the river."

The event, in its third year, benefits the American River Conservancy's trail construction projects and critical land purchases along the American River.

Wineries, breweries, restaurants and artists all volunteered their products and wares, said David Martinez, who performed at the event with local band Lumadae. Combine that with an army of volunteers and an equally voluminous crowd of supporters, and you've got quite a party, he said.

"This is an interesting event," Martinez said. "This is put on by people who actually live in the area, putting on a fund-raiser for the conservancy."

This theme of this year's event, "Extending Trails, Connecting People" comes from the idea that residents have access to the land and should be able to put it to good use, he said. Monies from Monday's event are to be directed into developing the area as a multi-use trail system.



Above, Coloma's Julie Leimbach, right, and Mary DeAquino, 9, add their artistic touch to a community painting to be auctioned off during the third-annual American River Trail Fest Monday evening, held at Coloma's EarthTrek Expeditions Camp to raise money for the American River Conservancy.

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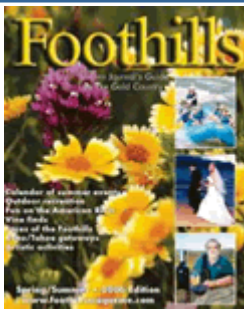
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The American River Conservancy's mission is to protect and enhance natural habitats in the area by acquiring donations of land from willing landowners, event coordinator Howard Penn explained. The River Fest, hosted by the Coloma-Lotus Chamber of Commerce, came about because the conservancy wished to purchase Cronan Ranch property. The community realized the non-profit could use some support.

"We felt it was a very important venue to get behind," Penn said of area business owners. "It's beautiful land, it's a perfect opportunity for us as a community to get it off the developer market. It really is a big, huge community party."

Visit www.arcoconservancy.org for more information.

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