

# Farm Raised

Local youth learn vital skills  
through 4-H Club

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PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE SAKKESTAD

A MediaNews Group NEWSPAPER

Rolling Hills 4-H club members Jimmy Nell, left, and Andy Suit show off a steer they are raising at the farm at McClellan Ranch Preserve.



Rolling Hills 4-H club members, from left, T.J. Suit, Caroline Nell, Rachel Causey, Jimmy Nell and Andy Suit show off steer they are raising at the farm.

# Growing Together

Rolling Hills 4-H members, animals grow up on the farm

By ALLISON WILLIAMS

Photographs by GEORGE SAKKESTAD

**S**ilicon Valley: The technology capital of the world. It's where the top names and innovators in the tech industry come to stay.

But a little ways past Apple's Cupertino campus is McClellan Ranch Preserve, where the air is filled with the bleats of goats.

McClellan Ranch is home to Rolling Hills of Cupertino 4-H club, which includes 180 kids ages 5-18 from Cupertino, Sunnyvale, Los Altos, Mountain View and Campbell. The club usually has a waiting list of about 60 kids every year.

Part of the Santa Clara

County 4-H program and within the University of California 4-H Youth Development Program, Rolling Hills was founded in October 1971. The journey of 4-H as a whole began in the late 1800s with the discovery that adult farmers were unlikely to readily accept new agriculture develop-

ments made at universities.

Research showed, however, that youth were more open to learning new techniques and sharing the new information with adults.

"4-H's learning opportunities are intentionally designed around four essential elements

necessary for positive youth development by providing youth with supervised independence, a sense of belonging with a positive group, a spirit of generosity toward others and a wide variety of opportunities to master

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life challenges," according to the county's 4-H Youth Development website.

### Growing on the farm

Hans Toensfeldt, a co-manager of the ranch, looks after the leased facility and makes sure everything functions. The farm can accommodate steer, sheep, pigs, goats, mini-horses and chickens, and members can sign an agreement and pay a monthly rental fee to raise their animals at the farm.

Toensfeldt has known about the club since its beginning at the preserve. His wife was named to the city of Cupertino's commission assigned to decide what to do with the property. His oldest daughter then joined the club, and more than 40 years later he's helping out at the ranch.

"The reason I'm still in it is because of what it does for the kids," Toensfeldt said, adding that his involvement started as a "honey-do list."

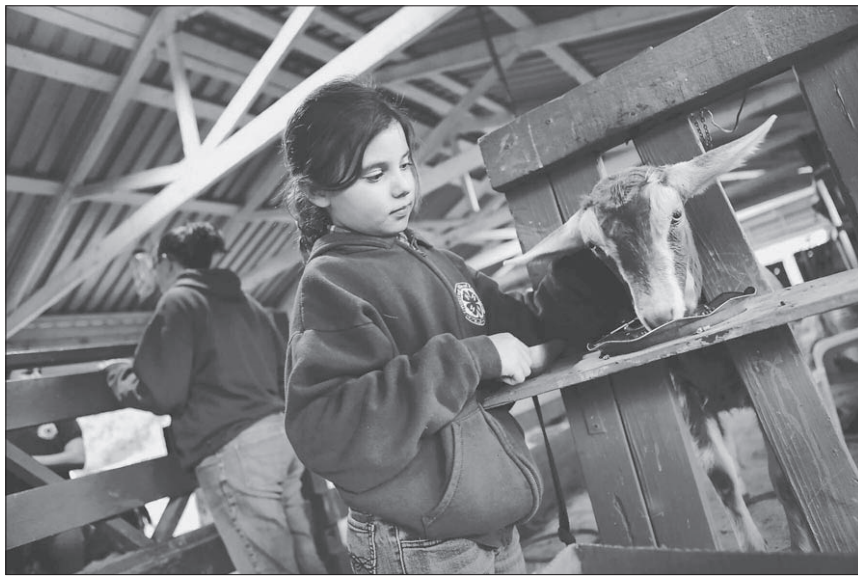
He spent 30 years in the typical Silicon Valley start-up culture and said one of the greatest things about 4-H is that youth learn to be businessmen and businesswomen.

About 15 percent of the Rolling Hills 4-H club are involved with the farm, as a large number of club members participate in other, sometimes non-animal, programs. But the premise of their involvement is the same whether they're at the farm or learning to handle a bow and arrow.

Toensfeldt said members are responsible for their animals. Market animal members buy their animals, raise the animals and take them to auction to sell.

Tiffany Causey's daughter, Rachel, has been involved in 4-H for four years, two of which have been with Rolling Hills.

At 13, Rachel has delivered kids, given inoculations and had a taste of what life may be like as a large animal veterinarian. She's also responsible for buying any accessories she may want for her animals.



Rolling Hills 4-H member Caroline Nell, 11, feeds her dairy goat at McClellan Ranch Preserve. In addition to raising animals, the 4-H club also offers other activities, such as ceramics, cooking and baking and public speaking.



A dairy goat sticks her head out of a pen at the Rolling Hills 4-H club in Cupertino.

The farm also has a sense of community, Tiffany Causey said. The members go to each other, talk about what's happening with their animals and work together to figure out solutions. The members weigh their

animals to make sure they're gaining the correct amount of weight in the appropriate time frame. If the animals aren't, a solution has to be worked out.

"You can't buy that kind of experience," she said.

Rachel has three goats and a steer and is working on getting some market animals. Right now, she's training her goat, Casper, to pull a cart. This is the first year she's decided to breed her animals. With breed-

ing comes finding homes for the kids.

Her favorite part of 4-H? "Being with the animals and showing," said Rachel, who took first place in showmanship at a Santa Cruz fair this year.

Tiffany said that getting Rachel to come to the farm is never hard, but getting her to go home often is. Rachel said she probably spends more time at the farm than necessary, but she likes to spend time with her animals.

While Rachel is somewhat new to 4-H, T.J. Suit is going on nine years as a Rolling Hills 4-H member. In that time he's raised hamsters, guinea pigs, goats, steer, lambs and hogs. He said hogs are his favorite animal to raise.

"They're different," he said. "It's fun to experience something new."

In 2010, he was offered a goat and so began his venture in market animals. He said he plans to be in 4-H until he can't any more.

### Tours

On Nov. 22 while the rain cleared up for the weekend, Rachel Causey had Casper out on his leash, trying to get the goat to walk through a puddle—part of Casper's training and to help him get over an aversion to water. Four young girls and a mom found their way to the farm, and Rachel went into tour guide mode. After telling the girls about Casper and letting them pet him, she took the five on an impromptu tour of the farm.

She explained each animal they came across, from pygmy and pack goats to the steer, miniature horses and chickens. The children laughed, pet the animals and asked questions.

Leading tours is another responsibility for farm members.

Tours take place the second Saturday of each month, but are on hiatus for the rainy months. Regular tours are expected to return in April.

### Not just for the animals

While the farm is a prominent piece of 4-H, other projects include ceramics, public

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Camryn Harvel of the Rolling Hills 4-H club walks her miniature horse, Kelly, around McClellan Ranch Preserve for some afternoon exercise.

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speaking, cooking and baking, dog care and training, entomology, record bookkeeping, wood-working, Lego robotics and knitting. The club also recently added archery, biking, therapy animals and food canning and preserves.

Karen Clayton, co-leader for the pygmy goat program, took the lead on a needlecraft project last year. She said the program wasn't picked

up this year. Clayton said she's been involved for four years and decided to help with the pygmy goat project because of her daughter's involvement.

"I think it teaches them leadership skills," she said, adding that it shows the members that they have a voice.

Rolling Hills 4-H also has a governing board of sorts, with a president, vice presidents, secretaries and other positions filled by members.

Barbara Suit said the board has to have regular meetings, create agendas

and decide on budgets. The members have to work together to make decisions and come to a consensus on issues.

Toensfeldt, the co-ranch manager, said one advantage of a community club is that all members meet once a month, regardless of their individual projects. At each meeting, one member has to give a presentation, offering practice in public speaking.

## Future

The farm and the surrounding preserve is part of Cupertino's Stevens Creek Corridor Master Plan. Toensfeldt said renovations to the barn is upcoming. The next meeting for the master plan is a Cupertino City Council study session scheduled for Dec. 16 at 3 p.m. at Cupertino Community Hall, 10350 Torre Ave.

*For more information on the plan, to provide feedback or sign up for notifications, visit [cupertino.org/index.aspx?page=1256](http://cupertino.org/index.aspx?page=1256). Those interested in signing up for 4-H can visit [cesantaclara.ucanr.edu/Youth\\_Development](http://cesantaclara.ucanr.edu/Youth_Development).*



Rolling Hills 4-H member Rachel Causey gets her neck tickled by a Bantam chicken she is raising at the club's farm at McClellan Ranch Preserve in Cupertino.