

# living in losaltos

m a g a z i n e

Spring/Summer 2015



## On the farm

Hidden Villa offers  
teen apprenticeships

## Welcome to Los Altos

Longtime resident provides  
tips for newcomers

# Food for thought



ELLIE VAN HOUTTE/TOWN CRIER

**It's not all cute and cuddly for teens participating in the eight-week Animal Husbandry Apprenticeship program at Hidden Villa in Los Altos Hills. Mia Mosing of Palo Alto, left, and Sophia Jackson of Los Altos clean the pigpens – one of many activities designed to teach them about caring for farm animals.**

## By Carol Rosen

Special to the Town Crier

**W**hile many teens today can't tear themselves away from computer games and cellphones, some are building confidence and learning to perform sustainable farming practices outdoors.

The local area, formerly known as the Valley of Hearts Delight, used to be covered with orchards. Today, most of that ground supports buildings hosting technical businesses, housing and shopping centers. Technology has surely advanced, but it seems that many local residents don't know or care where their food comes from.

Enter Hidden Villa. Tucked into the mountains at 26870 Moody Road in Los Altos Hills, the 1,600-acre organic farm and nature preserve offers teen apprenticeships for potential farmers. Experienced farmers train teens to be aware of the food they should eat to stay healthy and eventually to work and develop the food that feeds those who work in high-tech and other businesses that sustain the local economy.

The teen apprentices participate for a variety of reasons. Some are seeking information. One, Mary Kruberg, a student at Sacred Heart Preparatory, takes care of farm animals at home and explains that it's really im-

portant "to have base knowledge and know how to act around animals – a lot of people don't actually know how to act around animals."

"I'm interested in how these small, sustainable farms work, and this has helped give me a different perspective on how we can change things in our food system to better help farmers," Kruberg said.

Others are compelled to participate because they love animals.

"It's another chance to be with animals, another chance to be on the farm," said Los Altos resident Sophia Jackson, longtime Hidden Villa camper and Bullis Charter School student. "It's given me a community that loves animals as I do."

## Experience through activity

Eight-week Animal Husbandry Apprenticeships teach teens to take care of animals including pigs, chickens, goats, cows and sheep. Sessions are currently scheduled in the winter and spring, and coordinators plan to continue the afterschool programs next fall and winter.

Hidden Villa Youth Development Coordinator Sid Silverman oversees the apprenticeship program. Although she may look as if she's still a teen herself, she

has a wealth of experience working with youth. A community organizer, Silverman has focused on experiential education and training in teaching traditional farming and food justice.

“I focus on the experience,” she said. “I find that learning through action can result in critical thinking and long-term understanding of actions in larger contexts. It’s important for teens to learn using all five senses.”

The farmers Silverman uses in the program promote youth development and encourage the teens to learn by doing and consequently build greater self-confidence.

“we use farmers to provide an educational experience, to leverage confidence and development (for our apprentices),” she said.

The 14- to 19-year-old teens meet 4-6 p.m. Thursdays over eight weeks. They learn the care of one flock or herd of production animals, including newly hatched chicks, piglets, kids or lambs. The small class size enables Hidden Villa to pair each teen with an experienced farmer to learn to care for one farm area.

“The average age of farmers is 60,” Silverman said. “It’s very important to connect youth with organic, sustainable, small-scale agriculture.”

The group meets promptly at 4 p.m. to check in with each other and Hidden Villa’s livestock representatives. From 4:15 to 5:30, the teens train in animal care. At 5:30, group members can ask questions and discuss their research to demonstrate how each animal’s background

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**Anna Clare Pauker feeds and grooms farm animals during the Agricultural Apprenticeship program at Hidden Villa.**

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complements a sustainable food system. In the last 15 minutes of the session, the teens reflect on their day and participate in a think tank that conceptualizes their work within the larger food system.

The first week of the program they meet a representative for each different animal during a farmwide scavenger hunt.

The second week, Hidden Villa's animal husbandry manager reviews the farm's practices. Then each teen tends to the animal he or she is most interested in.

During weeks three to five, each teen trains with a farmer mentor in how to care for the animals. The final three weeks of the apprenticeship afford opportunities to share what they've learned with fellow apprentices and teach their mentors something about the animals they are responsible for. The last step may require outside research.

The final apprentice session is reserved for a potluck.

### **Summer program**

Hidden Villa's eight-week summer Agricultural Apprenticeship program for 13- to 19-year-olds is scheduled 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays June 15 through Aug. 7.

Teens spend their mornings in the field exploring different techniques of soil augmentation, irrigation, planting,



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**Anna Clare Pauker and fellow Agricultural Apprenticeship program participants record their work at the end of each session.**

training plant growth, sustainable pest management, harvesting and cooking. Afternoons include workshops that connect their field training with scientific and social contexts.

During the sessions, teens examine each stage of production, including botany, biomimicry, crop rotation and crop diversity, and design sustainable food systems. They also participate in Hidden Villa's weekly Community Supported Agriculture potluck and take a marketing analysis field trip to the Los Altos Farmers' Market. Once

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they've completed the program, they are eligible for up to 64 hours of volunteer service time for their work in the fields.

The goals of the apprenticeship program are to build confidence and encourage healthful decision making, according to Silverman. At the same time, it offers teens a refuge from the pressures of school and their daily lives.

"You're kind of removed from everything," Kruberg said. "You can come in here and say you don't really want to do something else, but when you leave, you feel better,

less stressed out."

Jackson added that the energy of the farm allows her to relax as if she were just "vegging" at home.

"If I'm stressed out, I can come here to hang out with the animals or go for a hike," she said. "The energy here is different from anywhere else."

Participant Anna Clare Pauker said it feels like a "mini retreat."

"It relaxes and refreshes you and just makes you a happier, better person after spending time at the farm," she said.

Pauker likes working with the larger animals such as goats and rams, and any animal with fur. But even the farm couldn't alleviate her fear of spiders.

"I like all animals that are furry – except for spiders," she said. "I like working with bigger animals, but there is something to be said about chickens and small animals."