

# Calling All Hands to Blackie's Hay Day!

BY LIDIA WASOWICZ PRINGLE

Organizers of Blackie's Hay Day hope the legendary, swaybacked horse that inspired the family funfest, which ropes in funds for youth library programs will motivate volunteers to race to their side.

The annual country-style fair, which will celebrate its fifth anniversary on September 25, has been kicking up a dust-storm of support. Crowds saddling up, trotting, jumping, grazing or just horsing around Blackie's Pasture have quadrupled in size — to more than 2,000 — since the event's kick-off in 2006 in conjunction with the publication of Blackie's biography.

Now, the unpaid, homegrown talent that originated, organized and operated the fundraiser hopes to round up additional hands to help further refine, revamp and recharge what many already regard as a community tradition.

"We are looking to become a regular volunteer event for local groups and schools. It's a people event, and it takes a lot of people to make it a success," said Stacy Achuck, the 2010 Hay Day co-chair.

"In the next year or two, we will start to re-look at some of the activities, freshen them up, find new, exciting things. I would love to see us bring in a little more of our local farm community. It seems like a natural fit."

Sophia Kingman, publicity chair, offered bales of reasons for hopping on the Hay Day bandwagon.

"The day is fun, but it's also significant because it funds, in its entirety, all the children's and teen's programs of the Belvedere-Tiburon Library. It's a great way for some people, particularly moms, to get their feet wet and volunteer locally," she said.

"What's even more interesting and inspiring is that Blackie's Hay Day is run entirely by local volunteers, and it's an event that was created by a handful of women who set out to do some good in our community but ended up creating a successful, lasting tradition."

The tradition has evolved over the years to suit a wider array of tastes and temperaments.

"We have tried to add things for the five-to-eight-year-old crowd, where in the beginning, we were mainly focused on the toddler set," Achuck said.

The benefit now incorporates pony, mechanical bull and toy tractor rides, a petting zoo, a rock climbing wall and family games, among an array of activities for all ages, and kicks in live entertainment and tasty



ELLIOT KARLAN

Emma and Jackson McFerron enjoy Blackie.

munchies to boot — all of this for just \$10 per person. Children under two and preteens who donate books get in free.

"Last year marked two of our biggest changes to date. The first was the decision to partner with the Bookmobile," Achuck said. "Anyone under the age of 12 that brought a gently used book was given free admission. We then donated the books to the Bookmobile to be handed out to families who couldn't afford books."

The second change exchanged sponsor gift bags for VIP tickets for families in need.

"We work with the Canal Alliance and Reed School to find families who would like to attend but due to financial reasons are unable to," Achuck explained. "We host them with our sponsor families with early entrance, light breakfast, lunch and unlimited activities."

What has stayed in place as firmly as Blackie, which legend has standing in the same spot for 28 years, has been the sponsors' mission: family fun that funds programs to "instill and inspire the love of books in our youth through reading, learning and discovery."

The Hay Day host, the volunteer organization Book-

marks, uses the monies raised to purchase new books and support such library programs as extended hours during school finals weeks; summer reading programs; community service for teens and story time and special performances for younger children.

"Although the event itself doesn't have a 'reading' any more, all the funds go directly to the children's portion of the library, funding all the free programs that are offered there," Achuck said.

The first Hay Day, Sept. 30, 2006, centered around the reading of "The Horse Who Stood Still" by Christopher Cerf and Paige Peterson, a whimsical biography-in-verse of Blackie's turn in the cavalry, rodeo and the picture-perfect pasture he called home for the 28 years of his retirement.

"We were inspired to have a family-oriented fundraiser instead of the all-too-common silent auction/dinner that Bookmarks would put on," said Sonja Bohannon, one of the originators of Blackie's Hay Day. "That year we were evaluating the idea for an event at Blackie's and needed a way to tie the idea in with the library. Next thing we knew, the book was being launched."

The rest, as they say, is history. ☘

**Thank you for making Friday Nights on Main possible. The community would not be able to**