

Living History

WINE AND VITICULTURE SENIOR COURTNEY GILLESPIE INTRODUCES VITICULTURE CURRICULUM TO GRADE SCHOOLERS.

AS THE DEEP TOLL OF THE BRONZE BELL RINGING from the belfry echoes through the valley, a group of schoolchildren make their way up a dirt road headed toward a pristine, white, one-room schoolhouse.

The girls dressed in long, bonneted dresses and the boys in denim pants and plaid shirts, bring to life the Living History Day that the third-grade class from the nearby Santa Ynez Valley Charter School is about to experience.

The Pleasant Valley Schoolhouse, established in 1869, is a labor of love for Tina and Paul McEnroe, who rescued it from demolition and moved it to their home at Rancho La Purisima in the hills of the Santa Ynez Valley to be restored for community use.

Tina McEnroe's roots run deep in both agriculture and education, and she has spent much of her life sharing those passions. In her most recent collaboration with Cal Poly, she partnered with wine and viticulture senior Courtney Gillespie to develop a viticulture curriculum, which is being taught in the vineyard adjacent to the historic Pleasant Valley Schoolhouse.

"In the Cal Poly mantra of Learn by Doing, we are discovering what a wonderful vineyard is all about," said McEnroe, adding that she is in process of getting the curriculum published in the teacher resource guide of the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom program.



Tina McEnroe and Cal Poly wine and viticulture senior Courtney Gillespie with elementary students in the teaching vineyard.

Gillespie recently visited the schoolhouse to help teach the inaugural viticulture lesson. As 19 third-graders rambled throughout the lush green vines, she helped the students identify the intricacies of what they were looking at.

As the students crouched down to inspect the leaves, ladybugs landed on their clothing. Upon closer inspection, they found larvae on the vines — leading Gillespie to explain the beneficial nature of the red-winged insects.

Gillespie and McEnroe created four 20-minute lesson plans about the science of viticulture, including identifying characteristics of grape vines, and they even wrote a song about photosynthesis that will be used in the program.

“It is important to expose children to botany at a young age,” said Gillespie. “Introducing them to viticulture leads them to ask important questions about where their food comes from.”

McEnroe doesn’t miss a beat, sharing the schoolchildren’s wonder in the vineyard, giggling and exploring alongside them. Once the lesson is over, the students are ushered indoors to experience a school day reminiscent of what it was like in the late 1890s.

McEnroe commands their attention, sharing the historic treasures she has collected to make the schoolhouse strikingly authentic to how it once was. Sitting in antique desks, students read out of McGuffey Readers and use handheld slate boards to do math lessons. They divide into two teams to participate in an old-fashioned spelling bee, and later, they share a laugh as a dunce hat is introduced.

The Pleasant Valley Schoolhouse, dating back to 1869, was built in just three days by two neighbors using shiplap. It closed in 1936 and went through several reiterations before ultimately falling into disrepair. The McEnroe’s moved it to their sprawling 1,008-acre cattle ranch in the Santa Ynez Valley in 2006 with the sole intent of restoring it as a gift to the community. Today, it is recognized as a Santa Barbara County Building of Historic Merit.

The couple has strong ties to the community, including Cal Poly. In June, Cal Poly awarded honorary doctorate degrees to them in recognition of their accomplishments and community dedication. Paul McEnroe, who directed the IBM team that developed the barcode, has served as a member of the Cal Poly President’s Advisory Council for 30 years.

Tina McEnroe is a state and national award-winning education specialist, holding a reading specialist teaching credential from UC Santa Barbara and a special education teaching credential from Cal Poly. In 2008 she was the honored alumna of the Cal Poly School of Education.

The McEnroe’s dedication to preservation also pertains to their Rancho La Purisima, which is protected by a conservation easement



(Above) Tina McEnroe in the vineyard.

(Below) Courtney Gillespie teaches students about lady bugs.

in a partnership with the Santa Barbara Land Trust for Santa Barbara County — protecting the agricultural nature of the lands and its wildlife habitat. Tina has also placed conservation easements on her ranches in Monterey County, assuring the preservation of the agricultural lands into perpetuity.

Tina McEnroe plans to continue her relationship with Cal Poly and is working with officials to partner with the Cal Poly Strawberry Center on her farmland in Salinas. She is also seeking to develop a reading lab at Cal Poly similar to one she launched at UC Santa Barbara called the McEnroe Reading & Language Arts Clinic to serve the community’s challenged learners.

“I’ve known Tina for many years, and her energy and enthusiasm are contagious” said College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences Dean Andy Thulin. “She has a true passion for both agriculture and education, and we are so fortunate to partner with her and Paul on these wonderful projects.”