

# Program brings nature to the classroom

By TODD GUILD  
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN  
**SEACLIFF STATE BEACH** — After a 45-minute talk by an expert about monarch butterflies Thursday, a class of second-grade students was brimming with questions. "How old do they get?" asked one student. "How do you tell the difference between a boy and a girl?" another wondered. California State Park interpretive specialist Vonnie Lemke answered their questions using photos and pictures of the orange and black insects and other props.



Todd Guild/Register-Pajaronian

**California State Parks Interpretive Specialist Vonnie Lemke discusses monarch butterflies with a second-grade classroom in Hanford, 175 miles away.**

Teacher Gail Kurtz, the teacher on the other end of the camera in Hanford, said her class has also done video sessions with experts at Plymouth Rock as they studied Thanksgiving, and others on mammals. She said the butterfly talk was a perfect lead-in as her class prepares for a more in-depth study of the insects. "I thought it was fabulous," she said. "There aren't as many opportunities for scientific field trips here in the Central Valley."

Kurtz added that, while she prefers real-life field trips, the video sessions mesh well with a tech-savvy generation accustomed to communicating via electronic devices. "It's nice that we have more options and modalities to learn,"

she said. "It's a wonderful way to engage student learning, rather than just from a book."

On March 6, PORTS was one of six programs to receive the California Association of Museums Superintendent's Award for Excellence in Museum Education.

The sessions — which are free — can be customized for grades kindergarten through 12th grade. They also include study materials to prepare students for the video session.

Organizers are currently aligning the programs with new Common Core State Standards.

Other PORTS programs are found at state parks and beaches throughout California, including Anza Borrego, Crystal Cove, Hearst Castle and

North Coast Redwoods.

The program is supported almost entirely by local nonprofit organizations, and by companies that donate the cameras, computers and other equipment needed to broadcast the classes. Locally, Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks contributed \$17,000 last year.

Lemke, who also occasionally goes to a local park to give a live talk, is one of two interpretive specialists who do as many as four sessions per day.

"This is really a fun job," she said. "They wouldn't get this experience otherwise, and I really feel I have something to share."

"I really feel like I'm doing my part," she added.

For information, visit [www.ports.parks.ca.gov](http://www.ports.parks.ca.gov).



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian file

## Grand opening for Pajaro Park slated for Sunday

Jasmine Arias, 4, (center) and other kids enjoy playing on the new play structures at Pajaro Neighborhood Park in February. A grand opening for the park, located on 24 San Juan Road in Pajaro, will take place Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. The event will feature activities such as soccer, basketball, arts and crafts, performers, a resource fair and free food. Free to the public, the event is put on by Pajaro/Sunny Mesa Community Services District, Together in Pajaro and the Watsonville Family YMCA.

## Water Resource Fair to target conservation

By TARMO HANNULA

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN  
**WATSONVILLE** — The Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency and Pajaro Valley Association of Realtors with the City of Watsonville are presenting a Water Resource Fair on Thursday from 5-8 p.m. at the Heritage Hall, Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. Local vendors and experts in hydrology will bring educational ideas on conservation, drought tolerant landscapes, catchment systems, a demonstration of lawn replacement and more.

The evening of food and education will include a rain dance by the White Hawk Dancers. There will be drawings donated by the vendors. Proceeds of the drawings will benefit the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds water conservation needs. The event marks the third such event that the PV Association of Realtors has collaborated with PVWMA. For information and to get a vendor display table application, contact PVWMA at [taay@pvwater.org](mailto:taay@pvwater.org), [mendiola@pvwater.org](mailto:mendiola@pvwater.org), or call 722-9292. The fairgrounds are at 2601 East Lake Ave. in Watsonville.

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Feb. 28, 10:50 p.m., to Kenna Beth Nest and Casimiro Concepcion-Aceves, Ben Lomond, a 7-pound 8-ounce boy, River.

**SLAVICH**  
March 1, 9:11 a.m., to Angela Maria and Anthony George Slavich, Boulder Creek, a 3-pound 4-ounce boy, Cooper Anthony.

At Sutter Maternity:

**HERNANDEZ**  
March 10, 9 p.m., to Justine Noel Wittwer and Andre Stefan Hernandez of Watsonville, a 6-pound 8-ounce girl, Hayden Cataleya.

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