

From the Pleasant Hill-Martinez Record

GOOD NEIGHBOR: John Muir Association celebrates Muir's 172nd birthday, 40th Earth Day

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To the world, John Muir was many things — naturalist, writer, botanist, co-founder of the Sierra Club — but to the people of Martinez, the Alhambra Valley and Contra Costa County, he was a neighbor and fellow rancher.

And what do you do for a neighbor on his birthday — even if it's his 172nd? Have a party, of course. The John Muir Birthday-Earth Day Celebration, presented by the John Muir Association in partnership with the National Park Service, is set for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, April 17, at the John Muir National Historic Site — Muir's home and garden — at 4202 Alhambra Ave. in Martinez.

For most birthdays, the familiar song, "Happy Birthday," fills the air. But for Muir's birthday, you will be more likely to hear the unmistakable sound of bagpipes. Since naturalist John Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland, the Piedmont Highlanders Drums & Pipes Band will herald the celebration.

And with a day full of activities, I'm sure no one will complain if the party is a few days earlier than Muir's actual birth date (April 21) and Earth Day (April 22).

"This regional celebration drew nearly 2,400 people from all over the Bay Area last year," said Sherida Bush, John Muir Association board member.

And it's perfect for our economic times — admission is free, and there are shuttles to free parking, as well. There will be more than 50 exhibitors, speakers, self-guided tours of the home and grounds, Junior Ranger activities provided by the National Park Service for younger visitors, two silent auctions to benefit the John Muir Association, and lots of music.

Extended Roots, an acoustic band of 13 women from the East Bay area, will perform, and they may even bring along their four-legged band member, Sadie the golden retriever, who squeaks a mean rubber chicken. And local band Spinning Wheel will be playing its brand of bluegrass and old-time country music.

Members of the John Muir family will even be at the party. Great-grandson Michael Muir will be introducing visitors to a horse from his Access Adventure, an organization he began to offer outdoor recreation to people

with disabilities. And great-great-grandson Robert Hanna is on the board of the John Muir Association and will be at the group's booth.

Celebrations like this don't come together out of thin air, so a tip of the hat to all of the volunteers who are working on the event. Thanks, also, to the sponsors that are making it possible, including Allied Waste, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the city of Martinez, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union #302, the Martinez Community Foundation, and Shell Oil's Martinez Refinery.

John Muir (as portrayed by ranger Frank Helling) will be telling tales and cutting cake. Food and drinks will be available for purchase. For more, visit www.johnmuirassociation.org.