Farm Family Friday



CATHERINE AVALONE/NEW HAVEN REGISTER

Bryan Schiano, 3, and Kelsey Carpenter, 6, of Wallingford play in the feed store on Farm Family Friday Nights at Lakeside Farm in Guilford.

At Lakeside Farm, hidden treasure off Route 77 at the foot of Lake Quonnipaug

By Lisa Reisman

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was growing up, her family had a little farmstand on Route 77 in Guilford. Her father was ailing and her mother was working that started this year. three jobs. It fell to her and her in order to help make ends meet.

weeks of school to pick them," the GUILFORD » When Toni Schiano Lakeside Farm owner said on a recent afternoon while preparing for Farm Family Friday, a weekly summer-season evening picnic

Except Lakeside Farm, situfive siblings to tend to vegetables ated just off Route 77 and named for its proximity to Lake Quonni-And strawberries. "We raised paug, offers a unique experience so many strawberries that our that goes far beyond strawberries,

all of us kids out the last two ent, are renowned for their redness inside and out and a luscious sweetness that has the likes of The Marketplace in Guilford and Robert's Food Center in Madison as prime customers.

So how is Lakeside Farm unique? Take the llamas, which are, in a way, what gave the place its start. Toni and her husband Jerry had always taken to the "gentle animals," she said, stand-

teacher Melissa Jones would let which, thanks to a secret ingrediing beside her well-tended boxes of flowers that front the feed store on a recent afternoon. "They don't get in your face, like goats.'

Once they got their first — from Catskill Game Farm - "we worried it was lonely, so we got another, and so on," she said.

When, in 1996, they ac-

quired Lakeside Farm, formerly a 100-year-old dairy farm and then owned by a multimillion-

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aire who used it as a summer getaway, they noticed families stopping to see the llamas and chickens, as well as their pony, rabbits, ostriches and, naturally, a reindeer.

"People are always asking about the animals," Jerry Schiano said to his wife at the time. "We should start a feed store."

That opened in 1999. From there, it's been Lakeside's mission to "constantly improve the farm, said Patty Schiano, Toni's daughter-in-law and manager, from expanding the feed store to transforming the brick coal shed into an airy farmstand.

All of which led to Farm Family Friday. "We've put a lot of work into the farm over the last couple of years and finally we feel like we're ready to introduce it to the public," said the competitive equestrienne and mother of four.

"What a great idea," feed store with her daugh- the pizza.



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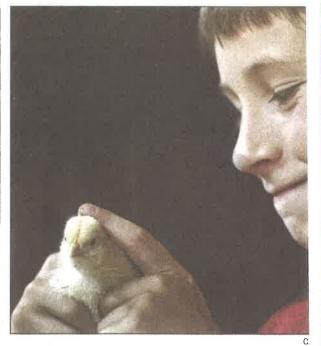
Patty Schiano holds a basket of vegetables on Farm Family Friday Nights, grown at Lakeside Farm in Guilford, near Lake Quonnipaug..

ter Grace in search of a baby chick to keep their egg-laying hen company. "More people absolutely should experience this place."

It's not just the reasonable cost of the dinner lows swooping dreamily - \$3 with a pre-bought ticket for a slice of pizza, hamburger, hot dog, or ice cream — but the tastiness of the fare: the fresh. juicy burgers raised from tured animal each week the beef cows on site, the said Sandy Singer of North home-grown tomato, ba- one week, a rabbit an-Branford, who was in the sil, garlic and peppers on other, brought around for

There's also the cool breeze coming off the lake and the sweet scent of citronella —from plants grown near the farmstand, no less. Even the dragonflies and barn swalaround - "good bugs because they eat bugs," Schiano said - lend the scene a tranquil air.

And, above all, the fea- a leash-trained goat picnickers to pet and ask



Alex Schiano, 11, holds a baby chick in the feed store on Fa Lakeside Farm in North Guilford.

questions about, along with fliers with information and fun facts.

"We also bring out all the different kinds of feed, plus anything from here you would need to take care of it," Schiano said, adding that llamas and chickens will take a star turn in the coming weeks. "It's a great way to get kids in touch with animals they've never seen up close."

Then there's the chance to wander the picturesque grounds: the hav barn redolent of molasses and oats; the gobbling turkeys; the bleating goats; the strutting peacocks with their dazzlingly iridescent tails.

There's also the feed store for every animal from chinchillas to poultry to sheep to horses. And the farmstand for ice cream on a hot day, fruits and vegetables grown on site as well as beef, pork, and chicken eggs raised on the farm.

Not to mention products from local farmers like Pond's Honey and Oliver Scranton's maple syrup. "If they want a stand to sell out of, we welcome that," Schiano said.



Jerry Schlano holds his grai nubian goat nibbles on the 1 Schiano's in the goat barn, Lakeside Farm at 31 Lake D Schiano is Rose, also a boar Avalone/New Haven Registr

simple. "We try to do righ by the farms that rely o us to have the stuff fo them to keep going, an we take pride in giving th customers a good experi ence," Schiano said, as sh crossed the feed room to the cages of baby chick to field the Singers' ques tions.

"You can really tell th difference," Sandy Singe said, in explaining the difference between fresl eggs and store-bough eggs. "It's like having a na In the end, it's pretty tive tomato rather than :



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A llama at Farm Family Friday Nights at Lakeside Farm.