

HAVE A HOT DOG, PET A LLAMA

# 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

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**GUILFORD** » When Toni Schiano was growing up, her family had a little farmstand on Route 77 in Guilford. Her father was ailing and her mother was working three jobs. It fell to her and her five siblings to tend to vegetables in order to help make ends meet.

And strawberries. "We raised so many strawberries that our

teacher Melissa Jones would let all of us kids out the last two weeks of school to pick them," the Lakeside Farm owner said on a recent afternoon while preparing for Farm Family Friday, a weekly summer-season evening picnic that started this year.

Except Lakeside Farm, situated just off Route 77 and named for its proximity to Lake Quonnipaug, offers a unique experience that goes far beyond strawberries,

which, thanks to a secret ingredient, 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-

ing 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 acquired 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,” said Sandy Singer of North Branford, who was in the feed store with her daughter



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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 — \$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 the beef cows on site, the home-grown tomato, basil, garlic and peppers on the pizza.

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 swallows swooping dreamily around — “good bugs because they eat bugs,” Schiano said — lend the scene a tranquil air.

And, above all, the featured animal each week — a leash-trained goat one week, a rabbit another, brought around for picnickers to pet and ask



Alex Schiano, 11, holds a baby chick in the feed store on Farm Family Friday Nights at 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 hay 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.

In the end, it’s pretty



Jerry Schiano holds his grandson while a goat nibbles on the hay in the goat barn at Lakeside Farm at 31 Lake Drive. Schiano is Rose, also a goat. Avalone/New Haven Register

simple. “We try to do right by the farms that rely on us to have the stuff for them to keep going, and we take pride in giving customers a good experience,” Schiano said, as he crossed the feed room to the cages of baby chicks to field the Singers’ questions.

“You can really tell the difference,” Sandy Singer said, in explaining the difference between fresh eggs and store-bought eggs. “It’s like having a native tomato rather than a



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A llama at Farm Family Friday Nights at Lakeside Farm.