

Pine Creek Grist Mill begins a new season

Cynthia Beaudette

of the Muscatine Journal

MUSCATINE, Iowa — Pine Creek is rushing through Wild Cat Den State Park once again and members of the Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill are ready for a new season.

Friends of the Mill, the non-profit group that oversees the preservation of the 160-year-old landmark, have plans for a full schedule of spring school field trips, guided tours and annual activities.

Ken Hyman, vice president of the Friends of the Mill, said approximately 1,000 area students along with their parents and teachers, make field trips to the mill each May.

This year, students from Muscatine, Blue Grass, Louisa-Muscatine and Buffalo have scheduled trips to the mill.

There are no slots left for field trips this year, said Hyman, but this is the time for schools to schedule next year's events, because many schools schedule trips a year in advance.

The trips include a tour of the mill, education in the historic Melpine Country School, grave witching in the Bill Nye pioneer cemetery and learning about the severity of life in pioneer times.

Students also participate in various hands-on activities, such as cutting logs with old crosscut saws and making butter by hand.

Public tours return

Hyman said the Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill have received enough donations to open the Pine Creek Grist Mill to tourists again this season.

"The Friends of the Mill are all volunteers but we have a paid staff of tour guides to keep the doors of the mill open," said Hyman. "We have restored additional machinery and the mill will operate on Saturday and Sunday afternoons."

The mill will be open for tours on weekends throughout May and from Wednesday-Sunday from June to mid-September. Weekend hours will return from mid-September through October.

Hyman said the Friends hope to get the mill's steam engine system working this summer.

"We will not operate with steam," he said. "But the big flywheel will turn and the steam engine will look like it is operating with steam. When this system runs, it is an impressive sight."

Annual events

This year the Friends of the Mill will host the annual mill fundraiser, the Wildcat Den Trail Run on Saturday, Sept. 6. Runners and walkers will travel the park trails on a 5 kilometer race course, which Hyman said makes it a more challenging race than most 5 kilometer races.

The annual Heritage Day celebration takes place the following Saturday, Sept. 13.

"This event showcases the skills needed by the pioneers who built the Pine Creek Grist Mill," said Hyman. "It is very family friendly with lots of hands-on activities."

Hyman said the Friends of the Mill are in need of tour guides and would like to speak to interested persons.

Anyone who has an interest in history, likes talking to people and would like to be a tour guide can call him at 262-9040.

Reporter contact information

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Details

What: Pine Creek Grist Mill historic site

Where: Wild Cat Den State Park

Hours: May — 12:30-4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Memorial Day-mid-September — 12:30-4:30 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday.

Mid September-October — 12:30-4:30 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.