

functioning as a classroom in the 1960s, has been a tourism destination and hub for gatherings, including fire safety and counseling resource meetings post-fire, as well as potlucks and other recreational events.

On a recent afternoon, Kludt met up with several of her neighbors at the schoolhouse to prep for the canyon's big annual event: the 49er Faire, featuring arts and crafts, music, food, gold panning and more.

The group was jovial and shared friendly banter while getting to work. Darlene hammered grommets into a banner. O'Neill affixed patriotic garland to the porch railing. Julia Westlund moved tables and helped the group gather and sort faire gift sale donations, an eclectic mix of items from canyon residents including a handmade shawl, woven basket and a golden lamp made with a bicycle chain.

Westlund grew up in the canyon and attended school there. It was "just like *Little House on the Prairie*," she said. She shared the classroom with about 19 other students in first through sixth grades and recalled them playing on an old horse hitching post out front like it was a set of monkey bars.

It's these deep roots that led her to dedicate her time to the association and preserving the canyon's history—and why she and her husband knew right away that they wanted to rebuild.

"It's a beautiful place to live and it is a great community," she said. "We didn't know where else we would go that we would love as much, so we just decided to take the plunge."

The faire (which happened June 5) is an annual CRHA fundraiser for the Colman Museum and Centerville Schoolhouse. Kludt said the organization is currently raising money to repair the schoolhouse porch and



also seeking volunteer docents for the museum (see infobox).

### Bridging the gap

Walt Schafer has lived in Butte Creek Canyon for 44 years. He and his wife, Kludt, live on 11 acres with a small farm, where they have enjoyed raising llama, alpaca and sheep. They bring in the animals every night to protect them from prowling cougars, Schafer said. He then chuckled to himself, because he's not really known in the city for his small farming venture, but rather as the president of the Honey Run Covered Bridge Association (HRCBA), which has been working diligently to rebuild the historic bridge over Butte Creek after its destruction in the Camp Fire.

The bridge, originally constructed in 1887, became pedestrian-only in 1965 and was the site of countless proposals, weddings, picnics and community events, as well as a popular recreation spot. Not long after the fire, the HRCBA decided to dedicate efforts to rebuilding the beloved bridge. In October 2020, Butte County officially transferred bridge ownership to the association, which is tasked with financing the rebuild with private donations.

Schafer said the group is committed to doing all that it can to rebuild the bridge "because it has been an iconic symbol of beauty,

Walt Schafer (right), president of the Honey Run Covered Bridge Association, celebrates the phase one reconstruction of the historic bridge with an employee of Q&D Construction Company.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WALT SCHAFER

history and community" for many decades.

"It will provide not only a link to the past, but a setting for wonderful new experiences for visitors," he said. "It will represent post-Camp Fire resilience, perseverance and unity for this entire region."

The new bridge will be reconstructed "as close as possible" to the historic original, Schafer said. (It will have to meet current construction standards.) The previous bridge had an emergency sprinkler system, but the power was cut off during the Camp Fire, rendering it useless. The HRCBA is looking into using a water tank or automatic generator to help protect against any future fires.

So far, the association raised \$1.2 million to complete phase one of the rebuild in November 2020, which included construction of foundations, pillars, abutments and slope protection. The engineering plans for the floor and trusses (phase two) were also completed.

The project is currently stalled pending further funding. Schafer said the nonprofit estimates it needs to raise \$1.5 million to complete

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### Support the canyon:

The Centerville Recreation and Historical Association is seeking volunteer docents and raising money to repair the deck of its historic Centerville Schoolhouse. Go to [centervillemuseum.com](http://centervillemuseum.com) or call 530-893-9667 to learn more.

The Honey Run Covered Bridge Association is raising money to cover the cost of the bridge rebuild. Go to [hrccoveredbridge.org](http://hrccoveredbridge.org) to learn more.

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