

NATIONAL DAY OF THE COWBOY

Old West gains new generation of young fans

By Troy Anderson Staff Writer

GRIFFITH PARK

Swirling water around the top of his pan, 5-year-old Louis Santore spotted a golden flake, carefully picked it up and then excitedly jabbed his finger toward his mother, proudly displaying his gold-panning prowess.

"I think it might be real gold," the Los Feliz resident said. "The thing I like about it is that it sparkles. I think I'll find some more gold."

As part of the National Day of the Cowboy and Cowgirl Festival at The Autry National Center on Saturday, junior cowboys like Louis got the chance to not only pan for gold, but watch a trick-roping demonstration, a gunslinging show, enjoy music by the Tumbling Tumbleweeds and tour the museum featuring collections from the American West.

While this was the Autry's first celebration of the National Day of the Cowboy and Cowgirl, the international festival has been observed since 2005 when President George W. Bush issued an official "letter of support" that the fourth Saturday in July be so recognized.

The National Day of the Cowboy Association is now seeking to have the fourth Saturday in July declared a national day to help preserve Western heritage. Support can be registered online at www.nationaldayofthecowboy.com.

"Everybody loves a cowboy because they had a clean spirit and heart and it was a time when a handshake and your word was good enough," said Julie Ann Ream, California spokeswoman for the National Day of the Cowboy. "It's something you just want to keep falling back on and falling back on for comfort. It's like a big hug."

A spitting image of "Buffalo Bill" Cody, Bodfish, Calif., resident Bruce Kratt, dressed in authentic Western garb, said the national day is long overdue.

"We need to preserve this history because so much history is being lost today," said the 67-year-old "Buffalo Bill" Cody re-enactor and historian. "One kid I talked to today didn't even know what a spur is. So fellas like us and ladies like Julie Ann are here to keep it alive."

One of several thousand people who attended the festival, San Diego resident Jaymee Buckley, 10, said she thought "Buffalo Bill" was very interesting and funny.

"I like it over there, too, where you get to ride on the saddle and act like you are in a movie," she said about an amusement ride that gives the riders the impression they are escaping from the bad guys.

"It looks like you are actually there."



John McCoy Staff Photographer

Gunslinger Joey Dillon tosses his shooting irons over his shoulders and behind his back as he thrills the crowd during a celebration of Western heritage.



Blacksmith Bryan Jones brushes off a horseshoe after stamping it with a youngster's name during a festival at the Autry National Center.



Valley Village resident Yotam Barr, 7, at right, ends up roping himself while trying his hand at throwing a lasso. But even a cowboy in the Old West sometimes needed another try.

