

By Marie Wolf

On the East End of Long Island, set back from the blare of honking horns and shrieking tires, supermarkets and office buildings, is a tree-lined compound that goats and chickens, ponies and parrots, llamas and lemurs, alligators, cougars – and a lone buffalo – call home.

Humans know it as the Long Island Game Farm in Manorville – a wildlife park and children's zoo that has been a part of the local landscape for more than 30 years. It's a warm weather destination that's attractive to many because getting there from anywhere on Long Island does not require crossing a bridge or paying a toll for the experience of touching, feeding and being entertained by a host of creatures with names like Gentle Gerry the giraffe and Daniel the llama.

Stay a While

Here on the Farm, visitors can make themselves at home for the day. Take strollers, cameras and pack a hearty picnic lunch – it's actually encouraged, explains co-owner Melinda Novak, who was just 9 years old when her parents, Diane and Stanley, founded the Farm. "We love that. Bring your lunch, hang out, spend the day," Novak, who recalls manning the ticket booth the very first day the Farm opened, has a genuine love for the resident animals. It's evident as she pauses often, petting a llama, greeting the turkeys or admiring the furry family of ring-tailed lemurs from Madagascar. "They are our biggest attraction," she notes, adding that the Novak family intends to "take the Farm to the next level."

With a desire not only to entertain but also to educate young children, the owners plan to implement on-site and in-school programs shar-



Melinda Novak serves up a healthy treat to birthday boy Gentle Gerry at last year's celebration.

ing more information about the Farm's exotic and indigenous animals. Their newest program, Camp Zoo, for kids in grades one through three, begins next month. Week-long sessions will include zoo tours and lectures given by educators, plus arts and crafts, storytelling and sing-alongs. "A little bit of everything related to animals," says Novak.

The Lay of the Land

The farm is situated on a 25-acre plot designed with wide walkways and numerous paths so you can virtually customize your visit, whether the kids want to start their day at Bambiland and walk among the delicate, spotted deer, or head straight for the carousel or the miniature amusement park with carnival-style rides that are suited for the preschool set. And, while the kids take a spin on the cup and saucer or saddle up for a pony ride, parents can sit awhile and watch from the comfort of a park bench or under a shaded straw canopy – a blessing when the temperatures begin to soar. There are also designated areas where children can tend to the newborn animals themselves. In the Nursery, they can bottle-feed the baby goats or move about other parts of the Farm to hand-feed the giraffes and baby bears. Zoo food, which comes in a keepsake sou-

venir cup, can be purchased on the grounds.

Older children will get a kick out of watching the Farm's alligators, who spend their days relaxing in a soothing, Jacuzzi swamp setting. Occasionally, they are lured out of the water by Zoo manager Glen Gilmore for a good-natured alligator tussle followed by a short informational lecture for spectators.

Big Cats on Stage

While you're there, be sure to grab a seat for the Big Cat Encounter show. Returning to entertain audiences for another season, the show features endangered and exotic lions and tigers performing twice a day in the Farm's 500-seat amphitheater. Best of all, there's no extra charge for the show – it's included in the price of the admission ticket.

Families will also be pleased to find clean restrooms with changing tables for baby, beverage machines scattered throughout the park and plenty of shaded areas to put up your feet and enjoy a leisurely lunch.

Be sure to check the Web site for special events taking place throughout the summer, including a birthday celebration in July for Gentle Gerry, a 9-year-old giraffe that already stands 18 feet tall.

Marie Wolf is the editor of Long Island Parenting News.

When You Go...

■ Long Island Game Farm Wildlife Park & Children's Zoo

Chapman Blvd., Manorville (Take the L.I.E. to Exit 70)
631-878-6644

www.longislandgamefarm.com

Gift Shop, Refreshment Stands, Shaded Picnic Areas

■ Hours

Open daily 10am-6pm through Labor Day

■ Admission

\$15.95 adults, \$13.95 children ages 3-11, free 2 and under