Stick Horse Rodeo and open house are June 16; three youth camps kick off in July.

By Darci Tomky
Holyoke Enterprise

Summer is here, and Camp Machasay is gearing up for a fun-filled camp season!

Camp Machasay (pronounced moc-ah-say) is set to kick things off with their kid-favorite Stick Horse Rodeo and an open house Saturday, June 16.

Instead of having the Stick Horse Rodeo at the fair, this year the event will be held at camp, which is located near Amherst, a few miles south of Highway 23 on the state line at 61360 County Road 40.

Kids ages 3-6 are invited to compete in four events—the bucking bronco, barrel racing, flags and goat tail tying—and they'll even get to take home their own stick horse.

Get there early for registration at 9 a.m., with the rodeo beginning at 10 a.m.

Lunch will be served by Jared Anderson's Outback Cooking and Catering from noon-1 p.m.

Community members are invited to stay for the open house from 1-4 p.m. Take a tour of the camp or check out the horse rides and ATV trails. Pheasants Forever will also have their youth trailer at the camp during the open house for some fun with things like archery and rifles.

Camp director Rick Cleaver said this is the 10th summer of operation for Camp Machasay, which is a ministry of Youth Challenge.

In addition to their annual camps, they are organizing an ATV trip Monday-Thursday, June 4-7 at Snowy Range in Wyoming for anyone 14 years and older.

Camp Machasay has three camps planned for this July.

Grades 3-4 will attend the first camp July 9-12. The next week, July 16-19, is the camp for grades 5-7. The third camp for grades 7-9 is July 23-26.

Camp staff noted the youngest camp for third- and fourth-graders is a great opportunity for parents to introduce their elementary-age kids to a safe camp environment for a short period of time.

All three camps follow the same schedule of registration at 10:30 a.m. on Monday and check-out at 10:15 a.m. on Thursday.

“It’s a full schedule,” said Cleaver, with lots of swimming, horseback riding, ATVs, games, activities, the Tradin’ Post, great food and great speakers. New to this year are shooting sports and a new ATV track.

The camp will also do some team games from the Leopold Education Project.

Camp staff said they love to get the kids outdoors to observe nature. “We want them to see creation so they can meet their creator,” said Cleaver.

A different main speaker will be featured each week. Pastor Dean Patterson of Fairfield Covenant Church and Youth Challenge will be there the first week. Pastor Christopher Hessler, associate pastor at Grant, Neb. Evangelical Free Church, will be speaking the second week. The third camp will feature Jack Hager, a nationally-known youth speaker.

The Bible quizzing focus at this summer’s camps will be Matthew 7.

Office manager Amanda LaGrange said the idea of Camp Machasay is important to her because camp is a safe place for kids to come learn about Jesus. “Machasay means refuge.”

Cleaver added it’s important for students to come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. They strive to make disciples who will be good leaders in their schools and communities. “The Gospel is the key,” he said.

Camp Machasay is one of four ministries of Youth Challenge, which was formed in 1988. The other three are Bible quizzing, missions and their Outdoor Adventure ministry.

“Youth Challenge exists to share the gospel with students of all ages,” said Cleaver.

The organization operates completely on donations.

In addition to Cleaver and LaGrange, full-time Youth Challenge staff members include camp manager Mike Frazier, Pastor Dean Patterson and Sonja Cleaver.

They are joined by 30 volunteer camp staffers for each camp in July, making it around a 1-1 ratio for campers to staff members.

Camp Machasay facilities are also available on a donation basis to churches and community groups looking for a retreat location.

For more information about the Stick Horse Rodeo/Open House, the ATV trip or 2012 summer camps, visit youth challenge.us or call 970-854-3863.

Campers can register on the website, as well as apply for scholarships. To get the early bird rate, registration must be completed by May 31.