

## VIEWPOINT

# Movie Night Honors Will Rogers Memory

By DANIELLE GILLESPIE  
Staff Writer

As I stepped out of my car at Will Rogers State Historic Park, I saw a horse galloping across the field as a lone man practiced polo. The sun was about to set, and I inhaled that familiar scent of cut grass.

I glanced around the park to find my husband, Peter, waiting for me on a bench with a wicker picnic basket and blanket.

We decided to meet after work last Friday to attend the third annual movie night hosted by the Will Rogers Ranch Foundation and the Will Rogers Motion Picture Pioneers Foundation. The movie night recognizes the anniversary of Rogers' death, August 15, 1935.

We had never seen a movie starring famed humorist and actor Rogers or spent much time at the park, so we were excited to join hundreds of other moviegoers with their delicious picnic spreads on the lawn adjacent to Rogers' ranch house. Vendors, beneath a red and white umbrella, served hot dogs, pretzels and popcorn for free.

Before the movie began, Rogers' great-granddaughter, Jennifer Rogers-Etcheverry, invited the crowd to join the newly formed Will Rogers Ranch Foundation, which she helped create in order to provide additional funding for the park.

"We have been working hard to keep this park open," Etcheverry said. Earlier this year, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed closing the park as a result of the state's \$17-billion budget deficit. Schwarzenegger has since said he will keep the park open, but funding is still a concern. Betty Rogers, Will's wife, deeded the 186-acre property to the state in 1944.

The foundation hosted a volunteer day to spruce up the park and more than 100 people have joined the foundation, Etcheverry said. Rogers' garage is being converted into a visitor center that will house a gift shop and a theater. The foundation has made a commitment to furnish the gift shop and operate it.

Etcheverry encouraged the group to visit the center once it's complete (most likely in late December), and she then introduced what we were all waiting for, the 1935 movie "Life Begins at 40," directed by George Marshall.

In the movie, Rogers plays Kenesaw H. Clark, owner and editor of the Plain View Citizen newspaper. Rogers is in conflict with the banker (George Barbier) over hiring a young man (Richard Cromwell), who had been wrongfully jailed for robbing a bank.

Rogers sets out to prove the young man's innocence, while a humorous fight against the banker ensues, which includes Rogers' rounding up a bunch of hog-callers to ruin the banker's hog show and political rally.

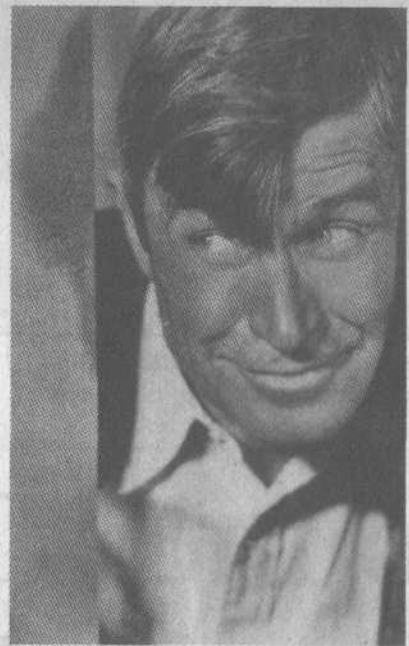
Peter and I (who are in our mid-20s) laughed throughout the movie and were surprised at how relevant the jokes were to our own lives. At one point, Rogers' neighbor, Ida (Jane Darwell), tells him that all the appliances in her kitchen are run by electricity, and Clark responds that technology will become so advanced that kids won't even need to use their arms and legs anymore — just their thumbs.

Occasionally, I glanced up during the movie at Rogers' home, outlined by the soft light of the full moon. I imagined him smiling down on us and feeling proud of his great-granddaughter's efforts to keep this park open for all of us to enjoy.

"We hope to carry on this yearly tradition," Etcheverry said of the movie night.

I hope so, too.

For more information about Will Rogers Ranch Foundation, visit [www.willrogersranchfoundation.org](http://www.willrogersranchfoundation.org) or call 866-688-7487.



Will Rogers