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A helping hand for dads



JERRY LARA/glara@express-news.net

Gregory Berlanga and his daughter, Brianna, 5, enjoy time at Walker Ranch Historic Landmark Park. "I really think that all dads really want to be good fathers," Berlanga says.

► **MELISSA RENTERÍA**
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Brianna Berlanga holds up two leaves to her forehead and places another above her lip.

She's a kitty, the 5-year-old explains before placing the leaves against her father's face to give him some feline features.

"I just really want to be here for my daughter; to connect with her and let her know I'm here," says Gregory Berlanga, a single father who founded the online parenting guide Awesome Dads last year.

Berlanga says he founded the site to help other fathers like him, those who defy the stereotype of deadbeat dads and want to spend quality time with their children.

"I realized that there was no source of helpful information available for dads who really want to take an active role in their children's lives. I created Awesome Dads for fathers who are in search of new ideas and activities to share with their children," says Berlanga, a salesman.

The site, which includes a parenting resource, advice column and events calendar, has partnered with organizations in the city including Big Brothers, Big Sisters and Communities in Schools.

Although Berlanga, 44, is a single dad, the site is meant for all dads.

"I really think that all dads really want to be good fathers. We just want to

EN BREVE

Awesome Dads

WHAT: An online parenting resource and monthly newsletter for dads of all backgrounds.

WHERE: awesomedads.net

FOR MORE: Write to gregoryberlanga@awesomedads.net, or visit awesomedads.net to find out more about monthly meetings and to subscribe to the newsletter.

help them with that by giving them ideas of things to do with their children," says Berlanga, who remains the only manager of the Awesome Dads site despite its recent growth.

The website has led to the creation of an Awesome Dads board of directors. A free monthly newsletter, which launched in late 2009, now has 2,000 subscribers. One of the members of Berlanga's Awesome Dads network has started a meeting on the first Monday of each month so dads could gather to talk about their parenting concerns and activity ideas.

Some of what the dads have learned from each other is that children often don't care what it is they're doing with their dads as long as they're spending time together.

"It's usually the simple things that are remembered most," says Berlanga, who enjoys playing music and doing crafts projects with his daughter.

One of Brianna's favorite activities is "finger painting," she says.