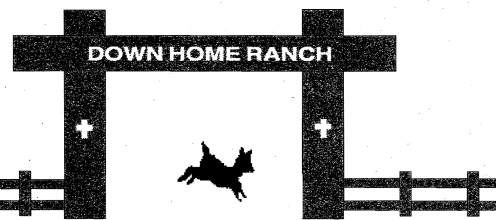


# THE SPIRIT OF DOWN HOME RANCH



July 2000

Vol. 10 No. 2

## Ranch Camp 2000 Initiates New Buildings

The day before Ranch Camp 2000 began the showers in the bunkhouses weren't working, the air conditioning ducts in the Pavilion were dangling in midair and lights still needed to be hung and wired. Just for starters.

Add to the scenario five days of rain (of course!) beginning the Thursday before camp began. But somehow it all came together and the buildings were put into service—although construction work continued even as camp went on.

The bunkhouses and Pavilion make Ranch Camp a far more enjoyable experience for campers and staff alike. For years Ranch Camp has been a popular program, but with marginal facilities. Now we have bathrooms and showers and air conditioning in the bunkhouses, an infirmary for the nurse and a big kitchen for the cooks. More important, we have space for more activities. All in all, it is a wonderful improvement, enjoyed by campers and staff alike.

Many thanks to the RGK Foundation for the lead gift on the Pavilion, and also to the Lola Wright, Hoblitzelle, Cora and Justin Paul Foundations.

## Facilities for Rent

The Ranch is open for your church or family or business to use its facilities: the Pavilion, Camp Center and bunkhouses. You can come with a big group, or or if you just want a place to stay for the night, there is room at the inn.

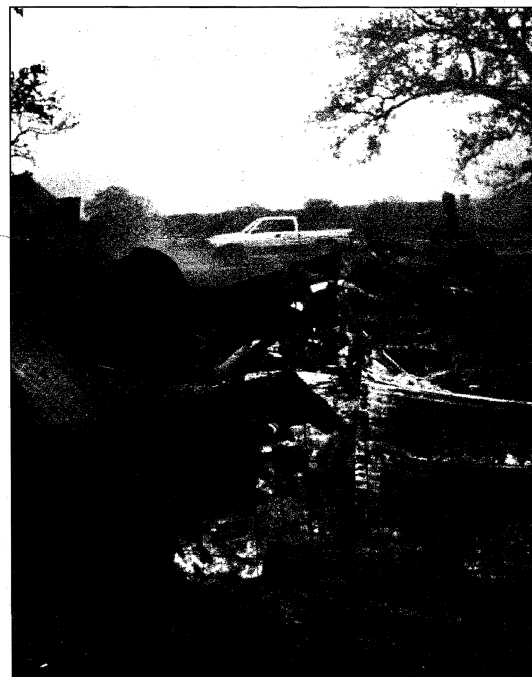
We can sleep 60 in our air-conditioned bunkhouses—not fancy, but clean and comfortable, and the Camp Center is a three bedroom house with kitchen. The dining hall in the Pavilion holds 100, and has a commercial kitchen. There is a 24' above-ground pool to cool the kids off and a basketball hoop to shoot at. The historic Lawhon-Gardener cemetery is fun to visit and you can hike around the property and visit with the donkeys. Many water birds are setting up housekeeping in our new pond, which is close to being filled.

Mainly, the Ranch is quiet, away from the hustle of the city, so if you are interested in our facilities give a call and we'll mail or FAX you a rate sheet.



Lindy Hunt and brother Ron Abramson erect a plaque at the Koi Pond in Sara's Garden constructed with funds from the family. Pond and plaque honor Al Abramson, Ron and Lindie's father, and Dan and Lindie's son Michael, who died in 1996. The plaque reads "Michael and Grandpa, Gone Fishing."

inside



Embers and twisted metal roofing are all that remained of the barn after a direct lightning hit on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 2000.

## Volunteers Make It Happen

It is common for nonprofits to praise volunteers. Why? Because often they are the lifeblood of the organization.

We couldn't hold *Ranch Camp* or the *Yam Bake* without volunteers. Progress would come to a halt.

Without volunteers, no trusses would be up in the Pavilion, the bunkhouses wouldn't be painted, and the greenhouses would still be a pile of trusses and purlins. The Camp Center deck was built and painted by volunteers. The cemetery is kept up by volunteer Scouts. The list goes on.

This issue of *The Spirit* is filled with pictures of just a few of the individuals and groups that come to the Ranch for an hour or a Saturday or a week at a time.

They are the backbone of the Ranch. We honor the work they do.

## director's chair

### Progress

As a sociologist I was cynical about the idea of progress. I still am. I believe that while technology may change, humans remain essentially the same—still struggling with the old issues of sin and redemption.

But here at the Ranch, we get to see a whole lot of the *goodness* of ordinary people. It is one of the best perks we get to enjoy.

Again and again, we see people giving their time and their resources to others. They send money to support the Ranch, join in with work parties, and write to say they are praying for our work and our people.

Businesses and tradesmen donate skills and labor. Aggies with Habitat for Humanity give up weekends to put up trusses in the Pavilion, joined later by nine UT Longhorns. Youngsters from an Austin Jewish congregation labor all day so that disabled kids can enjoy nicely painted bathrooms. Thousands of hours of volunteer labor are donated annually by these good hearted folks.

This work has eroded my old academic cynicism. And well, maybe that's progress after all!

### Grants Awarded

We are very thankful for recent grants awarded to the Ranch.

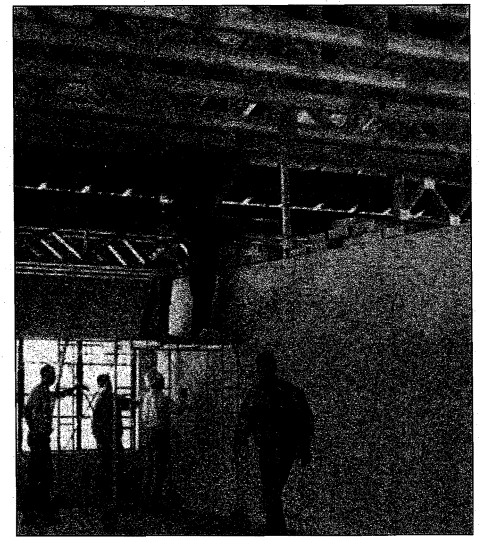
The Cora Foundation of Houston gave \$20,000 for program support and to help build a fishing/boating dock.

The first \$10,000 for VESS House, a duplex for two volunteers, was given by the Strake Foundation of Houston.

The Still Water Foundation of Austin has pledged \$25,000 to complete an architecturally engineered Master Plan.

The ALCOA Foundation awarded a grant of \$11,500 to build an entry way and fencing along FM 619.

In addition, the Ranch received two gifts of \$2,500 each from the Texas Knights of Columbus, via the office of Bishop John McCarthy.



*Students from St. Mary's Catholic Student Center Habitat for Humanity at Texas A&M put up Pavilion trusses on April 1, 2000. The trusses were donated by American Truss System, Houston. The following weekend nine Longhorns from the UT Newman Center joined the Aggies in "raising the roof!"*

### Web Site

Is is still "under construction" but our web site is officially up and running. Take a look at us and send us your comments or suggestions.

Check it out at :  
[www.downhomeranch.com](http://www.downhomeranch.com).

### Summer Doldrums

One of the harsh realities of our Texas summer is that the heat dries up everything, including funds to run the Ranch.

Even as we count our blessings for the new buildings and for the foundation grants, we still worry about the day-to-day financial obligations of running an increasingly costly enterprise.

So, if you have thought about becoming a *Ranch Hand*, and making a monthly contribution, now would be a great time to do so.

But however you choose to help, we thank you for your support of the kids and adults that Down Home Ranch serves.

*You make it possible.*



*Down Home Ranch was happy to have a group of hard working volunteers from Agudas Achium Congregation in Austin. The group spent Mitzvah Day in April helping paint bathrooms, the infirmary and the laundry room in the Pavilion.*

coming soon

### Father Joe Sheldon, RIP

It was during a Board meeting in 1993. We were in an old mobile home, surrounded by 200 acres of land covered in mesquite, mud, and fire ants.

"We've got to get some programs going out here," Fr. Joe piped up. His comment wasn't critical but it energized us, and out of that meeting we did begin programs including *Ranch Camp*, which flourishes today in its sixth year.

Fr. Joe referred to himself as a "holy schemer." He was canny and had a background in accounting, so while his heart rested with the poor and disabled the Ranch serves, he always kept an eye on the bottom line, too. (Not bad attributes in a board member.)

Fr. Joe was beloved by many, most especially his dear wife Mildred—who served with him on the Board during the early critical years—and their sons Mark and Troy.

As a priest Fr. Joe was a happy proclaimer of the Good News. His sermons were to the point, practical, and when he was through you knew what you were supposed to be about if you were going to call yourself a Christian.

Fr. Joe entered into the larger life March 14, 2000 in San Angelo, where he and Mildred had semi-retired (which was as "retired" as we knew Joe would ever be). With thankful hearts we recall his life and service among us and say "Goodbye for now."

### judy's views

Each session I ask the counselors to note funny or touching stories from camp. Here are a few from *Ranch Camp 2000*.

*The big grins on the campers' faces when they realized they really could ride Fox the horse—even trotting!*

Lise

*Norma getting together all the counselors in our bunkhouse and telling each of us how much she loved us.*

Anonymous

*Seeing how Hal conned Spanky into pulling him to supper on the little blue wagon!*

Merrideth

*Having my friend Matthew come to camp with me.*

Eric (Camper)

*Being here with my pal Eric.*

Matthew (Jr. Counselor)

*Hearing Terrie tattle on Luke during closing ceremonies!*

Gay

*Telling Greg, who was very sick to his stomach, that he was a trooper. "Yes," he said wanly, "I really am."*

Judy



*The rolling thunder of the Circleville Harley Riders Club was heard on Saturday, April 8, as 30+ bikers brought over \$2,000 raised for the Ranch through the club's Bunny Run. We are proud of our new friends and hope they'll join us on our Ride for the Yams this fall.*

### Bishop Visits, Joins Advisory Board

On May 18 the Ranch was honored with a visit from The Most Rev. John McCarthy, Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Austin. Bishop McCarthy came to help dedicate the Pavilion, the bunkhouses and the mission they serve.

At the visit Bishop John accepted an invitation from Jerry Horton and Jerry Bramlett, President of the Board, to serve on the Ranch's Advisory Board. A happy notice indeed.

About 85 were on hand to greet the Bishop and to hear Judy Horton sing her song *Canticle for Life*.

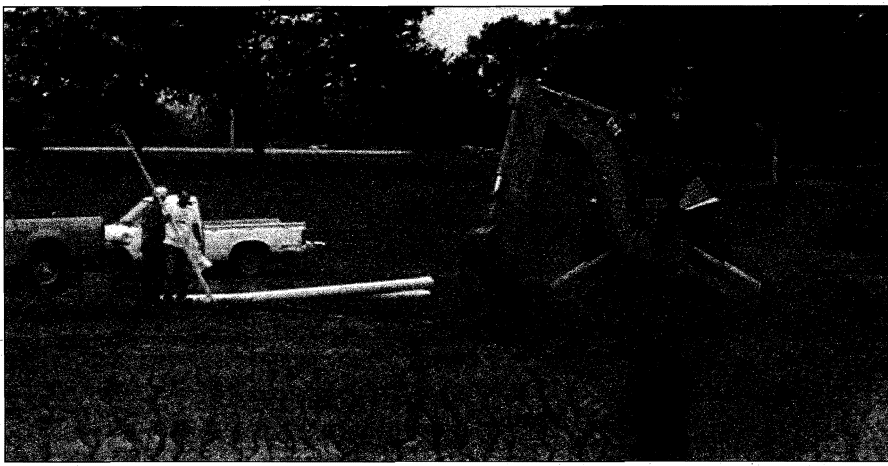
The Bishop's remarks focused on the special role that persons with developmental disabilities play in teaching us all. They are a blessing, not a burden, he advised.

Bishop McCarthy's visit may be the last before his impending retirement—now that Bishop Coadjutor Aymond has been appointed to work with, and eventually succeed, him.

Down Home Ranch has been greatly blessed by the support of Bishop McCarthy and the Diocese of Austin. His appreciation for the work we do and the people we serve has comforted and inspired us through good and hard times alike.



*Don Rettberg (left) brought a group from his NW Kiwanis Club to paint and enjoy some Saturday fellowship. Jeff Churchill (next to Don) was the Habitat for Humanity leader from Texas A & M*



*Mitchell Schroeder (USDA) and Frankie Limmer (Williamson Co. Commissioner, Pct. 4) donate time, materials and expertise to install a dry hydrant in the new pond. The hydrant will make water available to the local community for fighting fires.*

## **Yam Bake Adds On-Line Auction and Ranch Ride To Yam Bake 2000**

We are now seeking items for the Yam Bake 2000 Silent Auction, and going "on line" this fall so folks can look at and bid on items from our Internet site. Items can be inspected and bid on right up until the auction closes at 5:00 PM on Oct. 14, Yam Bake day. If you have items to donate call us at 888-926-2253, or 856-0128 if you are in the (512) area code. We're looking for works of art, jewelry, tour packages, concerts, tack, dinners out—just about anything of value.

Also, this year we're launching the First Annual **Ranch Ride**—a bike ride from and to the Ranch. You can sign up for one of several rides ranging from 1-62 miles. Serious riders can ride the 100 kilometer **Ranch Ride**, but if you want you can join the Hortons for a one-mile "Anyway You Can—Fun Ride", at which everything from donkeys to wheelchairs will be welcome!

Robert Wenske is the inspiration and contact person. We want to make this a big Yam Bake event. Give Robert a call at 281-2642 if you can help. (The routes will be on our website soon.)

Yam Bake will have a new format this year—low ticket prices, with bbq and other food for sale, more things to do and (we hope) Malford Milligan and friends to entertain.

## **DHR Barn Burns**

A barn is an inanimate object, but it was sad to see our rustic barn burn down March 17. It was gone long before the three volunteer fire departments arrived.

The chickens and the cats, not having a place to call home, have taken up residency on the office porch. The donkeys are in a series of temporary pens.



*Students from St. Stephen's Episcopal School help clear rubble from the barn fire and set new temporary gates.*

Our campers love the donkeys and they and our future residents will play a big role in caring for and showing them. We currently have six miniatures—two born at the Ranch—plus one on the way.

A new barn with foaling stalls, wash bays, tack room, classroom, office and other amenities—corrals, vet chutes, paddocks—will be a great blessing. We have plans for the new barn and some money generously donated after the fire, although we're far short of what we need to build. If you or someone you know has a love for long-ears, we could use your help!

organization