



Down Home Ranch

2005: A Year of Progress and Achievement, Tempered by Some Disappointment

Vision

Down Home Ranch seeks to be faithful to the Christian mission to provide for those in need.

Mission

The Ranch is a community for people with mental disabilities, offering housing, training, recreation and dignified employment, as well as opportunities for growth in mind, body and spirit.

Programs

Programs are designed to encourage participation and self-improvement, built on a spirit of "can-do" community teamwork.

— Ranch Camp —

One week summer camps for people with disabilities are days of hayrides, fishing, crafts, games and fellowship. Campers meet new friends and enjoy new challenges.

— Residency —

Job training, Internet surfing, cooking classes, swimming and golf-cart driving lessons are among many choices open to Ranchers. Friendship and community are vital to Ranchers.

— Day Program —

Non-residents get on-the-job training, help in the greenhouses and join in many other Ranch activities.

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When we started 2005 we knew it would be a year of great progress. After all, we had met "The Perfect Challenge" and had funds coming in for a major building program.

Construction had begun the previous fall but in January the slab for the *Learning Center* was poured, followed by *Hickory Lodge*—a four-bedroom cabin deep in the woods.

Sam and his framing crew moved from one job to the next: *Timothy House* for Danny and Mike; *Teresa House* for Kara, Julia and Kelly Horton—moving away from home for the first time; *Benedict House*, a three-bedroom cottage for Judy and Jerry. Elite

Pools started the *Swim Center* pool while Tentmaker Country Homes did the *Fitness Center*. We also had Rustic Cedar Cabins build two more cabins for Resident Volunteers.

Large and small groups of volunteers have come to the Ranch all year long. Dell Computer teams put in over 1,000 hours—much of it skilled labor. Riverbend Church sent over 150 out for a daylong project and the Lower Colorado River Authority had a work day here—wiring and plumbing greenhouses, hanging sheetrock, setting out poinsettias and many other jobs.

Early in the year volunteers from the UT Texas Wranglers, St. Stephen's School, St. Austin's Church and the University Interfaith Council came out on Saturdays to work in the greenhouses, on the Dock House, clearing and burning brush and a host of other activities.

Pat Dallas and his crew from First Baptist Church, Bryan, continued to come over the first Saturday of the month, building the Maintenance Shed, hanging sheetrock and doing a variety of other carpentry work.

We hosted two "Brunch with the Bunch" events in the Pavilion, with 175



January dawn with a pumper truck delivering yard after yard of concrete as work on the Learning Center began in earnest.



Texas A&M's student group ASSIST hosted a Winter Ranch Camp in February. The Aggies planned and carried out a great weekend for 35— and even taught campers the Aggie War Hymn. Longhorns take heed!

in attendance. A tasty brunch was followed by presentations by Judy and Jerry and tours of the many construction projects. At the end our Ranchers sang a rousing chorus of “Thank You Very Much.”

College Mission Week in March was a rousing success, including travel to Llano to dismantle and move two donated greenhouses, along with a 12,000 gallon water tank. The “Llano Greenhouses” as they are now called were re-erected by volunteers, while the LCRA moved and set-up the big water tank—which will be used to capture rainwater off of the larger Nexus greenhouses.

In the spring we held the Ranch RoundUp Charity Golf tournament at Avery Ranch—with over 100 golfers enjoying great weather and a competitive four-man scramble format. (The RoundUp 2006 will be held at Teravista Golf Club in Round Rock, April 21.)

We followed the golf tournament with a rousing success, a Gala at the Texas Disposal System Exotic Game Ranch. Johnny Dee and the Rocket '88s gave a spirited performance that had Down Home Ranchers dancing and



Kelly H., Heidi M. & Kelly J. sing with Johnny Dee and the Rocket 88s at the first annual Down Home Ranch Gala, held at the TDS Exotic Game Ranch.

singing on stage and into the night.

The first group to ever volunteer at Down Home Ranch, The Eastside Group, paid its first visit in years, having a one-day retreat at the Ranch Dock House. Good to see our old friends again.

Volunteers continued coming through the spring: UT Episcopal Students, the Wester family cemetery cleanup, Knight of Columbus men, King of Kings Church and the Kiwanis Key Clubers—providing endless hours of hard work and great progress on many Ranch projects.

In May Ranchers enjoyed a special night at the Round Rock Express baseball game, with the whole gang going down on the field as Michael threw out the first pitch. Hot dogs, popcorn and soda were also a big hit (straying a little from our usually healthy meals).

As summer approached Ranchers were able to take



Fifty-five students from the University of Nebraska, Texas A&M, UT Austin, Texas Tech, Texas Wesleyan, and Sam Houston State served at the Ranch during College Mission Week 2005—giving over 2000 hours of service to the Ranch and the Ranchers with disabilities we serve.

their first swim in the pool, and the Swim Center immediately became the most popular site on campus. Even though the bath/changing rooms and the Fitness Center were still under construction the pool was a big hit. Stephanie was finally able to begin giving swimming lessons for Ranchers, something that has been a goal for many years.

June, of course, means Ranch Camp and this year was no different. Over the summer we held six one-week sessions and served over 250 campers. The theme was Ports of Call, with each week a different place: Italy, Greece, Mexico and other exotic places, with decorations and food in concert with the port.

It was a long and hot summer, with more work and excitement than we wanted.

But wave after wave of campers got to enjoy what

for many is the high point of their year—seeing old and new friends, playing games, fishing, doing all kinds of crafts. And then there is the long-awaited Thursday night dance, with DJ Mike on hand to spin the platters, leaving everyone happily exhausted.

Following soon after Ranch Camp is the fall crop of poinsettias. After a flurry of preparation volunteers potted 12,000 in the first two weeks of August. And hoped.

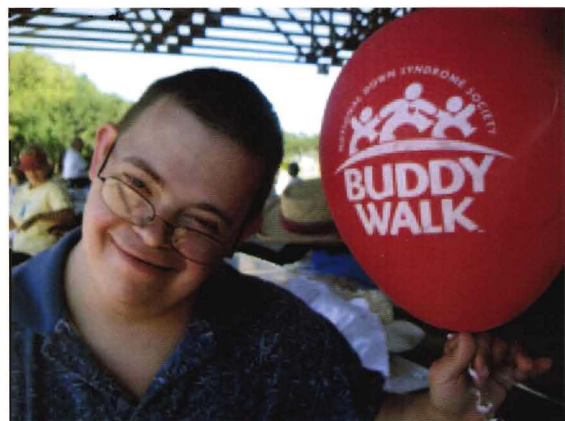


Kelly using the microwave to cook her favorite lunch, a Boca Burger.

On Labor day we added a new special event to our calendar: Swim Fest.

We wanted all of our residents to enjoy a few days of vacation, so we decided to let them help raise money for vacations that are not in the Ranch budget. So we held the first annual Swim Fest.

Each house determined to swim one mile—about 50 laps in our pool—and to ask family and friends to make a \$25 (or more) pledge for their efforts. Sunshine, zany costumes, and great bar-b-cue provided by Teri Daughtry's family



Chris H., who came to live at the Ranch October 1 of this year, enjoyed going to the Buddy Walk and singing with We Are the Chorus.

made for a great day, with many folks enjoying a swim after the event.

Resident and staff changes have punctuated the year. We've said goodbye to Ranchers K.J. and Tyler, but have welcomed Brent and Chris. Resident Volunteer (RV) Sue left for an Arizona monastery but RVs Sarah and Miles joined the staff and veteran RV Brian Loer signed up for a second year!

Stephanie Powers left her Resident Assistant (RA) position in Martha House to become our Program Coordinator. The girls were very sad to see Steph go but quickly warmed to their new RA, Becca Smith, who served as Kelly Horton's buddy at our very first Ranch Camp in 1995! Becca graduated in May from Texas A&M with a degree in Special Education.

The summer and fall saw construction projects continue under Foreman Pat's tireless, dedicated leadership, as we make progress in opening *Timothy House*, *Teresa House* and *Benedict House* before Christmas '05.

In May the Board of Directors agreed to initiate an application to become a Home and Community-Based Services (HCS) "Provider" through the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS)—a long and challenging process.

A great highlight of the fall was when Kelly's friend Sterling Hibbs was elected "King Kat" by Elgin High School Seniors.

We met Sterling when Kelly was 18 months old and he was a new baby (with Down syndrome). Over many years Sterling and Kelly have become an "item" and love going to church together and on dates—usually pizza and a movie—whenever they can.

Seeing Sterling elected Homecoming King was a great thrill for us all, although Kelly muttered "That's making me jealous" upon seeing the pretty Elgin High Queen on Sterling's arm.

And in a truly momentous occasion, Kelly Horton moved to Martha House, experiencing living apart from mom and dad for the first time.

It was a nervous, sometimes teary transition on



Kelly and Mike strike a pose on a field trip to Sweetberry Farms in Lexington. The whole gang spent the morning in a corn-field maze and then took a hay ride on Halloween.



Steve Powers was one of Martha's Mermaids and Jerry Horton was one of the Gabriel Hornblowers at Swim Fest '05, a very big hit.

both sides but Kelly's making a great adjustment and enjoying watching "chick flicks" with Becca, Heidi and Rebekah.

A big disappointment this year was the loss of much of our poinsettia crop. We had 12,000 plants in 6" pots and many developed root problems early on.

Our problems were compounded when we were afflicted with a scorchingly hot September and October, further stressing the young plants.

By mid-October it became apparent that we had serious problems and we halted further sales, hoping to salvage enough to supply those who had already placed their orders.

Since poinsettia sales provide operating funds to get us started in the coming new year, the loss of half our crop is a big blow. Estimates are that we stand to lose up to \$45,000 in fall sales—a real hit for a small non-profit like Down Home Ranch.



Poinsettias that failed to thrive mound up on our compost pile. This is the first time in seven years that we've lost a significant portion of our crop, a very disappointing loss.

residents, a theater for dramatic and performing arts, and a welcome/administration center.

For 15 years we have labored to become a working farm and ranch, with residents, staff, programs, greenhouses and all the rest. Now we are the community we dreamed of. Each person here holds a unique and valued place. Each staff member is here not to earn a paycheck but to answer a call to serve. The Ranch is founded on the principle that we are all equal in the sight of God—equally loved, equally respected, equally able to grow in mind, body, and spirit.

Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers. Despite setbacks, we plan to enjoy a Happy Thanksgiving, a Merry Christmas, and a great New Year. We wish the same for each of you!

Jerry, Judy, Kelly, Danny, Mike, Chris, Linda D., Miles, Becca, Heidi, Rebekah, Brian, LeAnn, Pat, Glynda, Sharon, Rich, Mark, Jared, Brent, Stephanie, Terri, Joe, Linda, Ryan, and Lobo

But we remain confident that we'll get past this challenge and continue on the road of progress. We've had setbacks before, and surely will again. So we'll just trust in Divine Providence and the generosity of friends to see us through.

The coming New Year will bring even more dramatic changes and challenges for the Ranch. The RGK Foundation has issued a challenge grant to finish building the core of our community, including a chapel, more housing for



Members of the prayer order of the Daughters of the King visited the Ranch on several occasions in 2005, seen here K.J., Heidi and Kelly showing off their stitchery projects.

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