



AGREEMENT WITH STATE AGENCY LEADS TO SPUR RANCH PURCHASE

Increases size of Down Home Ranch to 340 acres

In 1990 we purchased the 215 acres that is now Down Home Ranch and got to know our neighbor to the south, the owner of the Spur Ranch, who also had 215 acres. She had asked if we might want to buy her property when she retired, but at the time we owed about \$300,000, had almost no income and couldn't consider taking on more debt.

Our dream way back then was as it is today — we simply wanted to be a small working farm and ranch, with maybe 25 Ranchers (with disabilities) joining a like number of staff and family to raise cattle, grow poinsettias, host summer camps and do the other things one does on a working farm and ranch.

Recently our population grew to 14, with some funded by the State of Texas through the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS). Discussions last fall led to serious talks with DADS staff and the Commissioner and led to an agreement for a different funding formula, as well as capping growth on the Ranch at twenty —

which is an agreeable number to us.

However, we had successfully concluded the Capstone Campaign in '07 and were planning on building housing that would provide homes for 26, which was now precluded by the new agreement.

At the same time we became aware that 73 acres of the old Spur

Ranch was on the market, with the original three-bedroom cabin, a metal barn with two bedrooms and a new brick home with three or four bedrooms. We looked at it and decided that if we couldn't *build* then maybe we could *buy* instead.

So we consulted with the charitable foundation that provided the lead grant for the Capstone Campaign and they too thought it was a good idea. We'd use some of the Capstone funds as a down payment to buy the Spur.

So, on March 19th we closed on the purchase and are now taking full

possession, giving the owners the time they needed to get moved. The addition of the Spur Ranch brings Down Home Ranch to 340 acres,

See page 2...



An aerial photo of the beautiful Spur Ranch — now part of Down Home Ranch!

DON'T FORGET



**Golf Tournament on Friday, May 16th
Charity Gala, Saturday, May 17th**



You don't want to miss it! See page 7 for more information.

SPUR RANCH PURCHASE

continued from page 1

with good (and improving) fenced pastures and hay meadows, a four-stall barn, a house, a cabin, a well and two ponds. We've already put in an all-weather road connecting the two pieces, which now become one single ranch. The day at Down Home Ranch usually starts at the Learning Center, near all the greenhouses, and it was interesting to find that Teresa House in the Village and Joseph House on the Spur are both exactly one-quarter mile away from the Learning Center. A nice healthy walk or an energizing bike ride from both directions! There was an additional bonus that came with the purchase of Spur Ranch ... a herd of Angus cattle.

We immediately hired George and Karen Morgan to serve at DHR: Karen is now serving as Resident Assistant in Joseph House (on the Spur) and George has become our Ranch Wrangler, providing us with the advantage of his years of cattle experience.

We began taking over the new property in April. On the 15th we had a roundup to give our cattle routine care, and moved George and Karen in. On the 20th we welcomed Sterling Hibbs into residency and John Russell joined us on the 23rd.

In the fall, probably on Swim Fest weekend, September 1st, we'll have an open house and give tours of the new, 340-acre Down Home Ranch. We want y'all to come visit.



Peggy Sue, our three-year-old Longhorn heifer, is about to get married — sort of. Elgin Breeding Services is donating two straws (don't ask) of Longhorn semen and Peggy Sue will be gotten in the family way. She wants a calf, and we want a couple of Longhorns to grace our entry. So, we hope she'll calve next spring.



Pete is one of five Quarter Horses donated by the Simicek family. Here he is schmoozing with Michael before moving to Down Home Ranch.



Joseph House, at the Spur, is our newest resident home. Ranchers Sterling and John R. now call it home, along with Karen and George Morgan. Joseph House is the only home at DHR that has a fireplace, so it will be a popular spot on cold winter evenings.



Hickory Lodge (on the right) is used for camps, family overnights, parties and other goings on. Soon, we'll add Post Oak Lodge (going up on the left) to our venues, allowing us to welcome more campers this summer and provide another 16-20 beds for visitors.



Rancher Sterling was atop the squeeze chute on RoundUp day, moving the cattle through to get wormed, inoculated and tagged. Liz and Mark joined Sterling and the rest of the crew. The next roundup will be around May 14th, if you'd like to see how it's done.



The first roundup was held on April 15th, with Thomas and George presiding. We now have one bull, ten cows, and six one-year-olds, with calving season upon us. We're launching a herd improvement program, intent on producing the finest Angus beef we possibly can — for Ranch tables.



Cedar Cabin # 5 will be the home of a Resident Volunteer, Issac Rice, who will be next door to Benedict House, Judy and Jerry's home.

IT'S NOT JUST FOR EQUINES ANYMORE

Yes, there are six stalls in our new barn, but that's not all. We've included a tack room for saddles, feed and other equipment. There's also a bathroom with a shower, a conference/break room and ... Jerry's office. We've also built an apartment upstairs and Brian, our Assistant Grower, lives there. Not your typical barn, but it's the one we have been dreaming of for years, and now it welcomes everyone who comes through our front gate.

In September 2006 over a dozen people from Blythe Island Baptist Church on the East coast of Georgia drove all the way to Down Home Ranch, worked for up to 14 hours a day and left with a barn framed up. This March, another group came back to labor again and to admire the work of their fellow Blythe Islanders. Note the anchor in the round window — it is the Blythe Island Baptist Church logo, and we had it made to show our appreciation for all their hard work.



A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS...



CHANGE

Hericlitus said, around 500 B.C., that “nothing endures but change.” We get comments about how things are changing, or have changed, at the Ranch, but often, being in the midst, we hardly see it. That’s not true today. The changes are so large, so dramatic and important that we all notice them.

The changes include more residents — now up to 16, soon to be 20 — and more staff. RA Karen and Wrangler George, and residents John and Sterling are the newest additions, with two more residents to come. Of course, there’s the addition of the Spur Ranch and Joseph House. Add in a herd of cattle and another barn, a remodeled Pavilion, a completed Sarah House, a new Cedar Cabin, a new Post Oak Lodge and ... conversion to ICF-MR. We’ve expanded to eight sessions of *Ranch Camp* and added a day, so we’ll now close on Saturday instead of Friday. Plus, the barn built by the Blythe Islanders is now in full use and getting ready for Ranch Camp.

But the biggest change is that the Ranch is on the road to being a much more mature, stable organization. The rapid, almost frenetic days of rapid and large construction projects and major growth in population are coming to a close. We’ve still got some construction to do, but no huge, million dollar build-outs.

So now I can begin to turn some of my attention to other projects. We need to pay off the mortgage on the Spur as quickly as possible. This is vital to the Ranch’s economic well-being. We need to increase operating income to meet our greatly expanded services. And, we need to begin the long and hard work of building an endowment fund.

We’ve said over the years that an endowment is the final leg of the stool, the mechanism by which together we can ensure, as best we can, not just the long-term survival of Down Home Ranch but the prosperity of those we serve. I’ll be writing about this in the future and will be asking all — Judy and Jerry included — to consider a major gift or bequest to build an endowment so the Ranch can not just survive but prosper.

It comes as a surprise to Judy and me that we are actually seeing the dream that began 20 years ago come true. I remember Ana Garcia, our personable pediatrician, swooping into the delivery room holding baby Kelly, and pronouncing that “this baby is going to change your lives forever and in ways you cannot imagine. You’re going to have a great time with this kid!” Truer words were never spoken.

It has taken many people over two decades of hard work. But, together we have played a part in changing a little piece of the world for the better. May the changes we have incited endure. *Deo gratias!*



from the
**DIRECTOR'S
CHAIR**

GOTTA GET AWAY AND GET SOME FRESH AIR!



We work pretty hard at Down Home Ranch, but, hey, once in a while we all need to take some time off, relax, kick back and ... jump out of an airplane. On Saturday, April 19th, three DHR staffers helped raise money for the Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas (DSACT) by jumping out of airplanes. The videos of Denise (above), Stephanie and Sandy were so popular when shown the week after that staff and residents were hooting and hollering, and all saying “next year we jump.” Well, we’ll see. It’s a big thrill, and two people with Down syndrome were among the jumpers — each of whom has departed a perfectly good airplane, by jumping out, on several occasions.



We don’t miss many opportunities for a party at DHR, especially not on Valentine’s Day. Here we’re gathering for dinner and dessert.



Jerry’s 4-Runner escaped damage from the nickel to quarter-sized hail in March but the Dynaglass on the greenhouses suffered major damage.

IMPROVED WEBSITE IS IN SIGHT

We have sent out some Requests For Proposals (RFPs) lately, as part of a long-term plan to dramatically upgrade the DHR website. There will be so many changes that we won’t try to enumerate them all, but among them will be easier navigation, Rancher blogs, a resource section with lots of click-throughs to other sites, more detailed information for potential volunteers, better graphics and ... a dedication, including staff assignment, to keeping the site current, fresh, dynamic and interesting. It’s going to be great. We’ll keep you posted.

SPRING HAS SPRUNG AT DHR



Spring color in the form of hanging baskets is moving out of the greenhouses fast. Brian Loer (back to the camera) has done a great job and is becoming a regular greenhouse grower. He also supervises volunteer groups that come out to help.



Jerry and Daniel setting up Danny's laptop at the dorm where Danny lives at Eastern New Mexico University in Roswell. Daniel is in the Food Service program and, fittingly enough, is supported in large part by contributions to the Ranch CHEF — the Continuing & Higher Education Fund. CHEF is designed to help our people with special needs continue to learn, grow and achieve.

THE MISSION PROJECT AND DOWN HOME RANCH: SAME CONCERNS, DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS

Last August we took our residents with Down syndrome to the National Down Syndrome Congress conference in Kansas City, thanks in part to a generous grant from the Trull Foundation.

JUDY'S



VIEWS

There we met a group of parents who had the same concerns about what their children's lives would be when they left high school as we had when we decided to found Down Home Ranch.

Whereas we planned and built Down Home Ranch to be a working farm and ranch, the Mission Project parents decided to make themselves the directors of a non-profit corporation, and to use the natural supports available in their suburban KC community. They planned their project carefully, and selected the suburb of Mission, Kansas.

The parents, with their sons' and daughters' input, drew up key values they wanted to support with their efforts: employment, physical fitness, emotional growth, financial responsibility, independence, self-control, and continued learning.

Jerry and I paid the Mission Project a visit in October to see how it works. Each participant has to have a job — paid or volunteer. One lives in his own condo, but others live sprinkled throughout a large apartment complex. Some share, some live alone, but each is responsible for getting himself or herself up and out in the morning to go to work.

The parents hire drivers for the Project's vans that take the participants to work and activities. They help the participants draw up an activities calendar. Each parent takes a month-long turn being tied to a rotating phone number that makes them available 24/7 in case of emergency, although they report that increasingly the participants handle things themselves. The parents were impressed to learn, for example, that a bout of stomach flu had circulated among the residents, but they had taken turns caring for one another, cleaning up and making chicken noodle soup for their sick friends.

In late April we were blessed with a visit from the Mission Project people. They flew up on Thursday and stayed until Sunday. It was fun getting to know them, and now our Ranchers have some buddies in Kansas to visit and email. Our weekend was just the beginning of an important new relationship. To learn more about the Mission Project, log on to www.themissionproject.org.



Down Home Ranchers and staff make up a pretty big crowd when combined with their new friends from The Mission Project in Kansas.



Julia, from Down Home Ranch, and her new friend Ellen, from the Mission Project in Mission, Kansas.

TAKING A BREAK TO VOLUNTEER

Usually we can look on the school calendar to figure out when Spring Break is occurring. But this year we had three in a row!

Starting March 16th we welcomed 35 men of the Pi Kappa Phi fraternity, sent by PUSH America in Atlanta, for a week of hard labor, great accomplishments and a lot of fun. The men came from the University of Oklahoma, UT Austin, UT Tyler, Truman State, Indiana University, UT Arlington, Northern Illinois University and Texas Christian University.

Joining the PUSH men were five RV rigs, with husbands and wives from Campers On Mission (COM) who came for a second year in a row to help with construction projects. This year the COM men built six 12' by 12' stalls in our new barn — a major accomplishment that we've been waiting for some help to complete.

Meanwhile, the women cooked for all the PUSH men, for the COM men and — on a couple of occasions — for everybody else at the Ranch.

The COM crew stayed for a second week after the PUSH men left, working on all the projects Don and Pat had lined up.

Then, on March 23rd, a contingent of 15 folks from Blythe Island Church in Georgia arrived — after an 18-hour road trip — and jumped into the fray. These volunteers were members of the same church as the people who built our barn in '06. They enjoyed the first trip so much they just had to come back for more missionary work and fellowship.

Spring Break 2008 was three weeks of never ceasing work and a whole host of accomplishments. But, we had a lot of fun too — sitting in the hot tub to soothe tired muscles, playing silly games in the Pavilion or just swapping war stories after a day of labor.

Thanks to all these good people for helping move us forward! We couldn't do it without them.



Carole Strayhorn paid a visit to Down Home Ranch in March and got a warm welcome from Julia. The former Mayor of Austin and Texas Comptroller has a big heart for people with special needs and we were glad that Board member Mike Blair was able to arrange a visit.



The new barn got a big boost when men with Campers On Mission built six interior horse stalls and began construction on the outside stalls. The guys did a very professional job, and horses Magic, Bubba, Smokey and Traveler are enjoying their new digs.



The men of Pi Kappa Phi came from colleges and universities all over the U.S., and worked through rain and mud to set fence posts, stretch barbed wire, build decks and do whatever else was before them. Thanks to these terrific young men and to PUSH America for helping us build a great place for people with special needs.



We took the Campers On Mission to City Cafe, in Elgin, to thank them for all the work they did while here.

GOLF TOURNAMENT ON MAY 16TH & CHARITY GALA, MAY 17TH

If you don't have it on your calendar, get it on now. The Down Home Ranch Annual Golf Tournament & Charity Gala is almost here.

The mild spring days we've been enjoying lately mean that it's time to hit the links. Join us as we play in teams of four at the ShadowGlen Golf Club. Everything is included — green fees, carts, range balls, dinner and drink tickets. It's all for charity, so of course there will be prizes for all manner of feats, including putting and drives.

Friday, May 16, 2008 is a four-person scramble, with an 11:30 am putting contest and 1:30 pm tee-time at ShadowGlen Golf Club, on Hwy. 290 E, in Manor. We'll be awarding prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd, closest-to-the-pin, longest drive and the putting contest.

The next day, May 17th, we'll be hosting an evening of song and dance, our biggest event of the year.

Before dinner, you'll tour the Texas Disposal Systems Exotic Game Ranch near Creedmore, South of Austin, and spend some time with magnificent four-legged friends, including antelope, zebras and the odd giraffe. There will also be skeet shooting, closest-to-the-pin and wine tasting thanks to Fall Creek Vineyards. It's the kind of evening you can only find in Texas.

Visit our website to review the silent and live auction items, and get ready to bid prices up! Then we'll enjoy Nolan Ryan Steaks, garlic mashed potatoes and all the trimmings, thanks to the generosity of the acclaimed South Side Market in Elgin! Yumm.

Then we boogie to the retro rock and roll of our favorite band: Johnny Dee and the Rocket 88's, and our Ranchers have their best night of the year.

There's still time to be a sponsor or donate a silent auction item or get tickets. But don't wait. Time is running out.



Don't miss the music of Johnny Dee and the Rocket 88's!

The Ranch Round Up would not be possible without Underwriters and Sponsors. A special thanks to these major donors.

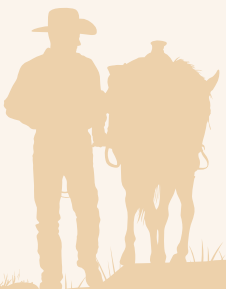
THE FISCHER FAMILY



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PARTNERS MAKE
IT POSSIBLE



CAMP 2008 COMING DOWN THE TRACK

In May 2007 Down Home Ranch was featured in *People* magazine, with a weekly circulation of 3.75 million people. The week after our issue hit the stands, it seemed every one of them had written, called, or emailed us. This resulted in hundreds of new contacts. One was from a mom in Tennessee: "I've got a son with Down syndrome and he wants to come to camp. Do you have any openings? We'll get in the car and bring him today."

Alas, we had to tell her we were booked up for the summer, but to plan for next year.

Well, "next year" is here, and we're gearing up for a great summer of eight weeks of new, improved and enlarged *Ranch Camp*.

Some of the changes include the building of Post Oak Lodge, a new cabin (and twin of Hickory Lodge) that will sleep 20 or more, giving us

the capacity to serve more campers. We've also closed in the Pavilion, and added three large rooms, one of them able to be partitioned into two. We'll have more space for arts and crafts, games, dances and whatever else we want to do.

We're building a canopy roof over the

Pavilion entry so that campers and their gear can get into the building quickly, sheltered from the inevitable rain that seems to grace every opening day of camp. We poured a slab for a basketball/sport court behind the Pavilion that will be covered by the time camp begins, so the pick-up games that seem to go on 24/7 can continue.

Another new wrinkle that will make parents happy is that we've gone to a full week of camp: Instead of ending on Friday afternoon, camp will now end Saturday at noon. This should make things easier for working parents and other caregivers.

Session One kicks things off on June 1st, and the summer season ends August 16th. Respite camp weekends will resume in September for those who just can't go another 51 weeks without a dose of camp.

And, you bet, we'll be welcoming a bunch of new campers from around Texas and the nation — including one from Tennessee!

Our web site will have all the information you need. Visit www.downhomeranch.org for the most up-to-date camp information and schedules.



Archery anyone? This is just one of the many things we do at Ranch Camp. We also swim, fish, kayak, ride horses, take nature walks, create a little drama, make crafts, and have a party EVERY night!

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