



THE SPIRIT of DOWN HOME RANCH

DECEMBER 2016

LOOKING FORWARD, GLANCING BACK

By Judy Horton

Autumn stirs memories—of good times and hard, happy and sad.

This fall marks 25 years since Jerry, Kelly, and I moved onto the land where we would build our dream of a loving community created to lift up the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and those of us who live with, love, and work with them. The memories wash over me.

Kelly was just a spunky six-year old. It would be years before she needed anything more than family and friends, but we knew that after high school her life would come to a screeching halt. We'd seen it: no schedule, no purpose, nothing outside the home waiting for her. What then?

We decided to do something. We were wise to start early, beginning with nothing but 215 mortgaged acres, a tiny mobile home, and a dream. Today, Down Home Ranch is that community, that dream come true. No one is more amazed than Jerry and me.

There have been times of rapid change: the first greenhouses to go up, the barn burning down, the Pavilion being built, of our first two Ranchers, and the two who arrived last month. Today we're 39 Ranchers and about the same number of staff, living and working together on the ranch.

In a few weeks we'll welcome four new Ranchers for a total of 42 living in 13 homes. We will have reached capacity and our community will be complete. This will mark the beginning of a time of transition for the Ranch.

That little kindergartener who became the first child with Down syndrome to have full inclusion in Thrall ISD is now 32. I am 74 and Jerry is 78. Though challenges remain, others will have to meet them. Fortunately, we can count on the Ranch's amazing staff and Board to keep the dream alive.



It won't be easy. They will have to cope with dwindling funds from public sources coupled with greater restrictions on any funding that remains. The government has never made it easy to live as a person with an intellectual disability and in recent years, in the name of "reform," it has made it even more difficult. Places like Down Home Ranch are no longer a "preferred model," despite being cost-effective, safe, and desired by many people with IDs and their families.

The biggest single challenge before us is to consolidate the gains we have made. We must refine, improve, and stabilize our policies, training, and implementation of program goals for our Ranchers. This is an opportunity we have never really enjoyed before, and we look

forward to greater satisfaction for all as we enter this new phase of development.

We are confident that we can meet this challenge and justify the faith that you and so many others—foundations, churches, businesses, volunteers—have placed in us over the years. We had the idea, but you made it possible. You can read about it in the pages of this newsletter.

We are ever grateful.

THE MERRY MEN OF BARNABAS

by Judy Horton

Barnabas House opened in 2006 and was named for Paul's companion. (People consistently misspell it "BarnabUs," but it's BarnabAs, a pet peeve of mine!)

We had sort of romantic notion early on of "companionship" being the theme of this particular house, with visions of the guys forming chummy friendships, going fishing together, and happily barbecuing in the back yard at the end of the day.

But, as my grandma used to say, "Man proposes and God disposes." Irony wins out and Barnabas became the home of six unique, wonderful men who live about as separate lives as possible, each following his own light on his own path.

First there's **Matt**, a sweet guy who began coming to Ranch Camp with his friend Mark. Everything about Matt is quiet. He doesn't talk much and when he does you have to lean forward to hear him. He goes about his business silently and slowly, listening to music through his earphones.

At the opposite extreme is **Sterling**. Sterling is generally up before dawn and out and about on his golf cart making the rounds. He checks in at different houses,

sometimes helping rouse lazy Ranchers out of their beds, sampling other RAs' cooking, gossiping cheerfully and planning the day.

Andrew is my "Polish Professor of Philosophy." Tall, bespectacled, and bearded with his hands folded behind his back, he appears poised to deliver a lecture at any moment. Andrew loves to bake, fish, and paint lovely pictures of various species of trout. He paints other subjects on occasion, but trout is definitely his specialty.

Cody is our youngest Rancher. Cody got to know the Ranch volunteering with his dad, who brings heavy equipment out on Texas Chainsaw Manicure days and manages the burn piles with his huge dozers. Cody has a mischievous and somewhat mysterious smile and loves palling around with Sterling, Mark, and Mike.

Alan is a loner through and through; he would rather work in the garden than do almost anything else. He loves the peace and solitude, moving among the plants with quiet dignity and grace. When Alan's mom found the Ranch and requested residency, I called his group home provider to chat about Alan's needs and habits. "Worst thing

Alan will ever do," he said, "is other people's chores." (True to form, Alan continues to finish off his housemates' chores.)

Clyde came to DHR after living in a local group home. He met our Ranchers at a dance, got sweet on one in particular, and as soon as we had an opening requested to move here. He's never been sorry (and neither have we) even though that first relationship did not work out. Now he's formally engaged to the love of his life who lives in a nearby town. They plan to marry next March with the blessing and support of her family. Because of arbitrary funding restrictions imposed by the government, Clyde and Ashley most likely will not be allowed to live on the ranch premises, which they both would like to do.

It takes an exceptional RA to thread together the different facets of these interesting personalities to create a home. The Ranch found just the person in Ashley Flemming, a Down Home Ranch veteran. Ashley is a veritable Energizer Bunny (a nickname she earned at the age of five), able to meet the needs of each of these unique personalities in an amazing way.



(clockwise from top left)
Andrew on the cruise; Matt says "hello;" Alan works the field; Cody and Casey; Clyde fishin' the pond; Sterling works on hay day; Ashley, the Barnabas RA



Coming Soon...

You get to make a lot of choices in your life. You choose your career and what type of education you want to pursue. You choose your hobbies and your interests; what sports you want to play and what groups and organizations you want to join.

We believe that people with intellectual disabilities should be able to make these same choices. They have varied interests and ambitions, just like everyone else, and we want to provide our Ranchers with the opportunity and freedom to follow their individual dreams. To that end, we are introducing the "Creating Choices" monthly giving program at Down Home Ranch. Stay tuned! We'll be sending out more information soon.



DOWN HOME RANCH WELCOMES SIX NEW RANCHERS!

We'd like to introduce you to the newest members of our family.

Orin moved into Timothy House, a two-person cottage, and was recently joined by **John**, who is retired from his job with the federal government in Washington, D.C. Orin has lived and worked on ranches in Florida and Georgia, where his parents are livestock consultants, and arrived with his own ATV to help him in his work.

Brian moved into Sarah House, where Michael (our first official resident who has lived at the Ranch for 15 years) has been living for some time.

Sonya joined the ladies in Teresa House last spring. She settled in quickly and loves her big room in her new home.

More recently, **Alex** moved into Teresa House. She spent many years with her

parents, who are house-parents at the famous Hershey School in Hershey, PA. Alex adores animals and making new friends.

Neal is the first new resident of Gabriel House and wishes the last four ranchers to

be added to our population would hurry up and come. He gets along fine with RA Shirley but they both look forward to making the Ranch family complete.

Welcome all!

(left to right) Alex, Neal, Orin, John, Sonya and Brian



COLONEL DON RETTBERG PASSES

by Judy Horton

Col. Don Rettberg who, with his wife Jo and son Don Jr., mentored hundreds of families of children with Down syndrome in Central Texas, died from complications of treatment for cancer last February in Macedonia, OH, where he and his family moved after four decades in Austin.

Jerry and I flew up for his funeral mass, as we were one of those families whose lives were graced by Don and his wife Jo, who became our lifelong friends. Jo visited us in the hospital after Kelly was born. She brought scrapbooks showing little Donny's exciting life and accomplishments, and did so much to dispel the fear and anxiety we were feeling. The family played a big role (largely unknown to them) in our decision to embrace the Catholic faith.

Whereas Jo was and remains a calming,

gracious presence, by contrast the Colonel was a doer, a whirlwind of activity advocating for the programs, legislation, and services that would enhance our children's lives. Together they were quite a force. The Rettbergs became enthusiastic supporters of Down Home Ranch, although never entertaining thoughts of Don Jr. living here. Last July, when the Colonel was interred with honors at Arlington National Cemetery, Jerry and I flew out to attend the service. We are forever indebted to this remarkable man, to Jo, and to Don Jr. for travelling with us on our journey. There is none to replace him.

To learn more about the life of Colonel Don F. Rettberg, read his obituary at: www.legacy.com/obituaries/statesman/obituary.aspx?pid=177896720

A GENEROUS BIKER

Tom Helbig biked from southern California to Florida, stopping by DHR as he visited communities serving people with intellectual disabilities while raising money

for Special Olympics and the communities he stayed with. Residents and staff jumped on their bikes, trikes and golf carts to salute him as he resumed his journey.



MEMORIAL BENCH

Sara's Garden at DHR has a lovely new focal point in a bench commissioned by long-time Ranch friend and former Board President Genie Sorensen. The bench is in memory of Genie's husband Wayne Sorensen, who died on Ash Wednesday in 2015, shortly after receiving anointing and ashes. It also commemorates Genie's sister Margaret, known as Marbie, who loved Ranch Camp with a passion unmatched by any other camper.

The bench was designed and built in the DHR woodshop with help from Ranchers. It was installed among three young trees – an oak and two mountain laurels – facing the koi pond and featuring good views of the Gazebo and the large pond.

We are so grateful to Genie for all she and Wayne have done for the Ranch, and for entrusting DHR with Marbie's happy, enthusiastic presence.

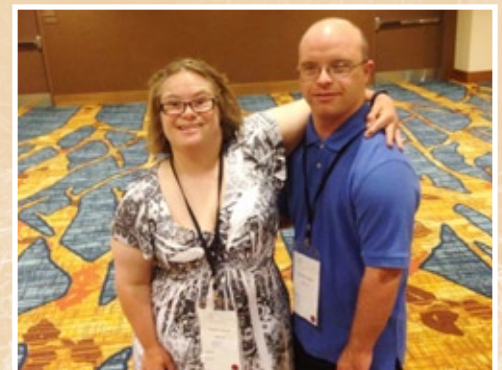
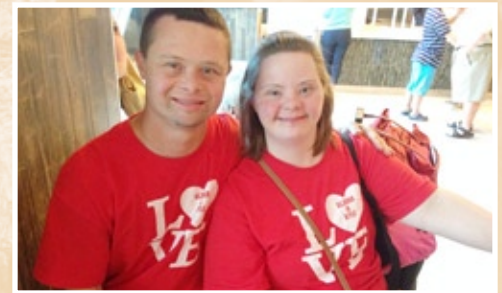


VISITING THE TEXAS ADVOCATES CONFERENCE & NATIONAL DOWN SYNDROME CONGRESS

by Lizzie Arnold

Attending events like the Texas Advocates Conference and the National Down Syndrome Congress is a great opportunity for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) and those impacted by individuals with ID. After participating in these conferences we return home with an invigorated spirit, ready to handle daily tasks with a fresh, creative mind, armed with more

effective ways to serve our Residents. These conferences delve into the mental processes people with disabilities experience, while explaining these processes in layman's terms. I am so thankful to work for an organization who sends their employees and residents to these conferences. The knowledge gained is invaluable and I hope to attend more in the future!



MR. MARIN AND MS. BURNS GO TO WASHINGTON

Jerry Horton, Founder and former Executive Director of Down Home Ranch, travelled with Director of Client Services Casey Dickerson, Day Hab Assistant Daniel Marin and Rancher Julia Burns to the Home and Community-Based Services Annual Conference in Washington, DC in late August.

Mr. Horton has played an instrumental role in focusing national attention on federal and state government regulatory moves designed to restrict residential options for adults with intellectual disabilities (IDs) and their families. He has worked with the Coalition for Community Choice (coalitionforcommunitychoice.org) and

more recently with Together for Choice, an emerging coalition calling attention to this serious issue.

Ms. Burns and Mr. Marin served on the Self-Advocates Supporting Intentional Communities panel as to their experiences living in an intentional ranch community setting. Mr. Marin currently works as a full-time day habilitation assistant at Down Home Ranch. Ms. Burns differs with her family, saying, "They're city people, you know, but I like the country."

Ms. Burns has previously testified on issues affecting adults with IDs before the Texas Health and Human Services Committee.



GAINING TRACTION

Last spring, the DHR leadership team started learning a new management system called "Traction," based on the innovative book by Gino Wickman. This past summer, employees from all areas of the Ranch began working with trainers. During training we learned how to focus on what is most important for the sustainability and success of DHR.

One of our key tasks was to define the mission statement of DHR and the things that make our company unique. After a lot of deliberation and careful thought, we chose to define our purpose as "To Elevate the Lives of People with Intellectual Disabilities."

As a team, we feel the most important thing we do is help each of our Ranchers meet their own goals achieve their full potential. Through the Traction program we will continue to encourage employees to define their most important tasks. They will be able to focus on those direct needs and, in return, reduce stress. We are excited about beginning this program and seeing how we can elevate the lives of all of us at Down Home Ranch!



WINEDALE

A contingent from the Ranch picnicked on the grounds of Shakespeare at Winedale prior to attending a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. The performances never disappoint our Shakespeare devotees, though Kelly Horton sobbed bitterly at the end when the beautiful young lovers expired.



This is the 25th anniversary of our moving to the land that would become Down Home Ranch on September 9, 1991.

Nothing looks the same. Not just because the Ranch now stands where only mesquite and a dilapidated barn stood before, but because I see it all with changed eyes and a changed soul. I have come to know this land

so intimately that I talk to the trees as though they were old friends. Several autumns came and went before I began to anticipate the lush native grasses that I now so love. I know when to expect which birds to arrive and listen to the Sandhill cranes headed for the coast far overhead. (They sound like whoopee cushions).

Our first Halloween we invited friends from St. George's to come out with their kids. We bobbed for apples, played hide-and-seek in the yard, and put on a play in the barn based on the Bible story of the Witch of Endor.

Our friend Richard crammed himself into a long narrow wooden box to play the part of Samuel. I was the witch (my witch laugh is a specialty) and Jerry played Saul. When Richard suddenly arose out of box the little kids sitting on the hay bales began to shriek and flee.

It was great fun.

So many people have come and gone, though some have stayed, especially the campers who became residents. Of our 38 Ranchers, 17 first came as campers, eight to the very first sessions held, in 1993. (One camper that first year is now full-time staff).

And the volunteers! Suffice it to say that without our great volunteers, half of the grand schemes Jerry hatched could never have come to fulfillment.

Yam Bakes came and went – all day country festivals with music, games, barbecue (of course) prepared by the Sacred Heart Knights of Columbus and a dunking booth.

I could, of course, write a book about it all and hopefully I will when the transition is complete.

Thank you for everything.

JUDY'S



VIEW'S

COMMUNITY CENTER COMPLETED

The Verandah, Down Home Ranch's new community center, was officially inaugurated in October at an official ribbon cutting by the Elgin Chamber of Commerce. Board President Gary Holliday and Ranch Manager Scott Ragan, construction manager on the project, jointly wielded the enormous scissors while eager Ranchers, Staff and Chamber members looked on.

The Verandah was funded by the Karakin Foundation and designed by Jerry Horton and architect Gary Bellomy, with

enthusiastic help from Ranchers during a brain-storming design meeting. Once considerations of budget and function were clarified and contained, the beautiful U-shaped building gradually came into being.

The Verandah has a full kitchen, nurse's station and infirmary, and two "big rooms" – a large living room with multiple sofas and dining area, and a rec room, for which Jay's parents Ann and Dave Jordan donated the outsized television. The infirmary proved

invaluable in keeping our sick Ranchers isolated and comfortable during the recent rounds of a stomach virus.

Judy Horton and Glenda Ross completed the first phase of decorating and furniture acquisition. Next will be walls and floors, but the building is already attractive and habitable as is.

Kelly Horton's birthday party was the first celebrated in The Verandah, the first of many happy occasions to be commemorated in this beautiful building.

NEW HOUSES

In February of 2016, Down Home Ranch began a new chapter of housing options for our Ranchers. Our first group of three Ranchers moved into their very own micro-homes in the Village. Later in the year we were also able to reopen Timothy and Sarah houses. The microhouses are home to one rancher each, while Timothy and Sarah are home to two Ranchers each. Over the summer, we began inviting new Ranchers to move into Gabriel House. We are excited to have had 6 new Ranchers move in with us this year. Once Gabriel house is full, we will be home to 42 Ranchers in the Village and our houses in Elgin.

CAN YOU HELP?

DHR is a big place, and it takes a lot to keep it running. Can you help us by donating any of the items below?

- new or used large capacity vehicles
- new or used small pickup trucks
- new or used tractor
- new or used riding lawnmower
- volunteers to work classes: yoga, music, woodworking, cooking, computer
- passes for sports and theatrical events
- baking and cooking supplies
- "hi-low" (high interest/low reading level) books

- feed for cattle
- ladders of all sizes
- new water hoses
- tire machine and air jack for vehicles
- shop supplies: hand towels, rags, hand soap, lubricants, etc.
- pool table for Community Center
- arcade games for Community Center
- juke box for Community Center
- maintenance supplies and barn tools: hard rakes, hoes, shovels, gloves, picks, hand tools, and hammers
- manure spreader, 2-wheeled wheel barrows, lead ropes, tarps, pitch forks

Thank you!



This page, clockwise from bottom left: one of the tiny houses being built; tiny house being moved; Sunnybrook group; framing new houses. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Verandah ribbon cutting; big thanks from DHR; volunteers from TRUECar; volunteers from Build America; Judy, Gigi and Elgin Chamber of Commerce President Gena Carter.



SUNNYBROOK VOLUNTEERS BUILD TINY HOUSES

One day last spring Rebekah ran through the Village shouting “Sunnybrook is back! Sunnybrook is back!” as our wonderful friends from Sunnybrook Church in Stillwater, OK, began rolling onto the Ranch, marking their eighth volunteer pilgrimage. This year, over 70 members of the church showed up – an all-time record.

These visits were inspired by ten-year-old Willa, daughter of Dan and Rona. Willa has Down syndrome. Rona became inspired by the vision of Down Home Ranch when Willa was still very small (so small she played atop the giant floor drum brought by the music therapist who accompanied the group to lead drumming meditations

for our Ranchers!)

Every year, Ranch Manager Scott and his crew dream up projects for Sunnybrook. They are uniquely qualified, competent in all aspects of building. The Sooner volunteers have done everything from finishing out the barn to renovating the bunkhouses and the Pavilion dining room.

We’d already built three micro-homes to house Jim, Eliza, and Tom – what to do now? Build two tiny houses, half the size, to squeeze between them. The Sunnybrook men got busy, assisted by Ranchers.

Each tiny house consists of a mere 110 square feet of floor space, and sports a single bunk bed, microwave, and full bath. They

are air-conditioned and comfy and enable staff or visitors needing to stay overnight at the Ranch to do so. They will also provide housing for interns such as Louise and Rebekah, who came from Australia last July to work with our Ranchers and learn about alternative housing options for adults with intellectual disabilities.

As usual, we closed the visit with a rousing party such as only Sunnybrook can put on! We’ve been invited to haul all those interested north to OK for a visit, and we are ready and willing to head north whenever we can work out the details. We’re already looking forward to next year’s visit, making plans for fun, fellowship, and friendship.

THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

Austin Pond Society
Boy Scouts of America
Build America (a.k.a. The Ability Experience)
Dell Computer
First Baptist Church Youth, Lexington
First Convenience Bank, Elgin
First Presbyterian Church Youth, Tyler
Hendrickson HS Boys Soccer Team
Kiwanis Club
Knights of Columbus, St. Catherine’s Church

Lago Vista HS Boys Baseball Team
PCSI - Professional Contract Services Inc.
Regents School, Austin (7th & 8th grade)
St. Gregorios Orthodox Church Youth, Austin
St. Patrick’s Catholic Church Youth, Hutto
Sunnybrook Christian Church, Stillwater, OK
Texas A&M Horticulture Students
Texas A&M Forest Service
Thorndale HS Senior Class
Thorndale NJHS

Thrall MS Student Council
Thrall NJHS
Trinity Episcopal School, Austin (7th grade)
TRUECar
U.T. Texas Lonestars
U.T. Texas Wranglers
U.T.S.A. Voices
Young Men’s Service League

...plus many, many individuals and families. We couldn’t do it without you!

We couldn't do it without you!



COMMUNITY DEFINED AND DENIED

Judy Horton

When Kelly was born in 1984, early childhood intervention services were just coming on line. We were fortunate to be visited in our home when Kelly was five weeks old by Madeline Sutherland, who created the Infant-Parent Training Program in Travis County.

As big sister Martha danced slowly in place while holding baby Kelly, Madeline nodded at them and said, "What Martha is doing right now is infant stimulation." She said that babies with Down syndrome can meet their early childhood milestones with the targeted assistance of therapies designed to help them. Moreover, parents could learn the techniques to apply.

Kelly thrived in the IPTP. Besides the practical help and encouragement, being able to meet the other families of little ones with disabilities was invaluable. We initially met in training classes and soon we were attending one another's birthday parties. We became a community of love and support. We could be together without explanation, celebrating our babies' progress.

Together, these families went on to build a beautiful Center for the children. There were play spaces, therapy rooms, and spaces for parent training. By then Kelly had graduated, but Jerry helped with the fundraising and we made sure she had a tile on the wall.

Several years later, I met the mother of a young baby with Down syndrome. I asked her about the program and she said, "Oh, once a month somebody comes out to the house and checks on her; but, we're not even going to bother with that anymore." "Didn't she attend the center?" I asked.

Then I learned of the changes that had taken place and effectively dismantled the IPTP program in the name of "inclusion."

"Inclusion" meant "serving the child in his/her natural setting." Babies were visited in their homes or day care centers. Some settings were good, but many were simply dreadful. Visits were infrequent because therapists now spent most of their time on the road traveling from one place to another, instead of being able to work with the children all day in a richly appointed setting built to address their needs. They could carry little equipment and few supplies. Costs skyrocketed, effectiveness plummeted. Parents once more were isolated from one another.

It was the first chill wind to blow, hinting of changes that would soon affect people with disabilities of all ages. The federal

government, which provides funds for housing and care for people with intellectual disabilities, dictates to the states how they will manage the resources received. The Centers for Medicaid/Medicare Services in Washington has now determined that adults with intellectual disabilities may not live in settings like Down Home Ranch and receive waiver funds.

In 2007, DHR was serving seven adults under HCS waivers. Each of them had chosen to live at the Ranch, in most cases having first attended Ranch Camp for years. We were informed that under new rules, the Ranch would no longer be eligible to offer HCS services on Ranch property.

Fortunately, the state agreed to allow these Ranchers to put their waivers in cold storage, as it were, and live at the Ranch under our new Intermediate Care Facility for Mentally Retarded (now ICF-IDD) licensure. If they leave the Ranch they may reactivate their waiver. We were and remain grateful for this unusual accommodation.

Nevertheless, the question remains: What benefit is it to any person or family for the state – federal, state, or local – to limit the choices available in determining what residential model is best for themselves or their child?

The Ranch currently offers HCS services in Elgin. The Ranchers that live there come to the Ranch every day to work and attend Day Hab, yet they miss out on one of the most important aspects of community life at the Ranch. In the neighborhoods where they live people are polite but distant, indifferent at best regarding the presence of what is essentially a small business with four unrelated people living next door. They do not invite our Ranchers to dinner or out to a ball game. They may be unsure of how to relate to these odd neighbors or even a little afraid of them. In any case they are busy with their own lives.

How different things are at the Ranch! In the evenings Ranchers and staff alike visit one another, enjoying a game of catch on the Village roads, or a bowl of popcorn and a good movie with friends. Or, they may just sit on the porch of the Verandah House and enjoy the evening breeze.

To learn more about the final rule and attempts of communities similar to Down Home Ranch to ensure full choice for all people with IDD's and their families, please go to:

- coalitionforcommunitychoice.org
- togetherforchoice.net



BOARD MEMBERS:

Gary Holliday- Chairman of the Board
Randy Ziehe- Board Member
Martha Adams- Board Member
Scottie Holton- Board Member

ADMINISTRATION & STAFF:

Judy Horton Founder/Director Emerita
Craig Russell Interim Executive Director
Casey Dickerson Director of Client Services/QIDP
Annette Ragan Director of Administration
Scott Ragan Ranch Manager
Elizabeth Arnold RA Anderson House
Kelly Bien RA Wilderness Trail House
Kelly Clarke Development Assistant
Staci Denny RA Teresa House
Rosemary Drake Resident Assistant Supervisor
Terri Duderstadt Registered Nurse
Cami Erickson Kitchen Manager
Ashley Fleming RA Barnabas House
Cassie Franke Gardener
Jacquie Gallagher Bookkeeper
Matthew Hall Assistant Grower
Steve Hall Operations Assistant
Laura Hanson Driver/Day PRN
Carol Johnston RA Independent Living
Shirley Jeune RA Gabriel House
Brian Loer Head Grower
Danny Marin Program Specialist
Lydia Pugh RA Isaiah House
Shawn Rapoza Operations Specialist
Naomi Russell Animal Care Specialist
John Sanderson Client Services Assistant
Pat Tatroe Ranch Foreman
Angie Torres Program Specialist
Brad Zipoy Groundskeeper
Laura Zipoy Ranch Receptionist

20250 FM 619
Elgin, Texas 78621

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phone: 888.926.2253
fax: 512.856.0256
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DownHomeRanch.org
info@downhomeranch.org