



# THE SPIRIT of DOWN HOME RANCH

MAY 2017

## KEEPING THE DREAM ALIVE

by Laura Zipoy, Administrative Coordinator

Almost 30 years ago, Jerry and Judy Horton had a dream. The inspiration for this dream was their darling toddler Kelly, born with Down syndrome.

Spunky Kelly lived at home with her doting parents and three adoring older sisters. She was well cared for and, upon turning school-age, she became the first full-inclusion student at Thrall ISD. The Hortons saw to it that Kelly's childhood environment was both enriching and nurturing. However, when Jerry and Judy pondered the future and what might come for Kelly once she entered adulthood, they grew concerned. The Hortons, just like many parents of children with disabilities, wondered what kind of life Kelly would have once she became an adult. Where would she be safe? Where would she find opportunities to grow and learn?

The Hortons dreamed of a community of opportunity — a place in the country shared by people with and without intellectual disabilities. People in this community lived and worked side-by-side. They were paid for their work and found the work to be as meaningful as it was necessary.

Just as the prophet in the ancient book of Habakkuk was instructed to write down his vision to make it plain for all to see, Jerry and Judy were inspired to share their dream in a short story they entitled *Once Upon A Time*. In this fable that foreshadowed what would become Down Home Ranch, they envisioned “a community and a home and a happy source of work and income for all who chose to live there — especially those persons with Down syndrome (and other intellectual disabilities) for whom the Ranch was the home they would otherwise not have.”

Through the persistence, faith, and determination of the Hortons and many others who believed in their dream, Down Home Ranch began in earnest when it was incorporated in 1989. Over the years, the Ranch grew from a summer camp for people

with special needs into an ever-growing residential community for adults with intellectual disabilities. Down Home Ranch is a fable no more — it's become a real 410-acre working Texas ranch and a home for 39 people with various intellectual disabilities and a similar number of staff who choose to live and work alongside them. The residents (we call them “Ranchers”) help run the Ranch and enjoy the training, employment and friendships that are an integral part of living in this exceptional community.

For more than 25 years, Jerry and Judy Horton relentlessly pursued the dream of Down Home Ranch. Today, the Ranch is a place where everyone is encouraged to explore opportunities for growth and development “while learning to be productive, reliant, resourceful, and reliable,” precisely the life that the Hortons described when they wrote their visionary tale.

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# KEEPING THE DREAM ALIVE, CONTINUED

This past January, after decades of hard work, the Founders announced that they were retiring from their leadership roles. The Hortons have repeatedly expressed their sincere appreciation for the many, many people who helped “breathe life into the Ranch through their work, their gifts, and their prayers” over the past 27 years.

Jerry and Judy have passed the torch to a very competent leadership team and a staff of talented, dedicated and caring individuals who want nothing more than to keep the Hortons’ dream alive.

Director of Programs and Behavioral Services **Barry Hamilton** notes, “I am consistently inspired by what has been created here at Down Home Ranch. My hope is to encourage the creativity of the staff we have in Day Habilitation, to provide an excellent level of care and increase opportunities for the individuals we support.”

Director of Ranch Operations **Scott Ragan** takes Down Home Ranch’s mission statement of elevating the lives of people with intellectual disabilities to heart by striving to “help our Ranchers obtain things that we seem to take for granted.”

**Annette Ragan**, Director of Administration, explains that what inspires her most about Down Home Ranch is “the smiles, the hugs, the unconditional love, and the true appreciation I receive from the 39 souls I serve.”

Executive Director **Craig Russell**, who oversees the organization, is particularly grateful for the staff who works 24/7, 365 days a year, caring for the Ranchers. He appreciates the work each staff member

does to make Down Home Ranch great. He reminds us that, “without the commitment, creativity, and dedication of the staff, we would not be the thriving organization we are today.”

The Ranchers’ long-time Case Manager is **Casey Dickerson**, who also serves as DHR’s Director of Residential Services. Casey’s vision is clear: “My goal for keeping Judy’s and Jerry’s vision alive is to continue building a community where all feel welcome and we can continue to learn and grow together.”

Jerry and Judy are widely admired for their steadfast determination and the decades of work that created the wonderful, thriving community that is Down Home Ranch, and they continue to advocate for those with intellectual disabilities. The unique and vibrant community they founded lives on as a testimony to the tenacity and dedication that grew from their fervent love for their daughter, Kelly.

In the closing to *Once Upon A Time*, the authors ask, “Utopia, you say? Did you know that ‘utopia’ means ‘no place?’ Non-existent. That aptly describes Down Home Ranch: it doesn’t exist. It is still a dream, a vision of a future-to-be. Utopia.” Thankfully, that is the case no longer. The dream born in the hearts of two loving parents has grown to fruition. It lives on and continues to inspire hope for countless individuals whose lives are touched by those with intellectual disabilities.





## CAN YOU HELP?

In May and early June we need volunteers to help us pick the blackberries used to make DHR's famous, delicious blackberry jelly sold in our Garden & Gift Shop. We are also on the lookout for folks with special skills (electrical, plumbing, carpentry, grounds-keeping, etc.) who might be willing to lend a helping hand. With 410 acres to manage, our Director of Ranch Operations, Scott Ragan, says there is always something to be done! Interested volunteers can simply print, complete, and return the Volunteer Application found on our website [www.downhomeranch.org](http://www.downhomeranch.org). If you have additional questions about volunteer work call Laura Z. at 512-856-0128 or email her at [lauraz@downhomeranch.org](mailto:lauraz@downhomeranch.org).



counterclockwise from top left: Gabriel House today; Gabriel House in 2002; Michael, Judy, Kelly, Daniel and Eric (l to r); Ranch Camp in 1995

## HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED!

by Judy Horton

In the beginning (1991, to be exact) Jerry and Judy Horton hauled a small mobile home to the property that would become Down Home Ranch. They moved in and posted a sign with the name "Mustard Seed" over the front door. They had faith that if they put everything they had into this project — building a home and a community for their daughter with Down syndrome — God would bless their efforts.

In the uncertainty following 9/11, Jerry and Judy wondered whether it was wise to begin the planned residency program. They decided to take another leap of faith and welcomed the Ranch's first permanent residents, Michael and Daniel. On November 1, 2001, the guys moved into the old Camp Center and made Down Home Ranch their new home.

In 2002, Amy and Eric, the young couple serving as the Ranch's first resident assistants, learned they were going to have a baby. But when Amy had a difficult time with the pregnancy, the couple decided to move back to Houston. Judy and Jerry decided that, given the uncertainty in the economy following the September attacks, it might be wise to take over the first house themselves. Fortunately, Gabriel House was nearing completion.

Mr. Pat (who still works at Down Home Ranch!) worked hard, volunteers helped out, and even Jerry pitched in to insulate and sheetrock. Finally, with money provided by the Meadows Foundation, the house was completed and the Horton family moved in with the three "Original Ranchers" — Michael, Danny, and Kelly.

Daniel and Michael were best friends in high school and original participants in Ranch Camp, which started in 1995. Michael is a cut-up and quite the mimic. (His riffs on Italian opera are hilarious.) Daniel, on the other hand, is more serious, given to collecting baseball cards and memorizing facts about American history. The conversation at the dinner table was lively, to say the least!

Daughter Kelly, the youngest Gabriel House resident, was finishing up high school as a senior at Taylor High. She is an engaging and well-mannered young lady with typical teenage interests: cute boys, pizza, movies, and the senior prom. She is learning the ropes and becoming a fully-fledged Rancher. And, as she likes to say, she is the original "aspiration" for the Ranch. She tells visitors proudly, "I found the Ranch!"

In short order, Martha House was added to the growing Village. Chris moved into Gabriel House and Kelly moved into Martha House where she was joined by three other girls. All enjoyed living among friends, trying their hand at Special Olympics sports, and weekends filled with Saturday night dances and Sunday afternoon picnics. At that time, they hoped to add at least 25 more residents into the DHR community.

In 2004 Barnabas House opened, followed by Teresa House in 2005. Soon four more homes opened in the fast-growing community: Isaiah House, Joseph House, and the two satellite houses in Taylor and Elgin. Today, the Ranch looks forward to welcoming its 40th Rancher!

Today, three Ranchers live independently in their own tiny houses, and four live in two-man cottages — Timothy House and Sarah House. Michael now lives in the latter, while Daniel has graduated to full-time program staff. Kelly still enjoys living in Martha house.

The Ranch, no longer a fledgling organization, now receives national recognition. Parents of children with disabilities from all over the nation come out to visit, looking for the inspiration and education they need to create their own special communities.

Sometimes it seems as if the more things change, the more they stay the same. That certainly seems to be the case at DHR. Each year has welcomed new facilities and additional housing and great opportunities. But, one thing will always remain the same: faith in the Ranch community.

# WELCOME BACK SUNNYBROOK

by Laura Zipoy, Administrative Coordinator

Rona Tracy, a member of Sunnybrook Christian Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma, visited DHR several years ago, soon after she and her husband Dan welcomed their daughter Willa into the world and learned that she has Down syndrome. Rona says that her visit to the Ranch “symbolized hope and a future for us.” Filled with enthusiasm to advance the mission of the Ranch, Rona invited others from her church to come to Texas and experience for themselves the sense of family, community, and harmony enjoyed by all those who live and work at DHR. Sunnybrook Church’s annual mission trip to DHR was born.

For the past eight years, Sunnybrook Christian Church has brought over 40 different families to DHR for week-long volunteer retreats. This March, 56 Sunnybrookers (six repeat families and three new families) spent several days leading fun Rancher activities and participating in service projects all over the Ranch. Some led art projects and games with the Ranchers while others reorganized and redecorated some of the Ranchers’ rooms. The children collected eggs from our ever-expanding flock of chickens and helped with the animals, including feeding and grooming the miniature horses and donkeys. Other volunteers replaced panels on the front of our greenhouses, built a cart in the woodshop, and helped build a retaining wall from railroad ties in the Village. Still more volunteers helped out in the kitchen, preparing meals and making jelly from DHR blackberries and mustang grapes. A couple of talented women with sewing skills spent about 30 hours embroidering names and unique designs on new bath towels, which were presented as special gifts to all 39 of our Ranchers! Our to-do lists were a lot smaller after their annual visit, and we couldn’t be more grateful.

The Sunnybrook volunteers have become DHR family as the bonds of friendship have strengthened year after year. Development Associate Gigi Ross was heard to say, “When they walk in the door, it’s like they’ve come home!” The volunteers are always organized and ready to help out, no matter what task they tackle. They personify teamwork, working diligently from sun-up until sun-down with cheerful spirits.

When asked why Sunnybrook keeps coming back year after year to help out at DHR, Rona said, “The Ranch is a wonderful place to learn and teach acceptance, and to experience the truth that we are all more alike than different. It’s a great place to experience life as it should be...focused on loving God and one another.”



## THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

Austin Pond Society  
Boy Scouts of America  
Charles Schwab & Co  
Dell Computer  
Dell Technologies  
Great Hills Baptist Church  
NW Kiwanis Club  
Regents School of Austin (7th and 8th graders)  
Sunnybrook Christian Church, Stillwater, OK  
Texas A&M Forest Service  
Thorndale NJHS (7th & 8th graders)  
Trinity Episcopal School (7th graders)  
U.T. Texas Wranglers

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



This page, top to bottom: a Sunnybrook youngster makes friends with one of our hens; Sonya poses with two Sunnybrook volunteers; Rebekah dances with a group from Sunnybrook; Kyle shares a joke with a visitor from Sunnybrook; three Sunnybrook friends take a well-earned break. Opposite page, top to bottom: Mark plays basketball — a favorite way to spend the afternoon; Travis shows off his work in art class; Are you ready for Swim Fest? We are!; a group of Dell volunteers came out to help us complete some big projects.





# GALA 2017

The 2017 Down Home Ranch Annual Charity Gala will be one for the books! We will be hosting the event at a brand new venue – The Bastrop Convention and Exhibit Center – on Saturday, September 9th. You'll find all sorts of goodies at the popular live and silent auctions, followed by a scrumptious catered meal. The highlight of the evening will be Texas country singer/songwriter Kyle Park! We'll be offering a photo booth, a special kick-off happy hour, and lots of laughs! Don't miss this event! Join us Saturday, September 9th, at the Bastrop Convention and Exhibit Center. Learn more at: [www.downhomeranch.org/news-and-events/gala](http://www.downhomeranch.org/news-and-events/gala)

*Kyle Park*



Born and raised outside of Austin, Kyle Park started playing country venues when he was 15 years old. Since then, he's impressively had ten singles land on the Texas Music Chart's Top 10, including two #1 singles ("The Night is Young" and "True Love"). His *Fall EP* peaked at No. 1 in 2010 on the Billboard Heatseekers South Central list. Park's latest album, *The Blue Roof Sessions*, is out now via Thirty Tigers. His current single, the anthemic *Don't Forget Where You Come From* continues to climb the charts. Known for his clever songwriting and guitar-heavy tracks, he's reaped consistent national press coverage from CMT, ZUUS, Taste of Country, *Country Weekly*, All Music, and *Guitar World*. Park has shared the stage with numerous notable and legendary artists including George Strait, The Band Perry, Gary Allan, Clint Black, Eli Young Band, and more!



# SWIM FEST 2017

"Swim Fest" 2017 is right around the corner — Saturday, June 10th! This is one of our major FUNdraisers of the year where we all come together and cheer on our Ranchers! There are various swimming events and competitions, which give our Ranchers the opportunity to show off their skills in the water.

The awards ceremony will take place shortly after lunch; we will be serving our very own DHR beef (tickets can be purchased at the event). There will be open swim in the afternoon and Field Day Fun for all to enjoy! Also, for the first time EVER we will have team T-shirts in different colors available for purchase so you can show support for your favorite team! The shirts are \$15 each (plus tax).

If you plan to attend, please contact our Administrative Coordinator: [LauraZ@DownHomeRanch.org](mailto:LauraZ@DownHomeRanch.org) or give us a call at 512-856-0128.



# WHAT IS SUCCESS?

by Craig Russell, Executive Director

As COO for DHR I examined financial reports, reviewed budgets, enforced policies, and managed personnel. I spent four years making sure everything ran smoothly — that was how I defined success in that role.

Last fall when I took on the role of Interim Executive Director, I looked at the organization from a broader perspective. I had a basic plan of the areas I wanted to impact by funneling resources and empowering employees. We hired new staff, raised the expectations, and created a great leadership team. I am very happy with the direction we are going.

But one question has been on my mind a lot lately: How do I now measure success at DHR?

Something happened recently that helped me answer this question, and put everything we do in perspective. A couple of months ago, we learned of a young man with an intellectual disability who lived in the area. He didn't have anywhere to go since he finished school; he just stayed at home all day. We were approached about the possibility of letting this young man into our Day Program.

It's not something we had done in the past but we wanted to be true to our mission, so we opened our doors to "Zach" (not his real name) and he began to flourish. He had been missing social interaction prior to coming to DHR, but his whole outlook changed once he had a place to go and friends who accepted and encouraged him.



The other day I learned that Zach and his family recently moved out of the area, and that the staff and Ranchers were missing him. As I listened, I realized that he had impacted their lives as much as we had benefitted him. I also realized that this is the DHR definition of success: making positive changes in the lives of everyone we touch — our Ranchers, staff, families and sponsors. What a difference a definition makes.

*great people*



from left to right: David gathers hydroponic tomatoes; Heather, Angie and Allison; Alaina works out in the DHR gym; Tom builds a new greenhouse; Natalie cares for flowers in the DHR store; Cara, Katie, Cedric, Danny, and Tyler



## meet the DAY PROGRAM STAFF

*Angie*

Angie is the new Programs & Vocational Services Supervisor. She worked for the Southland Corporation (7-Eleven) for many years before starting her own daycare, which she ran for 21 years. In the fall of 2015 she joined the DHR staff as a Kitchen Assistant and later as a full-time Day Program Specialist. Aside from her supervisory duties, she finds time to teach the Rancher Monthly newspaper class, Bible Study, and the "Wrangler Gals" class. She likes to spend her spare time working out at Anytime Fitness with her daughter as her personal trainer, watching movies, and going shopping with girlfriends.



*Daniel*

Daniel "Danny" returned to DHR after studying at Eastern New Mexico University. He proudly tells the story of how he graduated with a 3.5 GPA! Serving as a Program Specialist for the last two years, Daniel holds Day Program together by running countless errands as well as leading the Fishing Club and assisting in the "Wrangler Gents" course. He enthusiastically calls himself the "Jack of all trades" and we couldn't agree more. Danny absolutely loves to play his guitar in his spare time and also enjoys going to church or attending a concert every once in a while.



*Cedric*

Cedric is a native Californian who moved to Texas in 2014. He's been serving in this field for approximately 20 years by working in various day programs, assisted living facilities, and rehabilitation centers. He received his Bachelor's in Psychology with a minor in Criminal Justice from California State Long Beach. He began working at DHR at the end of March, and he currently teaches a handful of classes including: Archery, Internet DJ'ing, Plot Gardening, Music Jam Session, and Fishing. Cedric loves everything related to aviation, movies, and cooking/baking.



*Cara*

Cara is a proud small town Texas girl. She worked as a cosmetologist for many years, but spent the last 2 years working as a Certified Nursing Assistant at an Alzheimer's facility in Austin. She joined DHR in the beginning of March, and teaches Karaoke, Country Western Line Dancing, Cosmetology, Cooking Healthy Snacks, Arts & Crafts, Basketball, and Talent Show. Cara has a huge passion for helping others. She enjoys fishing and hanging out with her fiancé. She is currently expecting a baby boy and is very excited for this addition to her family!



# WELCOME BACK BARRY!

by Casey Dickerson, Director of Residential Services

We are very excited to welcome Barry Hamilton back to the Ranch as our new Director of Programs and Behavioral Services in February of this year. Barry began his career working with individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) more than 11 years ago as a volunteer with a small non-profit in Washington, Texas. However, Barry has had a lifetime of experience as the son of an individual with an IDD. During Barry's professional career he has provided consultation to families, licensed residential providers, direct support professionals, institutional settings and interdisciplinary teams within the mental health community.

Barry received his Bachelors of Science in Biology from Texas A&M University at College Station, and his Masters in the Science of Social Work from the University of Texas at Austin. Barry has received specialized training and is recognized as having expertise in the behavioral health needs of individuals with IDD. He has also presented on a variety of topics at national and local professional

conferences, supporting a movement toward mental health wellness for those with IDD. In his free time, Barry enjoys cooking, making home brewed beer, and hiking with his wife and twin toddler boys.

Barry has already made great strides in furthering our mission to elevate the lives of individuals with IDD in his first months back on the Ranch. He has been instrumental in selecting and training new day program staff, and they have added a wide range of valuable new classes and activities that enhance the services we provide. His warm and welcoming personality is real asset — Ranchers and staff always know where to go when they need emotional support.

All of us at Down Home Ranch are thrilled to have Barry back on our team!



*make it possible!*



## *Tyler*

Tyler is in his last semester at the University of Texas at Austin, pursuing his Masters of Fine Arts in Writing. Starting as a volunteer in the summer of 2016, Tyler joined the Day Program last fall as a Program Specialist. He spends his time teaching various courses, such as Golf Cart Driving, Public Speaking, Field Sports, Creative Writing, Walking Club, and Copy Writing and Editing. He also takes a group of Ranchers on a weekly trip to the Library to attend the community Book Club. In his spare time, Tyler enjoys writing poems, playing disc golf, and hanging out with his pit bull puppy named Ginny.



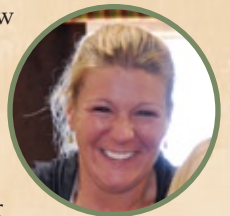
## *Katie*

Katie formerly worked as a day program specialist and medical assistant at Bluebonnet Trails Community Services. She is working on her Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice, and plans to further her education by pursuing a PhD in physical therapy. After joining Down Home Ranch at the end of 2016, Katie developed a fun class called "Dancing with the Ranchers," her own take on the popular TV show. She teaches various other courses, including: Mindfulness, My Book about Myself, Improve Your Reading, Mastering Home Chores, Cooking Meals in the Microwave, Build Positive Friendships, Disc Golf, and Astronomy. She spends her spare time adopting dogs from the local shelter, dying her hair blue, and training for an all-natural bodybuilding competition this summer!



## *Heather*

Heather worked in childcare for the last 15 years, most recently as CNP director for Vista Academy and registrar at Austin Classical Academy. After joining DHR as a Program Specialist at the end of 2016, she has reopened the Enterprise Center, in addition to starting a mini-horse course. A few other classes she teaches are: Scrapbooking, Sewing and Embroidery, Painting, Computer Skills, Science Experiments, and Drawing with a Twist. She also coordinates our Ranchers into weekly volunteer groups at the Bastrop Animal Shelter and the Lion Club Thrift Store. Heather spends her spare time caring for her 3 children, volunteering at the Salvation Army, and tending to the laundromat she owns and operates as a side business.



## *Allison*

Allison finished a nine-month internship for Children Ministry in May of 2015; after that, she worked as a nanny until joining DHR in the fall of 2016. On the Ranch, she splits her time between driving Ranchers to appointments and Day Program where she assists in teaching a Bible Study class, Karaoke, Arts & Crafts, Money Management, Music Appreciation, Sweating to the Oldies, and Gym. Allison enjoys babysitting her niece and nephew in her spare time, in addition to caring for her Great Pyrenees dog and three horses.



# NO LESS A MIRACLE...

No less a miracle is my child,  
Bright flower from an autumn garden,  
Born in crystal days of a dying summer,  
No less a miracle is she.  
No less a miracle is my child,  
Who made the world a miracle for me,  
Who taught me how to see the things  
I never saw before,  
No less a miracle is she.

And did I ever really feel,  
This child was somehow just not real?  
A child of no tomorrrows,  
A song no one would sing?  
When this one gave the world to me,  
And opened up the mystery,  
Of life's new understanding,  
Of joy's eternal spring.  
No less a miracle is my child,  
My little flower growing in the sunshine,  
Reaching to the sky,  
Never stopping to ask why.  
No less a miracle is she.

—Judy Horton,  
for daughter  
Kelly Page Horton



## DOWN HOME RANCH

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