

Hill Country Youth Ranch
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A child care facility family

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The Corral has been
published bi-monthly
since 1977

Volume 46 Number 2

A publicly supported tax-exempt charitable and educational organization

April 2023

Student art on display April and May in Kerrville Cafe

For 37 years as caregiver, teacher, and Fine Arts Director at Hill Country Youth Ranch, Carol Priour has worked tirelessly to gather the tools, often from thrift stores, or rocks and twigs along a path, to provide the materials for children to be able to express themselves creatively in visual art.

Recalls Carol, “I grew up in a poor North Texas cotton town, and I had to scavenge for materials to do the art that was inside me looking for expression. Artistic expression is therapeutic. To this day, I watch children revealing deep places in their spirits that they could not tell a

therapist in words. But there it is on a canvas, in a drawing, or in a poem.”

In the early years of her work here, Carol would find an empty room at the General Store or in one of the cabins to conduct art classes. Today, she is grateful to be able to work in the Stevens Fine Arts Center, a 21,000 sq. ft. complex with high-tech spaces for all the art media, and supplies to go with each. Children learn to draw, paint, write, take and edit photos, dance, act, build, and sing – with all the essential tools to save their work in products they can share with others, whether on film or in a frame.

As part of her work here, Carol teaches two advanced art classes for middle and high school students at our Najim Charter School in her art classroom (below right). Over the years, Carol has gathered an amazing gallery of paintings, poems, and carvings on display all year at the Carol Priour Art Gallery, built in her honor by the Heavin Family Foundation in 2017. Heavin Foundation also built new art and photography classrooms to provide high quality space for her work with the students.

“It is such a joy,” says Carol, “to be able to teach surrounded by quality equipment and sup-

plies, with brushes, paints, cameras, and PCs with the latest photo editing software, all under the best lighting and in ideal spatial conditions. It really makes a difference, and the children are so grateful. We have a waiting list wanting to get into a class.”

The students of the 2022-23 school year have worked hard to finish and frame their work to show at Pint & Plow Cafe in Kerrville. The show, which lasts a month, opens on April 15, and

the artists will be present that day for a reception from 2 to 3 p.m.

The public is also invited to visit the Ranch and see the gallery of work done by children over the past four decades. To arrange a tour given by Carol herself, just call HCYR’s main office at 830-367-2131, and we will help plan a day and time.

“The story told by their art has recurring themes of trauma and transformation that resonate deeply in the soul,” says Carol.



HCYR Fine Arts Director Carol Priour (left) talks to gallery visitors about student artwork in the Carol Priour Visual Arts Gallery in the Stevens Fine Arts Center at HCYR in Ingram. The artwork displayed there is the product of her students, created over the past 37 years, who now work in a well-equipped classroom (right). The Pint & Plow exhibit going on now (April 15 - May 15) is one of many sponsored over the years by area businesses and galleries in the Kerrville-Ingram area. One of our current students, Cameron Williams (see story on page 3) won “Best in Show” at the Texas State Arts & Crafts Fair in 2021.



Brand New Start CD is now available

It's been a long process, but a fruitful one. In 2019, the new Stevens Fine Arts Center, with its state-of-the-art VonBerg Recording Studio, gave us the place to restart the Children's Music Project, a Flagship arts program at HCYR that had previously produced three CDs of original music born of a unique collaboration between Ranch children, professional songwriters and musicians, and producer Tony Young. The results are in. With 12 songs composed by such luminaries as George Ensle, Leon Russell, Sara Hickman, Will T. Massey and Dana Cooper, and featuring an all-star cast of musicians and singers including Flaco Jimenez, Nunie Rubio, Michael Cross, and Chris Gage, we feel like our new CD *Brand New Start* is a musical masterpiece.

The Children's Music Project is an ongoing program at Hill Country Youth Ranch, a home established in 1977 for abused and abandoned children. Music Project songs usually start with our children. One of them writes a poem, tells a story or creates a work of art. Professional songwriters and musicians then collaborate on a song. Sometimes children perform rather than compose. Regardless, everyone benefits from the process. We learned many years ago that art, in



all its forms, is a powerful healing tool. Artistic gifts are frequently enhanced in traumatized children, and their works can be stunningly beautiful and moving. Even when the story is tragic, the creation of a song can transform. Launched in 1995, the Project continues to produce miraculous results. For more information on the Project, or for more details on our new album and our three previous Children's Music Project CDs, please visit <https://youth-ranch.org/music-project>.

We'd love for you to have a copy! For a donation of \$25 or more, we'll get one off to you in the mail ASAP. Just be sure to write on your check, or on a separate note, that you'd like a copy of Brand New Start and send it to Hill Country Youth Ranch, P.O. Box 67, Ingram, Texas 78025.

Songs on the album:

- Brand New Start* (Leon Russell)
- I'm Forgiving Me* (Ariel & George Ensle)
- I'm Not Broken* (Dana Cooper)
- We Will Always Have Each Other* (Bella & George Ensle)
- Circle of Love* (Sara Hickman)
- No Light Without the Dark* (Cameron & George Ensle)
- Forgiven* (Jacob Favela)
- Old Petal Beneath the Night* (Will T. Massey)
- Black Hole* (Cameron & George Ensle)
- He Sent the Waves* (Doug Lanier & Tony Young)
- Empty Forest* (Ariel & George Ensle)
- Common Ground* (Gary Priour & Kim Abel-Snell)

Tony Young is our Musical Common Thread

by Tony Gallucci, HCYR Publications

It's a story as old as time. Someone ventures far from home, just exploring, not searching for anything in particular. And in the process discovers something new and unexpected, and finds a new home. And lives are changed.

Meet Tony Young, musician and music producer. After a long career engineering recording sessions and running concert sound with his mobile studio, Rolling Tones, all across the country, Tony's adventure in the music industry rat race ended in Ingram, Texas, back in the 90s.

As musicians will, he soon connected with area musicians, and quickly learned that the Hill Country Youth Ranch had a new state of the art recording studio. He came by for a tour and, of course, learned the story of the Ranch, hearing about the children who call us home and was struck by their histories.

We have long known that kids may unpack their wounds through art, when efforts to talk through their fears with counseling might fail. One of those artistic outlets is poetry. We already had a substantial collection of poems written by our kids when Tony stopped by.

A lightbulb went on. You see, Tony had connections among hundreds of Texas' and the country's greatest musicians and songwriters, and he wondered if they wouldn't want to help out our kids once they heard their stories. He approached friends in the business to see if they would collaborate with Ranch children to write songs based on their stories. They jumped at the opportunity, and the result has been astounding.

Since 1995, Tony has hosted a parade of Grammy-award winners and legendary musicians, and has now produced four CDs of music all centered around Ranch life and the backstories of our children: *Broken Wings Can Fly*, *Heart Like a Flower*, *Prisoner of the Clay*, and our new album *Brand New Start*.

From these efforts has come over two decades of theatrical productions, performances as far afield as Denver and Washington D.C., music videos, news stories, and countless kudos. Kids who worked with songwriters to compose song lyrics received recognition, copyright credit and a feeling of accomplishment. Tony is the thread that has run through this project since its beginning, and he's still going!

I'm honored to work with my musical family in collaboration with the children at HCYR, inspired by their poetry and stories to create a meaningful message to the world. It's a blessing to witness the healing power of music in children's lives.

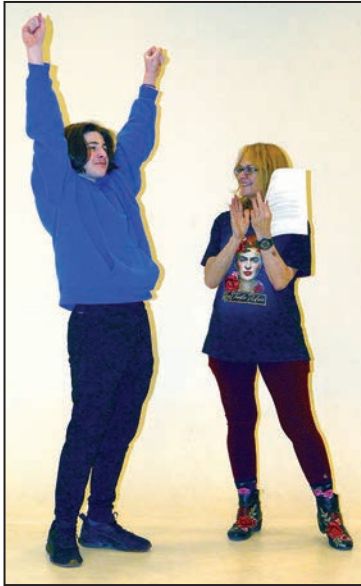
May all that has been reduced to noise in you become music again.

~ Tony Young



Mr. Williams goes to Washington

Veteran student artist, poet, writer wins essay contest, headed to D.C.



You can see Cameron's response (above) on learning his essay/letter had won the 2023 Central Texas Electric Coop contest that includes a prize of a trip to Washington, D.C. He wrote (below) about the impact on his career of the Fine Arts Center fire and its rebuilding with a tribute to the company's response (box, far right). Cameron is also a gifted artist and songwriter (right). Two of his songs, co-written with Texas Commission of the Arts Writer-in-Residence George Enslie, grace our new album Brand New Start. In 2021 his art was chosen "Best in Show" at the Texas State Arts & Crafts Fair.

Resident Ranch Renaissance Man Cameron Williams is getting himself prepared for the adventure of his young life. He'll be touring the state and U.S. Capitols as part of the Texas Youth Leadership Council Tour come June.

You might excuse him for being excited, you see, he's never been so far from home before. "It's after school is over, it's in June. I've never been past Colorado before," Cameron said. Asked if he was anxious about the trip, he said "Kind of. I've never flown before either." That's a common denominator amongst many of our children. But of all our current residents, Cameron shows a distinctive level of maturity, making him well-suited for this trip.

The hosts have an itinerary planned for the trip, including tours of the capitol buildings, the Smithsonian, a wreath ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and a group Talent Show, but it also includes plenty of free time for youth to get to know the Capital City. "My main goal is to explore a little bit," he said. "To venture about some. I am really most interested in Washington itself. There's a lot of things of historical value there; that's where the president lives. I could try to be president myself one day. That would be cool."



Cameron wins CTEC contest, trip to nation's capitol

Since 1965, Central Texas Electric Co-op, based in Fredericksburg and serving 12 counties of the Texas Hill Country, has sponsored an essay contest, with winners earning an all-expense paid trip to Washington, D. C. to join other youth from across the nation to tour historic sites and visit the Capitol. This year's topic was "As high school juniors and seniors, you could potentially be our next generation of co-op members. If you were managing CTEC, what would you do to reach younger and older members alike?"

Cameron Williams, star student in Carol Priour's art and writing class, entered the contest in January, and he won! Cameron will join other winners from across Texas in Austin on June 11 to tour the State Capitol, and then fly to Washington for a week's tour of the Nation's Capitol and historic sites there. His winning essay is printed below.

Cameron came to live at the Ranch in 2020, so he wasn't here when the original Arts Center burned in 2014. But after founder Gary Priour told him the story of that devastating event, and how CTEC, among others, showed up the next day to make the site safe by removing a fallen power pole that had left wires in the debris, and worked with volunteers to do an initial cleanup, Cameron took it from there and wrote the following essay. Because he loves to spend time in the new Arts Center, with all its tools and technology, he said the essay is really a thank you letter to CTEC and the volunteers and donors who made the new building possible.

Unity in Devastation

On November 10th, 2014, the building I sit in now was burned to the ground. A devastating fire occurred in this art center at the Hill Country Youth Ranch, the place I, and many other children and adults live. To think, something as small as an electrical short in a rooftop air conditioner reduced such a beloved place to ash and rubble.

Thankfully enough, no one was hurt. Although a lack of injury is wondrous enough, what truly stands out is the effort and community-like unity displayed by the CTEC and other community volunteers for several nights and days afterward.

CTEC workers removed hazardous, life-threatening materials, such as large exposed electrical wiring and fallen power poles, all free of charge!

Furthermore, to demonstrate such a connection with the people is exactly how I would like to manage the Central Texas Electric Co-op Company. I personally can confidently state that acts of generosity such as this not only positively effects the representation and image of the company, but also the relationship with the members of the CTEC. Purveyances of kindness like this are certainly what humanity could use in times such as these.

Lastly, to summarize, as a high-schooler being asked such a question as, "What would you do?", all I can say is that I'd want to care for the people as much as the CTEC did nine years ago. They (volunteers included) ensured that I could have a place to peacefully enjoy creating art. Although this is supposed to be an essay, I personally view it as a letter, saying thank you.

Sincerely, Hill Country Youth Ranch resident Cameron Williams.

HCYR Memorials & Honors

Each month HCYR receives memorial gifts honoring loved ones who have passed away and other gifts remembering special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Because they are so important to the daily operation of the Ranch, and in keeping with their two-fold purpose, we gratefully acknowledge all such gifts both in the newsletter and in cards sent to family members. The following list includes loved ones honored by gifts from January 31 through March 31, 2023.

In Memory Of:

GERRY & JOAN ALLISON
Happy Birthday, Dad
John Allison

FRED ANDERSON
Bill & Lynda Tolleson

RICHARD JAMES ANGELL
R. A. Angell
Greg & Carrie Furman
Jimmie & Angela Heimann
Paul & Deanna Hopper
Eddie E. Horton
Patricia Lege
Sandy Merritt
The Moss Family
Paige, Gareth & Alexa Reagan
Jack & Gina Schubert
Edward & Sherry Secor
Connie & Ralph Smith
Linda Stephens
Bob Tribble
Ed & Nancy Wallace
Valarie (Angell) Willette

JOHN R. & GAY NELLE
BARTON
Wayne & Lisa Iltis

EDWARD BASTIAN
Doris Curl

GREGORY F. BERTASZ
All the Smith's (Randy & Marilyn)

EMILYBIERSCHWALE
Diane Caddell
Josefa Martinez

JAMES B. "JIM" BOONE JR.
Ken & Margie Oehler

DARIN CRACKNELL
Karen Gibson

TOMMY JOE DOUGLAS
Kenneth Lindig & Vickie Ahrens

JOE DOZIER
Mike Schofield

MAX ELLIS
My Black Lab
Darlene Ellis

LINDA LEWIS EWING
Thomas Ewing

TYLER FINE
Jayne Johnson

JAMES GIESE
James & Mo Rhodes

FRANCIS GODINEZ GOMEZ
Ronnie & Karen Schneider

BRYAN ALAN GRELE
Bonnie White

JOANN HALE
Carter Hale

EVELYN HENRY
Patrick Henry & Terry Graham
Gary & Carol Priour

PETER C. HENRY FAMILY
Peter, Bennie Jane, Patricia, Peter, Jr.
Jane Ann Henry

CURTIS HERBORT
Stanley & Doris Ernst

MARY K. HESSON
Rick & Kelly Conley

BRUCE HILTON
Patricia Hilton

VALETTA HOGUE
Walter Hogue

RUSS HOLMER
Junell Holmer

BURT & ELLEN ISENHOUR
Anonymous

GAYE JANICE
Linda Brown Stephens

CONNIE JETTON
Ken & JoAnn Hedrick
Cathy Carden Henry

BART KAISER
Frances Kaiser

RICHARD KAISER
Frances Kaiser

DIANE KELLY
Harvey & Marilyn Vordenbaum

EVELYN KINGSBERY
Jody & Bill Bowers
Phyllis Carlisle
Rick & Kelly Conley

HCYR Auxiliary
Ben & Jerri Lindsey
Bob & Cynthia Moran
Mel & Cynthia Peters
Gary & Carol Priour
Leslie Scharafanow
Harold & Judy Wilson

DAVID KIRK
Linda Brown Stephens

EDWARD & RUTH KIRK
Benny & Penny Grimmer

EDWARD KOTHMANN
Delbert & June Oehler
Ken & Margie Oehler

RUTH KOTT
Stanley & Doris Ernst

LAURA J. LAING
Herbert Laing

DR. LAIRD LAURENCE, DVM
Lynn & Jolyn Colvin

WANDA LEIBEE
Allen H. Leible

ED MARTIN
Ronnie & Rochelle Lumpkins

NOLAND DEMPSEY
MARTIN, JR.
Wayne & Millie Smith

RED MCCOMBS
Gary & Carol Priour
Michael Priour
Krystle Ramsay
Harold & Judy Wilson

DONNA MEREDITH
Claire Gilmore Nelms

TERRY SCOTT MOORE
Michael Moore

KENNETH NORWOOD
Bertha Templeton
Pauline Thomas
Ray Thomas

CHARLIE PENCE
Harold & Judy Wilson

JEAN PITTMAN
Jim & Rita Arket
Ruth Hatch
Linda, Rodney, Scott
Satterwhite & Leslie Hawkins

KEY PUCKETT
Bill & Lynda Tolleson

EVELYN RALSTON
Charles & Velma Chesnutt
Marilyn Hankins
Dan & Donna Magee
Ann Vaughan & John Price
Dorris Wendt

DOMINGA P. RAMIREZ
Suzel & Arnold Vela

GUADALUPE RAMIREZ
My Grandmother
Richard Cantu '84

DOUG REID
Charles & Tommie Ridgeway

JAMES ROBINSON
Rosslyn & Marshall Crawford

JANIS JOAN RODEN
Mr. & Mrs. Eddie Hatch

MELINDA BECK SAVAGE
Kay McCorquodale

BRENDA SCHIRMER
Carl & Maxine Mayes

CHARLES SCHMIDT
Jack & Waldean Groff

PEGGY LOU SCHMIDT
Jack & Waldean Groff

KATHERINE S. SCHULTZ
Georganna Bell
Rose Decatur Breece
Jane Priour

VERLYN SCHULZE
Tony & Karen Antony

HOWARD SIVELLS
Ronnie & Rochelle Lumpkins

ALLEN STERN
Martha Pollard & Leroy Lamprecht

JERRY SYME-VAN FOSSEN
Kay McCorquodale

JIM TERLECKI
Elroy & Doris Behrends
Family

LYNN TOWNSEND
Bill & Lynda Tolleson

JANICE WAHRMUND
Donald J. Priour, MD
Kyle & Judy Priour

TOM WHITLEY
Dorris Wendt

CAROLYN WIEDNER
Armand, Karen, Bridget & Lucas Antony

MICHAEL WILSON (orphan)
Kari Lawrence

BETTY WOOD
Carol Meyners & Family

RICHARD WOOD
Frances Andrews

In Honor Of:

FLEETA CURTIS
Birthday
Claire Gilmore Nelms

NETTIE ISENHOUR DAY
Anonymous

ELIJAH A. ESTRADA
Birthday
Mary G. Estrada

CHARLES GILMORE
Birthday
Claire Gilmore Nelms

BILLIE GULLEY
Birthday
Claire Gilmore Nelms

CLAIRA GULLEY
Birthday
Claire Gilmore Nelms

JENNY GULLEY
Birthday
Claire Gilmore Nelms

BARBARA HARDIN
Birthday
Claire Gilmore Nelms

RICHARD ISENHOUR
Anonymous

KERRVILLE
Brian Bowers

MICHAEL D. KESSLER
Birthday
Claire Gilmore Nelms

LEE PENCE
Birthday
Claire Gilmore Nelms

REV. FRANK PULLIN
Birthday
Claire Gilmore Nelms

JANET ROBINSON
Birthday
Donna Schloss

DAX & ELI TERRY
Birthdays
Claire Gilmore Nelms

500 Club

The **500 Club** is our way to honor donors who have given \$500 or more to HCYR. We are pleased to announce new members whose donations total over \$500 by virtue of gifts made from January 31 through March 31, 2023.

Generous cash donations came from **Allen Lund Co., La Canada, CA; Horton Family Trust B, Manchester, IA; Ezekiel & Amanda Duke, Abilene, TX; Apollo Environmental, Beaumont, TX; Leroy Willits, Jr., Crosby, TX; Lynn, Jolyn & Bryan Colvin, Fredericksburg, TX; Alice White, Fredericksburg, TX; Ronald,**

Dawn & Jennifer Smith, Horseshoe Bay, TX; Michael Felt, Houston, TX; KACCMC, LLC, Kerrville, TX; Jack & Regina Schubert, Kerrville, TX; Wayne & Millie Smith, Kerrville, TX; Lakehills United Methodist Church, Lakehills, TX; Bettcher Manufacturing, LLC, McAllen, TX; Frederick & Melayne Martin, McAllen, TX; Phillip Rimes, Mission, TX; Rocio Banda, Pearland, TX; and Walmart Region 6, San Antonio, TX.

Thanks to these new members, and to all our **500 Club** members, for your generous and enduring support.

Enhanced Horizons Renewing Facilities, Programs

by Gary Priour, HCYR Founder

Exciting things are happening at Enhanced Horizons, HCYR's campus for young adults, ages 18-25, on their way to taking on the many challenges of adulthood.

For the past 15 years, Enhanced Horizons, a 35-acre campus located four miles west of Ingram, has served aged-out foster youth and at-risk young adults who benefit from mentoring and short-term support as they prepare for the next chapter in their lives.

When young adults leave the state's foster care system, they don't usually have biological families to turn to, whether for a holiday like Christmas, for a summer before college, or for the time it takes to learn job skills, find gainful employment, or simply have access to basic advice like most of us got from our parents.

Here are some alarming national statistics on aged-out foster youth:

- 20% become instantly homeless
- 3% earn a college degree
- 60% get involved with drugs

• 50% are victims of trafficking
And, by age 21:

- 25% have a child with no support
- 22% have been incarcerated
- 50% are unemployed
- 30% no high school diploma
- 33% have been homeless

Thanks to Enhanced Horizons, we have put a small dent in those statistics. From the beginning of our mission with abused and abandoned children, we saw the need for a separate campus where our graduates could find a launchpad into adulthood. The Cailloux Foundation knew of this need, and in 2007 purchased the old Star Ranch, a former children's home, and gave it to HCYR so we could fulfill our dream of having such a campus.

Now a new team of leaders is at work to improve both the EH programs and the facilities in order to best serve the young adults who come to live and learn there.

Karen Brune, daughter of Ed and Trudy Brune (who built much of Big Springs Ranch for Children and helped start our Charter



Left, thanks to the Brickner and Anderson family of Fredericksburg, we recently installed streetlights to illuminate walkways and roads, and added high speed Internet and security cameras to the campus.

Below, built as a children's home in the 1990s on 35 acres near Ingram, EH has belonged to HCYR since 2007, serving aged-out foster youth and at-risk young adults in a residential and educational community that helps them pursue educational goals, gain life skills, and become successful adults.

School system) has been joined by other Brune family members to work on the EH re-design, and to further the legacy of their parents. The Brunnes have also brought new friends to the project.

A plan for capital renovations was developed in 2022, and thanks to many generous donors, work is underway now on remodelling two of the houses – one for young men and one for young women. Plans call for more such improvements, as more funds become available.



Thrift Shop needs more volunteers

Our Thrift Shop in Ingram has become a huge success, contributing both to the Ranch and our local communities, raising significant funds and helping to furnish the houses at both children's campuses and the dorms at Enhanced Horizons Transitional Living Center for young adults. This is only possible through many great donations, and the volunteers who do all the work to prepare and price the items. This brings us to a plea for those of you who have a desire to help. We really need you for a few hours a week to replace or add to our numbers. Stop by the Shop to see it for yourself at 3171 Junction Highway, just east of Ingram. Each day of the week is run by a different team of volunteers, with some days more short-handed than others. Store hours are 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

Gifts-in-kind help provide quality environment

Please remember us when you clean out your storage or decide to be rid of usable items.

Like every active family, we wear things out. Thus, we have a system for sorting and utilizing all such gifts for maximum benefit.

First, we sort donations to see what can be used at one of our campuses. After we've furnished our residences, outfitted and supplied the children, we offer remaining items for sale at our Thrift Shop. Either way, our children reap the benefit.

We send a truck out each Thursday to pick up items from donors. So call us to schedule a pick-up at 367-2131, or bring items to either campus from 8 to 5, Monday through Friday.

Our current "most-needed" list includes:

Furniture – any quality items, including

chests, dressers, tables, shelves, like-new queen or king mattresses & box springs for houseparent quarters, sofas, chairs, lamps, etc.

Appliances – like-new appliances, large and small.

Housewares – glasses, dishes, pots, pans, silverware.

Linens – towels, sheets, pillows, blankets, comforters.

Office Equipment – desks, chairs, tables.

Transport Vehicles – 12-passenger vans and minivans – prices are very high for low-mileage used vans and we are behind in fleet upgrade.

Pickup Truck – maintenance utility truck.

Recreation – Fishing gear, sports balls, horse tack, bicycles, helmets, skates, games.

Tools – of all kinds

Auxiliary Twine

Dear Friends,

"In like a lion, out like a lamb." Here we are at the end of a month that has had unprecedented weather across the country. We are still praying for rain in the Hill Country to nourish our land, animals and creatures.

We have had showers of blessings from our wonderful donors. The Thrift Shop is excited about our "SPRING FLING" April 3rd – April 7th. As they say, "The early bird gets the worm." And in this case, the early shoppers will find the greatest clothes. Come join us for a great shopping experience.

And, if the newsletter arrives after the SPRING FLING is over, come on in because new items will be put out the week following the annual sale. You never know what's next. For example, we discovered, in a box of donated clothing, that someone had given us a gorgeous gown with the price tag still attached – \$2,265!!!

I look forward to seeing everyone at the next HCYRA meeting, April 24, 11 a.m., at The KROC.

This month we will honor graduates from "The Ranch". Albert Hernandez, Superintendent of our Charter Schools, will be our speaker.

Grace and peace,

*Cheryl Sieker, President
Hill Country Youth Ranch Auxiliary*

... just one activity among many to give the kids a well-deserved vacation!

We went and got Western over Spring Break!



It's natural to associate Spring Break with wild and woolly times, but at the Ranches, we take wild and woolly to a different level. In fact, this year we went Wild West as one of the many activities our kids got to experience over their school vacation.

And why not? We live on ranches, maybe our children should get a feel for real ranching life!

Famous cowgirl Suzie Heywood, Trail Boss of the *Trail Drive of the Century* from Bandera, Texas to Dodge City, Kansas, regaled the girls with her stories of achieving in a 'man's world'. She did things never before accomplished by a woman, and told them they could become whatever they wanted in this world.

Bandera cowboy Lew Pewterbaugh added some old time cowboy songs to the mix, demonstrated calf roping, and the use of a bullwhip to move cattle. He then taught some of the kids how to throw a lariat.

Kathy Freeman brought her horse and introduced him to the kids with rides around our arena. Big Springs Ranch echoed that program with Michael Priour and Lamar Perez taking kids on trail rides around the Leakey ranch on our famed horse program.

Over the break kids also went swimming in the Frio River, saw nature programs, took trips in the Hill Country, and came back educated, refreshed and ready for school again!



Cowfolds Suzie Haywood and Lew Pewterbaugh (above) entertained the kids with stories, songs and artifacts of old-time and modern ranching life.



Kathy Freeman and Jessica Hungerford both brought horses out for the kids to pet and ride in March. Jessica (left), leads a charge around our arena. She also brought kid pygmy goats and baby chicks with her. Kathy (below) was here for Western Day and gently introduced the kids to her horse.



One of the day's big highlights was a lesson in using a lariat to rope a calf. Bandera cowboy Lew Pewterbaugh did the teaching, then the kids got a chance on a real live plastic calf-bale. The success rate was surprisingly high and no animals were harmed in the process! Meanwhile Residential Program Director Derik Ramos (far right) manned the grill so all had plenty of beef to eat.



Offering to help grandparents left with grandchildren

by Gary Priour, Founder

In 2021, the Texas Legislature passed HB 567, defining abuse and neglect as conduct that results in “immediate danger” instead of “substantial risk” to a child to meet the threshold for investigation and removal. The result was about half the number of CPS-initiated child removals in 2022 than occurred in 2021. But that didn’t mean families in Texas were suddenly safer places for children by the same ratio. Some children were moved to grandparents to get them away from dangerous situations, with the cases simply closed. But not all grandparents were given proper authority. Those grandparents given custody through conservatorship or adoption were able to make crucial decisions seeking medical or therapeutic help. But, in some cases, the grandchildren presented challenges beyond the capacity of the grandparents to manage either financially or in terms of their own skills or stamina. We have become aware of the increasing numbers of grandparents raising their grandchildren because of tragedy or the inability of their children to do the parenting. We want to help, and God is clearly putting angels in this new path. Want to be one? Call us.

Looking for a mission in life? We need staff for a new program

We have an exciting new program at our Big Springs Ranch for Children (BSRC) near Leakey that needs childcare staffing. Couples or singles interested in helping us launch this program can reach out directly to campus administrators Clint Rangel or Somers Dean to learn more about the program and its staffing needs. BSRC is an educational village built on a 7,000-acre ranch that includes the headwaters of the Frio River.

In the last several years, changes in the Texas Foster Care System have left an increasing number of grandparents to raise their grandchildren without financial support. Some cannot afford to do this, and the challenges presented by grandchildren who have been traumatized can require special training not available to these loving grandparents. Thanks to a generous donor, we have opened a spacious 5,500 sq. ft. house at Big Springs Ranch specifically for children whose grandparents are seeking help to keep them out of the system and allow the family to remain in touch during out-of-home care and treatment.

Interested? You would receive professional training, and live with the children in this beautiful family-style house, with a few days off each week (onsite off-duty housing provided). The children go to our Charter School on the campus, and each home has a van for transporting. They have breakfast and lunch at school on school days. We offer health insurance, a retirement fund, and other benefits.

We cannot open this program until it is staffed, but all else is ready.
Call Clint or Somers at 830-232-7410 for information



Big Springs Ranch specializes in horseback riding, animal care, and 4-H involvement. Above, Campus Director Clint Rangel helps a child show a goat at the local livestock show. Below, one of the houses open for grandchildren placed by grandparents.



When Spring shows up it's planting and story time

by Tony Gallucci, Publications

Throughout the history of the Ranch, Easter has been a special time. The oldest tradition here is the planting of a vegetable garden on Good Friday. Preceded by reflections on the trials and crucifixion of Jesus shared by founder Gary Priour, the story dovetails into the resurrection and its relationship to our task for the day. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, so a seed planted will rise from the ground and live, eventually sacrificing itself to bring sustenance and life to us.

Thankfulness abounds. And, along with our other great community day in the fall, Thanks-

giving, we all gather as one huge family, working together towards a common goal, sharing in memories and laughs, and getting a little bit muddy in the process.

Kids, staff and esteemed visitors take prestarted seedlings and place them in carefully plowed rows in our one-acre field where they will grow and bloom and produce fruit. Over the next few months our tables are filled with fresh peppers, tomatoes, squash and melons. And the lesson is then complete as the children see, literally, the ‘fruits’ of their labor.

After planting, we’re off to celebrate Easter. It’s a short hop to the Community Center, where

volunteers have helped the Easter Bunny distribute a few hundred eggs across the hills. We turn the youngest kids loose first and they run ragged trying to find the ‘golden’ eggs which might contain a prize. Of course, there’s lots of chocolate in those eggs, and little toys that will keep them busy for another hour or two. The big kids go out and root out the harder to find eggs, gathering a few ‘golden’ eggs of their own.

Next on the schedule is pictures with the Easter Bunny herself, and another spring specialty – frito pie and sweet tea – with homemade cupcakes, made by the kids and staff themselves, for dessert.



And, in a new and really special twist this year, the kids and staff from Big Springs Ranch are joining us in Ingram for all the fun! Because of the distance between campuses, events that



include both groups of kids are rare. So, getting this opportunity will be a wonderful joining of our clans to share old traditions.



Our Javier takes two giant steps . . .

Editor's Note: Javier came to live at HCYR in 2008 as an 11-year-old, along with his four siblings. Over the next six years, he came to call the Ranch his home and family. Despite CPS moving him constantly to community foster care, Javier had bonded here and always begged to come back. He was forced to leave six times in as many years, always returning. In 2017, he testified at the Texas State Senate about the malpractice of moving foster kids constantly, especially when they had found a home. He talked about being moved 22 times into 15 different school districts, starting at age five. When he finished his testimony, you could hear a pin drop in that packed hearing room. Today, Javier is not only a survivor but a man with purpose. In this story, he shares and celebrates two milestones in 2023.

by Javier Castillo '14

I have some amazing news! For those following my story, as of March 11th I am a married man! I married a beautiful woman named Faith: she's strong-willed, but shy, and a woman of God (which is a big plus in my book). We started dating in November 2019. She moved here from California and we met at a

home Church. Like in the good ol' days when the saints and disciples of Jesus Christ would go from house to house breaking bread and giving glory to God.

Back in 2017 as a proclamation in a speech I gave before the Texas Senate, I told them that when I found my future wife we would get married in the chapel at Big Springs Ranch. Here we are in 2023, married, in that very chapel! What an amazing family I have. Thank you to everyone who has supported me.

In other great news: I am pursuing my Bachelor's in Research Biology at Northwest Vista, and I'm on track to graduate in May of 2024. This semester, I was given an opportunity to go on a summer research trip to Costa Rica for 15 days. And, because of the scholarship grants from my Ranch family, I am fully sponsored and will get to go! I will be working with sharks, crocodiles, birds, and plants, and study the water quality of the area while staying at three different research stations.

Thank you all, again, for all the help, with a special shout out to Gary, Krystle, the Auxiliary, and the Pat Childers family for helping me go to Costa Rica. I couldn't have done it without you.

Back in 2017, when I talked

Marriage and . . . Costa Rica!



to the Texas Senate on behalf of all my brothers and sisters in the foster care system, I told them that Hill Country Youth Ranch was the best place for me to find healing. They have been more than a placement, more than just another home. They are my family. They have helped me far more than I expected. When I needed a job they were there. When I needed a place to stay they were there. When I went off on my prodigal journey, they accepted me back with open arms.

As always, my Ranch family is standing beside me in this season, helping me in so many ways. Whether I ask for a wedding venue, scholarship help or recommendation letters, Gary Priour and Krystle Ramsay's answer is always "What do you need? Tell us and it's done."

Last year I spoke to the Hill Country Youth Ranch Auxiliary during their annual Style Show fundraiser. So many supportive friends in the audience gave me a super warm welcome. I was also connected with a new friend, Pamela Harte, at the event. She is a very kind, compassionate, and outgoing woman with ideas about ways she might help. She heard that I wanted to pursue a career in Research Biology. She has a school for biological research, Harte Research Institute,

Javi and Faith (right and above) tied the knot at the Chapel at Big Springs Ranch for Children in March. From there, a semester of biological research in Costa Rica (left) awaits Javier.

in Corpus Christi. She connected me with them and took me on a personal tour. It was exactly what I envisioned I could be doing!

I've come a long way from being in the foster care system. As many of you know, the statistics for us being successful in life after foster care is extremely low. Of 23,000 kids that age out, 20% instantly become homeless. Only one

of every two foster kids will have some form of gainful employment by the age of 24, and less than 3% will earn a college degree. More than a quarter of us will suffer from PTSD. I plan not to be a statistic. I am extremely grateful for all the help and support that the Youth Ranch has given me. Without them I would not have made it this far.

