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## Summer covers all the bases

by Tony Gallucci, Publications

One might think that daily life slows down at the Ranch when summer rolls around. That could not be farther from reality.

In many ways summer is when the Ranch kicks into a higher gear. Now, suddenly, all of our children are turned loose from their eight hour school day, and something, or someone, has to fill that time.

Enter our program and maintenance staffs to manage two extensive summer projects. Both are multifaceted components of our renowned Enrichment Programs featuring skill building and gift revealing activities.

Project Numero Uno is "Work Crew". Ranch kids who have met a standard of responsibility and interest are divided into teams. They are assigned project leaders and mentors from our skilled maintenance staff, and off they go to do a morning's work painting,

repairing, clearing brush, building trails, trimming trees, and gardening, all in an effort to keep their Ranch home beautiful and functional.

Work Crew teaches everyday skills the kids will need some day when they have their own homes to keep up or yards to landscape. More importantly, they learn patience with others, and the kind of teamwork necessary to complete large, sometimes complicated, tasks.

To top things off, they are paid for their work, with bonuses for extra hard work, for initiative, and for leadership. The money is deposited in savings accounts, but the money is theirs to do with as they see fit. Sometimes they buy electronics, sometimes they go to the movies, sometimes they pool their money for special trips. Therein lies another lesson: money management.

Next comes "Summer Elec-

tives". These are promoted as educational classes, but they are not classroom bound. They are fun classes that also teach life-time skills and hobbies: ways in which kids can learn to occupy their downtime with substantially rewarding personal activities.

Among the more popular classes we offer are dance, music and songwriting, horsemanship, painting and drawing, arts and crafts, photography, fishing, cooking and baking, wildlife study, and yoga.

In addition, the cabins are on a rotating schedule at the gym for sports such as basketball, volleyball and dodgeball, and going to our indoor pool for swimming and poolside lounging. Many years we have been blessed with a Swim Team that punctuates our summer with a competitive swim meet and end of classes party.

Of course, these programs, both Work Crew and Summer Electives, are only possible through the generosity of foundation and individual donors who understand the value of providing our children with life skills education beyond classroom learning. State funding only covers the necessities: food, clothing, shelter, and schooling.

It is no great secret that providing children with a 'proper' education extends well beyond those basic needs. Wholeness requires discovering unique interests and gifts, and developing them.





# Healing through Ranch continuum of care

by Krystle Ramsay  
Executive Director

Why can't you be my mom? Why can't you adopt me? These are some of the toughest questions I have been asked in my time at the Ranch. A lump in my throat and a tear in my eye form each time I hear these words. I am a mom of two boys who also ask me some pretty tough questions as well. They have had the privilege to grow up at the Ranch, but under very different circumstances.

I can still visualize my oldest son's face when a friend at the Ranch told him his mom was in jail. It was a look of shock, empathy, sadness, and confusion. His five-year-old brain and heart could not understand how a mom was not loving and caring, how a mom would not care for her own children. We have had some pretty difficult conversations since then.

Foster care is not for the faint of heart. We often talk about our calling and mission but fail to talk about the challenges those who grow up in foster care face. There is a misconception that children should be grateful to be out of the chaos and dysfunction they were born into, while the reality is, most wish to return to their biological families, and often-times they experience significant guilt, grief, and confusion.

Our children are born into a world where the odds are stacked against them. Foster care is traumatic. It continues to impact their social, emotional, and cognitive development into adulthood. So how do they win? How do we help them overcome? While the answer is easy, the road to get there is not. We have to start where the trauma began.

In January of 2012, four siblings were placed in care. They ranged in age from two to six. The removal affidavit notes their mother was arrested for possession of a controlled substance. The oldest children only attended school 20% of the school year. The youngest was diagnosed with a life-threatening syndrome. The home was unsanitary and unsafe; the children were often left unsupervised and without food. They did not have beds and slept on the floor with a thin blanket.

The first years of life are vital in establishing trust and a healthy attachment style. When your basic needs are unmet, your brain begins to develop pathways for survival, not attachment.

These young children quickly realized that they could not trust their caregivers. They developed a fear of the world and learned that their caregivers would not meet their basic needs. In the years that followed, these ideas, along with feelings of rejection, abandonment, and inadequacy were reinforced.

The second oldest sibling, we'll call him Jay, was four when he was removed from his home. He would be placed in an emergency shelter for seven days before being placed in a foster home to be reunited with his siblings. Can you imagine the fear, sadness, and loneliness he felt for those seven days? Would he see his parents again? Would he see his siblings? What did he do wrong?

Within the year, his parents relinquished their rights, which allowed the children to be adopted by other families. His three siblings were adopted in 2015 and 2016 without him. Again, more questions, would he see his siblings again? Why not him? What did he do wrong?

Jay would experience twelve placement disruptions between 2012 and 2018. He was placed in foster homes, adoptive homes, psychiatric hospitals, and a Residential Treatment Center. Eight of the twelve disruptions listed "child's behavior" as the reason for discharge. What that tells us is that the foster/adoptive parents requested he be moved. I can only assume that he was not talked to about why he was leaving or where he was going. With each move came the same feelings of guilt, grief, confusion, and rejection.

We know that children need consistency, routine/structure, and attachment to a caring adult to thrive. Studies have shown placement instability increases risks of behavioral challenges, insecure attachment styles, poor academic achievement, and incarceration and homelessness in adulthood. Our children are fighting many battles in their daily lives, some we will never understand.

Although I do not understand why things happen, I do believe that God prepares us for what is to come. Jay came to live at the Ranch in 2018. We became Jay's 13th home, at the age of ten, after being in foster care for six years. Jay has called the Ranch his home for five years now and we are the longest placement he has experienced



in his sixteen years of life.

I often think about Jay in those moments of heartbreak. My 'momma's heart' breaks for him as I envision the fear on his face, the cries he must have cried, and his deep heart's desire for his momma. To be held, to be loved, to be seen, to be heard . . . even now at sixteen he still holds onto that and when he tells me his mom didn't want him or when he asks "why can't you be my mom?" What do I say? How do I convey to him that he is loved, that he is wanted, and that he is seen? We keep showing up. We give grace when challenges arise. We meet his basic needs and provide opportunities for positive experiences. We go fishing and camping. We build memories that he will always be able to look back on. We just find ways to fill his bucket. We often say "it takes a village" and it really does.

While I cannot adopt Jay, I can be a mother figure to him along with many others. I cannot answer his question as to why he doesn't have a mom but I can say he was blessed with many other moms who love him dearly. I am very

proud of the young man he has become. I feel honored and blessed that God has entrusted him to us.

A foster mom blogger recently wrote: "Today I am reminded that I am surrounded by an entire foster care system filled with people that are struggling. This life isn't normal, this isn't how things were ever meant to be, families aren't supposed to be broken and kids should never have to live a life of foster care but we live in a world where this is our reality and more than ever right now, so many need prayers." Her words resonated in my soul so deeply. We cannot change their past but we can influence the trajectory of their lives as we move forward.

God, would you guide our steps. Give us wisdom and discerning hearts to fulfill the mission we have been called for. Would you bless those before us, those alongside of us, and those who will come behind us? We ask for your hand of protection on HCYR, our staff, volunteers, supporters, and children. Thank you for the honor of being called to be the hands and feet of Jesus.



# He will place angels in the path to help you

by Gary Priour, Ranch Founder

Once in a great while, someone will ask me, “What was your business plan?” I always reply, “Faith.” God meeting us in our journey with angels to help us, and to lead us through challenges, is a matter of record.

In 1976, I was a 28-year-old with a calling to work with emotionally damaged children, and a vision that God had given me to build a village for them where they could heal and grow and find people they could trust. I had discovered my own gift while volunteering in children’s shelters and raising my son as a single parent.

When my father agreed to let me take my inheritance early to start my dream on 150 acres of family land near Ingram, I jumped at the chance. But I had no money.

However, as soon as I had made the commitment to donate the land to start a 501(c)(3) charity and begin to build, miracles began to happen and angels appeared.

The first angels were volunteers sent by the homebuilders association to put up the first three buildings, including our community center, a barn, and the first cabin. They came in crews from various contractors, and local suppliers donated the materials. It was amazing and joyful, a gathering of neighbors, like an Amish Barn Raising. I put on my toolbelt and joined them.

A community leader summoned a group of local ladies and formed the HCYR Auxiliary in 1977, with the goal of gathering furnishings for the first house. I had no idea at the time how this group would become so key in our connection with the community and provide an extended family to the children and the programs.

Following a local telethon on cable TV in 1978, a man called me out of the blue at our donated office in Kerrville and offered to build the first larger children’s house. I was speechless when he said he’d pay the full cost. He said he had seen our commitment and hard work and he wanted to partner with his wife to help build out the campus.

The miracles didn’t stop. With buildings completed, we were set to open in 1979 with a cabin for girls. With no money for operations, a couple volunteered to work as houseparents without pay. We had no funds for salaries until 1980. Everyone worked as volunteers. The builders had set the example. A second telethon in 1979 produced our first operating budget.

When the first children arrived, they became part of the adventure, surrounded by loving volunteers and a community geared to help. Their miracles soon validated our work, especially as the first graduates entered the world and proved our vision of individualized care and lifetime family commitment.

There were many challenges along the way. When the Recession of 1987 hit, I had no experience in looking for the light at the end of that tunnel. The state suddenly cut off its contract fees for childcare, and we were on our own. I let the community know about our situation, as I had always done, and we soon received the largest wave of financial support for operations we had ever received. It was a good lesson as we would experience recession about every seven years after that first one.

I learned the three constant tracks of ongoing fundraising – capital for building the villages, endowment for securing the future, and operations for meeting the needs of the present. In all three cases, God sent angels, sometimes when I was on my knees praying about a deadline.

As the program and facilities evolved, I also learned that there were *big moments* that opened us to new possibilities. As we discovered needs to improve or saw gaps in our continuum of care, here came the gift of the second campus at Leakey, the Charter School system, and the Enhanced Horizons campus for young adults, all adding to our ability to serve. We learned to observe, plan, pray, and move forward.

There were also moments that seemed impossible, despite our faith and determination. Scary. But we stayed at work.

I have always said to children, “There is a light at the end of *every* tunnel. I know it from my own journey. When troubles cloud our view, let’s watch for God to open the way.” Psalm 27:14: “Wait on the Lord and be of good courage.”

There is one tunnel which has not yet opened, in which we have waited since we discovered a flaw in the state’s placement system 40 years ago. The state moves children according to one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter ideals without regard to the needs of the individual child. That’s why the system is full of children with 25 different placements and no sense of attachment. We tried for years to develop a partnership with the state to spare the children arbitrary moves.

But the state bureaucracy keeps changing, and the dream of that partnership has vanished with time. The path to serving children who need to stay with us through to high school graduation is clear – other children’s homes twice our age did it through endowment and a shift to private placements.

We’re not there yet, but the financial obstacle to that route was recently lessened when a donor stepped forward and offered to begin to “fund-a-bed” one bed at a time so that we could help grandparents and other kin by providing scholarship placements for kids in need of what we have to offer.



## Looking for a mission in life? Our family needs you.

The Youth Ranch is looking for loving houseparents and childcare workers to help us provide a safe and healing environment for children who need a surrogate family and home. This is basically missionary work on homeland soil, work that changes the world, one abandoned and traumatized child at a time.

If you join us, you will live in a spacious, family-style home with separate quarters for houseparents. The children go to our Charter Schools on each campus, and each home has a van for transporting. They have breakfast and lunch at school on school days. You get extensive professional training before being left alone with kids, and you get paid while you train. We offer health insurance, a retirement program, housing, and other benefits. Contact us and find out more.

**Call Christy at 830-367-2131 to ask about our Ingram campus**

Our second campus, located near Leakey on the banks of the Frio River, is looking especially for couples to help start a new program for children being raised by grandparents or other kin who need help in their efforts to keep the children out of the system but lack the benefits of the system, or perhaps the means or skills to become full-time parents themselves. A donor (*see article*) has generously offered to fill the financial gap by funding the first beds in the first house to create a model. Our challenge is to find staff – a couple for the primary role of houseparent, and singles to provide respite and help with activities.

**Call Clint or Somers at 830-232-7410 for information about positions at the Leakey campus**

The remaining obstacle to moving into this new “*big moment*” is the lack of laborers in the vineyard. We’ve never seen a time when finding houseparents to do this work was so difficult. Even with an improved

payscale, housing and good benefits, we’re just not getting the response we need. Once we have a houseparent couple on board, the new program will launch and grow. So once more, we’re on our knees.

# 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 April 1 through June 6, 2023.

## In Memory Of:

JIM ANGELL  
Jackie Bishop  
Barbara Council  
BETTY BALES  
Vivian Ringo  
MARY BERNHARD  
James & Sherri Burdell  
Dennis & Carol Maurer  
GREGORY BERTASZ  
Lydel Bertasz  
EMILY BIERSCHWALE  
Mary Ann Bartlett  
Mildred Cammack  
Tom & Linda Johnston  
ROYLE EDWARD BLACKBIRD  
Georganna Bell  
CAROL BLAINE  
Carolyn Pavlovsky  
CAROLE HEXT BOHNERT  
Delbert & June Oehler  
Deanne & Herman Walker  
ED BRUNE  
D. G. & Berlee McCoury  
RODNEY JAMES BUNSEN, SR.  
Martha Bunsen  
MARY JANE CAMPBELL  
Violet Balraj  
Hill Country Youth Ranch  
Auxiliary  
Hill Country Youth Ranch  
Family  
Bob & Cynthia Moran  
Gary & Carol Priour  
Joyce Ridgeway (*birthday*)  
Steve & Janet Schaeffer  
Ann Vaughan & John Price  
Gary & Jeanette Vaughan  
Harold & Judy Wilson  
VIOLET CANALES  
Col. Frank Bertagnolli, Ret.  
BOBBY COOPER  
Betty Cooper  
LORRAINE EDNA CROOK  
Billie Stoepler  
JEFFERY ALAN CUMMINS  
Roz Cramer  
PERRY DAU  
Bonnie Dau  
JEANNETTE DOBSON  
Meg & David Ables  
Pat Browne  
LANA DYESS  
Ann & Buddy Wells  
MARIE FARRINGTON  
Carl & Maxine Mayes  
SID & PEARL FIEDLER  
James Fiedler

ED FOREMAN  
Shirley P. Gumert  
HAROLD "CHUB" FOREMAN  
Shirley P. Gumert  
RICHARD RUBEN GARZA  
Dennis & Carol Maurer  
JIM GAVIGAN  
Ralph Shelley  
DANNY GOTCHER  
Karen Gotcher  
CLEMENS CLINTON GROBE  
Sherri & James Burdell  
CHARLES GRONA  
Tivy Class of '52  
CAROL HAMILTON  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
JANETTE ESSER COLLINS  
CARPENTER HAMILTON  
Lynn & Jolyn Colvin  
Mary Jane Morrison  
WERNER & LORENE HENKE  
Glen & Carol Bockhorn  
PETER, JR. & PAT HENRY  
Jane Ann Henry  
TERRY HISE  
Pat Angell  
PATRICIA HOOVER  
Wayne & Norma Curtis  
BEULAH & BILL HUGGINS  
John H. Broocks III  
BARBARA IRBY  
Anonymous  
Stephen & Rene Bailey  
Winston & Jackie Depew  
Delbert & June Oehler  
DARRIEL JOHNSON (*birthday*)  
Hank & Linda Johnson  
EVELYN KINGSBERY  
Sammy & Barbara Allen  
Ron & Kathey Chapman  
The H. W. Kingsbery Family  
*Joe, Walter, Stuart & Bill*  
Paul & Krystle Ramsay  
EDWARD & RUTH KIRK  
Benny & Penny Grimmer  
BRYAN LAND  
Gwen & Peter Arhelger  
Mrs. Edgar Priess  
Jason & Rebecca Priess  
SHIRLEY LANGE  
Emily & Marion Baethge  
ARLEN LEEDER  
Edward & Sylvia Albrecht  
PATRICK K. LEMOINE  
Thomas and Cheryl  
A. J. LOTH  
Scott & Sandy Hofmann  
CLIFTON MACKKEY  
Mike & Betty Schofield

JERRY & KENNETH MANNING  
Louis and Mary Kay Smith  
Family Foundation  
FORREST MAULDIN (*my dad*)  
Rick Mauldin  
RED McCOMBS  
Dr. Anna Armstrong  
Bryce & Cindy Gaudian  
Gary & Carol Priour  
DAN MITTEL  
Scott & Sandy Hofmann  
TROY LYN PATTESON  
Scott & Sandy Hofmann  
Clarence & Elaine Jenke  
JEAN PITTMAN  
Diane & Sandy Brown  
Glen & Lucie Ellis  
Charles & Deana Jones  
Steve & Janet Schaeffer  
Margaret Shouse  
KEY PUCKETT & KEY  
PUCKETT III  
Bill & Lynda Tolleson  
GUADALUPE RAMIREZ  
(*my grandmother*)  
Ricardo Cantu  
JOSEPHINE RAMIREZ  
Arnold & Suzel Vela  
DEE ROBINSON  
Rob Robinson  
JUDY FERGUSON ROUSE  
Ann & Buddy Wells  
SHIRLEY SCHMERBECK  
Harvey & Marilyn Vordenbaum  
KATHERINE SCHULTZ  
Kathryn Kruse  
Tivy Class of '52  
RUBY SEALE  
Bill & Lynda Tolleson  
BOBBY SIEKER  
Cindy & Joe Abel  
Robert & Mimi Allison  
Marilyn & Mike Andrus  
Jim & Rita Arket  
Shirley Beckemeier  
Carl & Dolores Borchers  
Rex & Sheila Brand  
Linda Brown  
Pat Browne  
Allie & Betty Burton  
Larry & Beverly Charles  
Wayne & Norma Curtis  
Frank & Julie Dunlap  
Karen Fair  
Jimmie Sue Francis  
Kent & Deanna Grist  
Cathy Carden Henry  
Tom & Donna Hillin

Hill Country Youth Ranch  
Auxiliary  
Hill Country Youth Ranch  
Family  
Jayne Johnson  
Bart & Karen Jones  
DeWitt & Sharon Lang  
Craig & Andy Magee  
Ray & Peggy Mitchell  
Bob & Cynthia Moran  
Gary & Carol Priour  
Paul & Krystle Ramsay  
Mark & Carolyn Richardson  
Nancy Sarlin  
Steve & Janet Schaeffer  
R. L. Schmerbeck III  
Claire Shippy & Dinah  
Willbern  
Will Spencer & Mary Ann  
Hart  
Alice Springer  
Linda Stephens  
Jim & Martha Theiss  
Ann Vaughan & John Price  
Gary & Jeanette Vaughan  
Harvey & Marilyn Vordenbaum  
Charles & Bobbie Wetherbee  
Emil & Bobbie Willmann  
Harold & Judy Wilson  
Sandy Wolfmueller  
PATTY SMITH  
Doris Ivy & Family  
MARCELLE SMITLEY  
Lynn B & Jolyn Colvin  
SHARON STELLMAN  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
BOBBIE L. SUBLETT  
Herman & Merle Baldwin  
BETTY J. TAYLOR  
George & Teresa Lopez  
FLORENCE LEEDER TERRY  
Edward & Sylvia Albrecht  
LEONA TURNER  
Wayne & Norma Curtis  
LINDA UPCHURCH  
Ann & Buddy Wells  
ROSEMARY VAUGHAN  
Bill & Lynda Tolleson  
DAN WEINHEIMER  
Wayne & Norma Curtis  
TAYLOR WILLINGHAM  
Ben & June Willingham  
BRAD WILLIS  
Cindy Fraley  
Hill Country Youth Ranch  
Family  
Sherlee Johnson  
Gary & Carol Priour

Helen Steele  
George & Jan Willis  
MICHAEL WILSON (*orphan*)  
Carolyn Lawrence  
PRESTON WILSON  
Scott & Sandy Hofmann  
JUDY WOLPMAN  
Nanette & Tom Newbern

## In Honor Of:

MYRA, RODDY & NANCY  
ATKINS  
Beth Duderstadt  
HARRIET C. BILLINGS  
*Birthday*  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
LEON COX  
*Birthday*  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
COBY DAVIS  
Joy Hawkins, Grandma  
PEGGY SIMMONS DEAR  
Bill & Blythe Thomas  
LONDON & JENNIFER DELAGE  
Walter Hogue  
JUD GALLOWAY, JR.  
*Birthday*  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
FRED B. GILMORE, U.S.C.G.  
*Birthday*  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
KERRVILLE  
Brian Bowers  
MAE MARKSBURY  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
NEW CENTURY HOSPICE –  
KERRVILLE  
Anonymous  
JOANNE NIX  
*Birthday*  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
RICHARD & LING PATTY  
*55th Wedding Anniversary*  
Evelyn Anderson  
GARY & CAROL PRIOUR  
Sarah Lawton  
MATTHIAS RAMSAY  
*Birthday*  
Mary Estrada  
DEE SHOULTZ  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
CHERYL SIEKER  
Nancy Sarlin  
WILMA TEAGUE  
Claire Gilmore Nelms  
CYNTHIA WORD  
*Birthday*  
Betsy Drapela Rowan





Members of the HCYR Auxiliary (above) present Ranch graduate Christina with money to help her in her first year of enrollment in college. She will be attending Texas A&M-Corpus Christi beginning this fall. Christina will also be receiving a scholarship from the Auxiliary later this summer. The funds were given from the Auxiliary's Alumni Scholarship Program which helps Ranch Alumni of all ages with grants for college and trade school. Joining in the presentation are (left to right): Ann Vaughan Price, Thrift Store Manager Bridget Dale, Najim School Principal James Horrall, Christina, Auxiliary President Cheryl Sieker, Leslie Wells Rambin, and Barbie Haberer. The last meeting of the Auxiliary before their summer break was held at the HCYR campus on May 22. Members were treated to tours of the facilities. Many new members and guests were in attendance.

## Thrift Shop needs more volunteers

Our Thrift Shop in Ingram has become a huge success, contributing both to the Ranch and our local community, raising significant funds and helping to furnish the children's houses. The Thrift Shop

team is all-volunteer. Interested? To find out more, please stop by the Shop to see it for yourself at 3171 Junction Highway, just east of Ingram. Store hours are 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

## Gifts-in-kind provide quality environment

Thanks so much to all of you who think of the Ranch when you decide to get rid of usable items. Such donations play a big part in our ability to provide a quality environment.

Like every active family, we wear things out. We could not keep up with furnishing and equipping eighteen children's houses without gifts-in-kind.

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, or to the Thrift Shop during regular business hours from 10 to 4 Monday through Saturday.

Our current "most-needed" list includes:

**Furniture** – any quality items, including sofas, chairs, chests, dressers, tables, shelves, lamps, beds, rugs.

**Appliances** – like-new only, large and small.

**Housewares** – silverware, plastic ware, glasses, dishes, pots & pans.

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

**Office Equipment** – desks, chairs, tables, shelves.

**Vehicles** – 12-passenger vans, mini-vans, pickup trucks.

**Horse Supplies** – saddles, halters, tack, ropes, blankets, mineral blocks, hay.

**Fishing Equipment** – tackle boxes, poles, lures, tools.

**Recreation** – fishing gear, frisbees, sports balls, bicycles, helmets, skates, games.

**Tools** – of all kinds.

**Anything re-sellable**

## Auxiliary Twine

Dear Friends,

Congratulations to the graduates of the Najim Charter School, Brune School at Big Springs Ranch in Leakey, and Enhanced Horizons! I was privileged to witness the pride and joy of each graduate and family members. It was evident that these students have a great love and admiration for their fellow classmates, teachers and administrators. The teachers, staff and administrators go above and beyond to help each student succeed.

As president of the HCYR Auxiliary, I would like to challenge you to join us and give of your time, energy, talents, and resources to make a difference in the lives of these precious children.

You can begin by attending the 47th annual Healing Hearts Celebration, Style Show and Auction, which will be held September 19th, 2023. This special event will be held at the YO Conference Center. Check out the Youth Ranch website to purchase a table!

I'm looking forward to seeing you in September!

Grace and peace,

Cheryl Sieker, President  
Hill Country Youth Ranch Auxiliary

## Save the Date!

We're planning our annual  
Trailride, Dinner, and Barn Dance for  
**November 11, 2023**

So mark the date on your calendar!

Come join us at our beautiful Big Springs Ranch on the Frio for a whole day of fun and adventure, or just for the evening festivities.

Stay tuned, details to come.

## 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 April 1 through June 5, 2023.

Generous cash donations came from **Wealth Preservation Strategies, LTD., La Grange, IL**; **Kimberly Bryan, Comfort, TX**; **100+ Men Who Give A Damn, Fredericksburg, TX**; **Clarence & Elaine Jenke, Fredericksburg, TX**; **Melynn Williams, Fredericksburg, TX**; **EDF Renewables, Houston, TX**; **Jim & Martha Theiss, Humble,**

**TX**; **Jared & Candice Douthit, Kerrville, TX**; and **F. & DeAndrea Magee, Kerrville, TX**.

We were also blessed with generous in-kind gifts: **Leslie Lehrmann, Ingram, TX**, gave furniture; **Donna Simmons, Ingram, TX**, gave furniture; **Karrolyn Brown, Kerrville, TX**, gave furniture; **Wendy Sachs, Kerrville, TX**, gave furniture; and **Sovereign Life Fellowship, Longview, TX**, gave toiletries & craft supplies.

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



# Twenty-one Graduate from Youth Ranch Schools!



To say that the Hill Country Youth Ranch's Charter School System, consisting of Cailloux, Najim, and Brune Schools, and the Center for Advancement at Enhanced Horizons, is a success is evident in many ways. But perhaps no more so than in looking at our graduates. Originally chartered to school long-term Ranch residents, the school system has had to adapt, as the Ranch has, to the changing whims of the foster care system. With residents being forced to move more often, we generally have a shortened window in which to impact the lives of children who have had little or inadequate schooling experience prior to coming to HCYR, BSRC and EH. Thus, it's a challenge to just get our students to the commencement stage. Enhanced by the addition of students from the community because of our reputation for working with students who have struggled in school, the charter schools have had tremendous success in guiding students through the ins and outs of education, from kindergarten through high school. We take great pride in announcing the graduation in 2023 of twenty-one students from our school system: three from Najim High School, eleven from Brune High School, and seven from Enhanced Horizons, all with high school diplomas. We wish all of our graduates the best of everything for their futures!



## State Track Meet Results!

by Albert Hernandez  
Brune School Superintendent

On April 22nd a combined team of middle school and high school Brune Hawks track and field athletes, 37 in all, attended the regional track meet for the Texas Charter School Academic and Athletic League at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. The team participated in field events (discus and shotput) and running events (100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, and 4x100m relay). The Hawks gave it their all and placed in many of the events. The Brune Track Team had two athletes advance to the state meet taking place May 6th at the same venue. Cadence Hernandez placed 2nd in discus, and

Braden Smith placed 2nd in the 400m, and 6th in the 800m at the regional meet.

The morning of May 6th was hot and humid as over 40 schools and 700 athletes took the field. Cadence Hernandez missed winning her first state championship by six inches in the discus. Cadence threw over 110 feet, but scratched, and the throw did not count. She wound up as a two-time state runner up (2022 and 2023) and, as I told her, "Second place in State isn't bad!" Braden ran in a tough field for both of his qualifying events, taking 12th place in the 400m and 8th in the 800m. We are so proud of the Hawks accomplishments and congratulate each of our athletes on a job well done!



Senior Cadence Hernandez (above, with her father Albert) placed second in discus at the state track & field meet. Braden Smith (right, with Cadence) also represented Brune School at the state meet in the 400 and 800 meter races.





# Pint & Plow Art Show a huge success for Ranch artists

by Tony Gallucci, Publications

Students from Carol Priour's art classes at HCYR were invited to show their works at the wonderful community cultural hub Pint & Plow in Kerrville, Texas in April. And, of course, they were thrilled for the opportunity.

It was a rousing success, attended by Ranch supporters, esteemed community members, and local media. Comments were heard all afternoon praising the creativity of the student artists, with much of the discussion centering around the healing that comes through the channeling of pain into art.

We learned many years ago that art, in all its forms, is a powerful healing tool. An otherwise non-responsive child may find expression in drawing a picture or writing a poem. Those 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 art can transform.

Student artists shepherded guests around the display discussing their technique and the stories behind their pictures. Award-winning artist Cameron Williams was interviewed by *The Lead* reporter Louis Amestoy about his published poetry and his artwork on display.

Artworks unsold on the day of the exhibition remained on display for a month. Sales of the artworks directly benefited the artists, with the students going home having found tangible reward from their artistic abilities.

While the show has now concluded, there are dozens of student artworks on display in the permanent gallery at the Fine Arts Center on Ranch, where visitors can see them.



Ranch artists got to spend an afternoon greeting guests at Kerrville's Pint & Plow (left), while showcasing their art, produced under the tutelage of Fine Arts Director Carol Priour. Dozens of artworks were on display (below).



Areanna's three-dimensional, winged, sewn-up broken heart titled "The Healing" (far left) was a favorite among the many visitors. This was, as were almost all the artworks, sold to community visitors, and the money went directly to the students' savings accounts. Local reporter Louis Amestoy of *The Lead* did some serious reporting about the show. He is shown here (middle) discussing the show and the Ranch with Executive Director Krystle Ramsay, and (near left) talking with Cameron Williams about his poetry book. Cameron had two paintings on display.



# Brune Cheerleaders bring home another title!

by Albert Hernandez

Charter Schools Superintendent

The Brune Charter School 2022-23 cheerleading squad recently competed in the Bravo Spirit Events cheer competition. The competition was held at the Kalahari Convention Center in Round Rock, Texas.

The cheerleaders competed in the Junior Varsity Game Day Division and came away with a Division Championship!

Each cheerleader received a medallion and a beach towel, and the squad received a championship banner that will hang in our gymnasium at the school campus.

Eleven cheerleaders from Brune Charter School attended the competition this year. The squad is coached by Debbie Armentor with assistance from Monica Hernandez.





# Letters Home ~ notes from alumni

*Every day we receive notes, emails, and online posts from our alumni, now over 2100 strong, and ranging in age from 18 to 58. We're so glad when our alumni write to us, or visit us, sometimes to show their spouses and children the place they call home.*

*To all our grown children – keep the visits, photos, postings, and emails coming!*

May 29, 2023

Dear Papa Gary,

I'm sending my final grades for this past semester – all A's and one B. I'm so thankful to have made it through my first year of graduate work at UTSA. I could not have done it without my wonderful support system. Thank you to my home, Gary, the Auxiliary and the Childers family for the wonderful scholarships you've offered for me to continue my education to get my Masters degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Forever thankful. And thank you for always believing in me.

Love you tons!

Kim Mosel Samaniego '02

San Antonio, Texas

May 27, 2023

Dear Papa Gary,

It's been a few years since I brought my family for a visit to the Ranch, so I thought I'd send you an update on us via Messenger.

As you know, I am proud to have served honorably in the military for 15 years before returning to San Antonio to be with my wife and children. About 5 years ago, I ventured into the world of construction in the field of remodeling and repairs. It's been quite a journey – not an easy one, but God has been good and given me favor along the way. I have to put God in everything for He is the vine indeed. Just as you taught us at the annual Good Friday garden planting, it takes time for the seedling to emerge from the ground and then slowly grow. That has been my journey in this career. There is a lot of competition, but the favor of God is what I cling to and pray about daily. And I do my part by doing my very best for every work I render to each client.

My business is now officially registered as Texas Remodeling Advisors!

The thing I like the most about this work is to see the before and after of every small or big job. And it reminds me of our lives: Sometimes our environment can leave us in such a messy condition and even leave us stranded. But God sees us with His loving eyes and sees the beauty that He has envisioned for us and created in us.

That's how I see projects from time to time, especially when it comes to remodeling a home. Sometimes the owners of the property become forgetful of the upkeep, and before you know it, the house is in bad shape. Someone outside the box has to come along, give them fresh ideas and a vision of what it can be with the proper work, time, and dedication. Once the clients understand and we all agree, the home can come back to life and look brilliant. But it takes time to put in work and see the process unfold!

This reminds me of your work in my life when I came to the Ranch. I had to agree that I was not okay. I needed that extra help, I was in a messy spot, and I was left stranded and alone. The right people came along and spoke life and envisioned me doing fine. Words are powerful, and I was careful to hear the words that were spoken in the Chapel by you and others on Sunday mornings. I would sometimes pretend that I was not listening. But I did listen, and I believed. And I clung to the Word of God, and I have seen His works in my life – I am a living testimony of how a messy life and broken heart can be restored. When the world saw a lost cause; God saw me with love, hope, and a life ahead. And God sent the right people, in His timing, to restore me.

My family is also doing well. I/we are still very much involved in the ministry – I use every opportunity I have to pray for someone, or whenever an opportunity opens for me to share the Good Word, I do so. Of course, I do so without imposing myself or what has been revealed to me in my walk with God. Unless people give me an opening.

God never fails – and in this journey I am in now, I fall constantly upon His promises, His goodness, and His timing.

Always,

Steven Ayala '00

San Antonio, Texas

May 21, 2023

Dear Gary,

I'm on my way to my Biology Research summer studies program in Costa Rica. In fact, as I write you this message, it's about an hour till we land in Costa Rica! Thank you so much for all your help getting me to this point. This is a dream come true. I'll make sure to take plenty of photos while I'm here!

Gratefully,

Javier Castillo '14

Kerrville, Texas

May 19, 2023

Dear Ranch Family,

I saw on Facebook that Mr. Bryce Gaudian from Hayward, Minnesota brought a load of horse tack to Michael Priour, manager of the BSRC Horse Program, during his visit in April to Big Springs Ranch for Children.

Seeing the photos of Michael and the horses and the tack brought back so many wonderful memories. That program is amazing! I speak from experience. Being an orphan, then taken from my God family to the Ranch, I felt afraid and stranded. The horse program saved my life. I honestly don't know where I'd be if I didn't have that program to keep me sane during those years. Please tell Michael hello for me.

Beatriz Perez '15

Albany, Texas

May 13, 2023

Dear Ranch Family,

I want to tell you a story about Mama Carol and why she is the absolutely the best Mama ever!!

I am one of the Ranch girls of the 90s, and I've been gone from HCYR for 30 years. Last Saturday, on May 6, the shooting took place at the Allen Outlets Mall. Mama knew I lived in Allen, and she also knew that I worked in Allen Outlets. Right after the news broke, she messaged me to make sure I was ok. Thankfully I was at another Allen Outlets location, but at that time my mall was on an active shooter alert and lock-down.

Mama Carol stayed in constant communication over the next two hours while I was locked in a bathroom with six women and four teenagers who work there part-time. The teenagers were reading their Twitter updates and freaking out. But Carol's sweet words of encouragement and her prayers that I felt in my core kept me strong.

I never once felt weak during that dreadful time due to her prayers that kept coming and reassuring me. And then the SWAT team came and escorted us out underneath their shields – the SWAT shields/protection that I know Mama Carol's prayers sent!

And just think. I'm one of over 1000 daughters Mama Carol has cared for in her 38 years at the Ranch. And in my time of danger, she was right there.

Layla Torkizadeh Williams '94

Allen, Texas

May 12, 2023

Dear Momma Carol and Papa Gary,

I am so thankful I won the lottery when I landed at HCYR in the 1980s! The trajectory I was on before I came to the Ranch was one of failure, jail, even death, but the Ranch redirected my path. Everyone showed me UNCONDITIONAL love. The Ranch saved my life. And the difference you and the staff made in my life CHANGED my life forever.

It's the same when I talk to others – my Ranch brothers and sisters. Like me, they made it to the other side through the love provided by our Ranch family and the support of the surrounding community! There is so much power in that ya'll.

I love you Gary Priour and Carol King Priour so very much! And Happy Mother's Day to the woman who loved me right where I was at in the 80's and to this day! I love you!

Catherine Brockett Carson '87

Magnolia, Texas