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## New planting in an old garden

### *Return to family placements has begun*

by Gary Priour, Founder

Our oldest community activity at the Ranch is planting our spring garden, which we have done every year since 1978 on Good Friday. At the planting, I tell the children the story of Good Friday and Easter weekend 2000 years ago, with its lessons of Resurrection on Sunday, following Christ's suffering and death on Friday. We compare it to the spring rebirth that follows the winter in nature, and with the planting of our garden, putting seeds into the dark soil, then watering and nourishing them so God can do His work of bringing forth the miracle of life.

"Renewal" is a word in much use at the Ranch. Our aging physical plant has required restoration and renewal, starting with a 10-year plan to restore the original Ingram campus that launched in 2011 and continued through 2020, taking much time and funding. Enhanced Horizons is now being restored, and Phase I is almost complete (see report on page 5).

We also use "renewal" when talking about our work to find God's child in the broken child, pointing to how God teaches us to love one another as Jesus loved us, seeing beyond the scars left by abuse and abandonment. John 15:12 is our mantra, and we teach it as a goal to our staff, seeking to practice it daily in our interactions with children. Bringing out the

child God created also takes time, and yes, funding.

The Youth Ranch started its journey of caring for children by receiving applications from parents, grandparents, and relatives of the child. This worked well, and the children could stay as long as it was good for them and their families, many for eight or ten years until they finished high school. Our funding came from community supporters and friends.

By 1990, our continuum of services for children with varying needs had become highly complex, and more expensive. We contracted with the state to help with the finances, while the community continued to grow its support as well. We appreciated all the help, but discovered a problem with state decision-making. Neither the Ranch nor the children were allowed at the table when decisions were made about moving a child between placements.

Our work was all based on the individual needs of each child – not quota systems or 'one size fits all' mandates, with decisions excluding providers and the children and often made remotely without consultation. We began to see consequences in the lives of children and pointed to the evidence.

Despite our best efforts to negotiate a unified planning process with Child Protective Services, as well as to seek remedy through the

legislature, this problem has only gotten worse with time.

Today's bureaucratic prejudice against group homes seems to derive from an assumption that all children are the same. But we know from 47 years of data that this is not true. Some children in foster care, especially the most severely traumatized, thrive best in a setting with multiple mentors and a continuum of services that allows them to heal and grow without having to move constantly to a different 'family' based on arbitrary ideals. Some of our children have been moved 20 or more times while in care, failing each time because no one listens to them when they say they don't want to move, that they have found their 'forever home' in, of all places, a group home surrounded by loving caregivers and teachers, with opportunities to grow their gifts and find special life-changing mentors.

Our history is a story of taking chances that align with our core mission, and God's calling, to serve children in a family setting, establishing relationships that can last a lifetime. Please read the articles from Alumni on pages 3 and 7 of this newsletter to hear directly from two of them – one from the 80s and one from the 90s – who have thrived knowing that we are always there for them, regardless of their age or circumstance.

We've known for a long time

now that to fulfill our mission of being a long-term family to children who need us, we will have to wean from state contracts. This means replacing the funding provided by the state, one bed at a time. Thanks to a friend who has followed our reporting on this challenge, and who has chosen to replace annual state funding for four beds at Big Springs Ranch, we are responding once again to applications from families, especially grandparents raising their grandchildren, who are without the means to pay for our services.

So here we go, returning to our beginnings and renewing our commitments. What we've had to do is to find a way to fund private placements so the state doesn't have the power to make the capricious moves that damage a child's ability to regain trust in adults and live a stable life.

It's a tall mountain, but a path has opened, and we've stepped onto it in faith, believing. If you would like to join in this journey to renew our mission, or if you have questions, please email me at [gary@youth-ranch.org](mailto:gary@youth-ranch.org).



Since opening its doors in 1977, the Youth Ranch has held John 15:12 as its motto, striving to move closer to the commandment of Jesus.

# Event crowns drive to fund Enrichment Programs

*Auxiliary has been our funding partner for 47 years . . . and produces what many believe is Kerrville's top annual social happening*  
by Gary Priour, Founder

I can still remember the scene of the first Auxiliary Style Show, held at River Inn Resort southwest of Hunt in 1977. The goal was to raise funds for furnishing and decorating the first children's cabins, being built by volunteers on the new Youth Ranch land near Ingram. The recently formed Auxiliary filled the event room at River Inn with 50 guests, mostly charter members of

the Auxiliary. Outfits were provided by Bea Young, local fashion designer and also a charter member of the new support group. The Auxiliary never looked back, switching to modeling clothes from the Thrift Shop, which opened in a storage warehouse in 1978. The event has run every year continuously for 47 years, growing this year to 500 guests and setting records for helping to fund Ranch programs (*see right*).



*live auction*



*silent auction*



*great food style show*



*Executive Director  
Krystle Ramsay*

*See the wrapup of the event and words from our special Alumna speaker, Kim Mosel Samaniego, on page three.*

*speakers*



*Thrift Store Manager  
Bridget Dale*



*Auxiliary President  
Cheryl Sicker*



*Founder  
Gary Priour*



*Chief Financial Officer  
Tim Campbell*

## The programs at a glance

During 47 years of providing an educational and life-enhancing environment for traumatized children and youth, seven core programs have proven their worth in lifting such children and youth to see more in themselves than brokenness, allowing them to discover gifts, take new adventures in learning, develop strengths, and find motivation as they continue to heal and prepare for adult life. They include chapel and Christian education, horsemanship and animal care, visual and performing arts, recreation, family life activities, summer programs, plus transitional living and 'fresh start' programs for young adults at our third campus, Enhanced Horizons.

The total annual budget for these seven core programs is \$1,200,000. Because the government offers no support for such programs, we must raise these funds each year to sustain and protect them. We believe they are essential to the success of our children and youth. Having them makes Hill Country Youth Ranch unique, and adds to our continuum of therapeutic services.

The Style Show is one component of our annual drive to fund these programs. If you are interested in knowing more about the programs, and how you can help sustain them, ask for Gary or Tim at 830-367-2131.

- **Chapel & Christian Education** – Our mission to provide a life-enhancing Christian environment starts with Sunday chapel. Our children often arrive angry at authority, including God. Each requires a different 'next step', so we sing and talk about the love of Christ, and strive to be mutually respectful while waiting for an opening to occur.
- **Visual & Performing Arts** – Art, music, poetry, and theater are powerful healing tools for traumatized children. An otherwise non-responsive child may be able to paint, write, sing, or dramatize what they cannot otherwise share. Plus, artistic gifts are often enhanced in such children, and their works can be stunningly beautiful.
- **Horsemanship & Animal Care** – Certified staff help children learn to be around horses safely, while also learning to groom, saddle, ride, and show them. Riding for fun is what the children enjoy most. They also learn valuable life lessons like respect, discipline, trust, and work ethic through such interactions, experiencing healing in the process.
- **Recreation** – Recreation is a key element in healing and growth. Trauma is stored in the body and mind in ways that influence behavior. Recreation provides life-changing experience through exercise, adventure, challenge, and play. It also offers gift-discovery and development.
- **Summer Programs** – The whole gamut of enrichment programs is offered each summer on an elective basis. Residents take classes in life skills, cooking, sewing, arts and crafts, dance, music, drama, painting, vocational education, sports, fishing, horseback riding, and more. They can participate in many programs in rotation.
- **Family Life** – Each individual house, 18 of them spread across the two children's campuses in Ingram and Leakey, functions as a family. It is our goal to model traditional family experiences. Cabin activities for each household include holiday celebrations, birthday parties, off-Ranch outings for meals and entertainment, and trips to special destinations.
- **Enhanced Horizons – Transitional Living & Fresh Start Programs for Young Adults, ages 18 - 24** – Residential and educational support for HCYR alumni, aged-out foster youth, at-risk young adults, homeless young mothers with infants/toddlers, and sexually abused young women, ages 18-24. Offerings include: high school completion (EH Charter School), college enrollment and financial assistance, job skills training, life skills coaching, career guidance, transportation assistance, transitional housing, and help during crises.

# Healing Hearts lives up to its name

by Tim Campbell, Chief Financial Officer

The 47th annual Healing Hearts Style Show, Luncheon, and Auction was a wonderful celebration of the work of Hill Country Youth Ranch and was planned and presented by our strongest supporters, the members of the HCYR Auxiliary.

For a number of years now, the annual Auxiliary Style Show has raised money for HCYR's Enrichment Programs. These programs have stood the test of time as foundational elements of our work with traumatized children, helping them to identify gifts, gain skills and confidence, and serve as pathways for healing and growth. Each year in September, the proceeds from the Style Show and Auction get us across the finish line to complete that year's drive.

Net results have not yet been finalized, but from all indications, this year's event was the most successful one ever! And attendees enjoyed an inspiring array of presentations.

As Kim says in her speech, the Auxiliary is an extended family to the children. Their faithful and successful work lets our Alumni know that they can count on their Ranch family for a lifetime!



## *Alumna Kim Mosel Samaniego's speech is highlight of program*

Hello everyone. I apologize in advance as I am terrified of public speaking but when Gary reached out to me and asked if I'd like to speak to you all, I couldn't say no. There was no way I could pass up the opportunity to tell you all how much the Ranch has impacted my life and my family's life.

I first and foremost want to thank you all for all you do. You may not always get to see how much the things you do matter, or the difference you are making, but I am here today to tell you – you are changing lives every day.

I came to the Ranch when I was 6 years old. I was a very scared and shy little girl and felt so alone when I first arrived. I didn't realize that I was about to gain such a large family for life, or that I would be lucky enough to have met so many individuals throughout my childhood that I still have in my life today. I want to tell you how some of the Enrichment Programs at the Ranch helped shape me into the person I am today.

I can still remember all the plays that Carol worked so hard on, like *Broken Wings Can Fly*. I remember seeing her work for months and endless hours helping us learn and practice our lines, laughing and just having a blast while doing it all. There were many other memorable times such as when she would take us to the Fine Arts Center and we would get to put on costumes and pretend to be anything we wanted. It was truly magical and something I will never forget. Other times we would simply spend the day in the Center painting all day long or making wood art. I know so many of us loved learning to play instruments and making music with Tony Young and how we were always encouraged to do our best at it. I still remember when he taught me how to play the bass guitar. We always had so much fun that most of the time we didn't even realize that we were at a foster home, because to us it was simply home.

My favorite program was the horse program. I rode my first horse when I was 7 years old with Mike Priour at the Ingram campus, and I've never stopped. I learned so much from this program, like how to saddle a horse, how to feed them, wash them, care for them and best of all to love them. Riding horses was and still is one of my most favorite things to do even today. It makes me happy, puts me at ease and makes me feel like I'm home.

When the first group of girls moved out to Big Springs Ranch in 1999, I was blessed to be among them. Mike Priour brought the horse program out there and would take us horseback riding every week. It was truly so magical for us to grow up in such a beautiful place. I couldn't tell you how much the horse program really helped me come out of my shell and gain confidence. I could not be more thankful that these programs are still around today, knowing that other children get to grow up on a ranch with arts, music and dance, and be around horses, cows, pigs and chickens.

I'm thankful for so many things from the Ranch. I am who I am today because I got to grow up here. I have the drive that I have today because at the Ranch, I was taught and encouraged to always do my best and never give up on my goals. I am the mother I am today because I was shown what a mother should be, and today, I pass on many of the lessons I learned at the Ranch to my own five kids.

I remember when I first enrolled in college in 2016, with my husband's blessing, and started working toward getting my Associate's Degree. College was a huge step almost 12 years after high school graduation. I had been a good mother, but I felt I might never accomplish my educational goals. But Gary would call me and tell me that he believed in me, that you all here today believed in me and to not give up.

Those words of encouragement got me through some hard times and I am grateful for them. I was so happy when in 2018, I graduated with my Associate's Degree, and then in 2020 got my Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. I am forever grateful for all your support. I cannot believe that I am now in my third semester for my Master's Degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, and I promise you I will achieve this goal as well. So, thank you all for never giving up on me and for believing that I could reach my dreams. I love y'all, and I will be forever thankful to God for bringing me here, and to all of my Ranch family for the rest of my life. You are my forever family.

*The 2023 Healing Hearts Celebration (below) was a sellout once again, filling the YO Hotel ballroom.*



# 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 August 5 through October 5, 2023.

## In Memory Of:

RICHARD JAMES ANGELL  
Dale & Pamela Hardin  
JAMES BARNETT  
Gary & Kim Omlor  
FRANCES "FRAN" BERNARD  
BERTAGNOLLI  
Frank Bertagnolli  
LARRY BIEDENHARN  
Violet Feller  
JO ELLEN BIERMANN  
Edward & Sylvia Albrecht  
NAOMI BONORDEN  
Sidney Osborne  
EDRA BOWDLE  
Pat Browne  
Marilyn Hankins  
Robert & Phyllis Lane  
Dorris Wendt & Janie Love  
Paul Toops  
Judy Vinson  
KIMBER BRIGGS  
Jane Ann Henry  
LOUIS BURTON  
Mike & Betty Lou Schofield  
LOUISE CALVERT  
Eddie & Gerry Ann Hatch  
MARY JANE CAMPBELL  
Len & Linda Montgomery  
JOE CARRELL  
Jake & Kari Short  
AIDA URIAS CASILLAS  
Catherine Carson  
Gary & Carol Priour  
BOBBY COOPER  
Betty Jo Cooper  
BILL DENDY  
Marion & Emily Baethge  
Herman & Merle Baldwin  
Elton Faught

Bob & Cynthia Moran  
Ken & Margie Oehler  
TOM DEUPREE  
Bill & Blythe Thomas  
SUSAN PANKRATZ DICKENS  
Harry & Mary Seidensticker  
SUE MARTINDALE DIETZ  
Don & Marcia Dietz  
DANIEL "DANNY" DOHERTY  
Wayne & Norma Curtis  
NELDA DUNN  
Carolyn Brinkman  
DONAGHEY "DON" DURAN  
Janet Smyers  
REV. SHERRELL ECKSTEIN  
Linda Stephens  
JAMES ENDERLIN  
Mary & Harry Seidensticker  
JUDY ANN ESTES  
Eddie & Gerry Ann Hatch  
AUGUSTINE ESTRADA  
Mary Estrada  
CHARLES FLACH  
Edward & Sylvia Albrecht  
MILTON FRIESENHAHN  
Armand, Karen Antony &  
Bridget, Chris & Lucas  
CAROLYN JO HARZ GOODALL  
Lorraine Massey  
Ikey Peter & Family  
Mary & Harry Seidensticker  
CHARLES GORE  
Kay McCorquodale  
JACK GRAHAM  
Carol Ann Meyners  
VIRGINIA MAE GRINDLE  
Dora Lee Sewell  
PETER C. HENRY & FAMILY  
Jane Ann Henry  
BRUCE T. HILTON  
Patricia Hilton

TED HUDSON  
Dave & Sue Tune  
MARCUS JOHNSON III  
Betty Jo Cooper  
HUGH NED JONES  
Vickie Ahrens  
Adeline Honig  
CAROLINE MALOCHLEB  
KENSING  
Peggy Malochleb Contreras  
EVELYN KINGSBERY  
Mike & Ann Hilliard  
EDWARD & RUTH KIRK  
Benny & Penny Grimmer  
LOUELLA KOCH  
Margaret, Rick & Marcia,  
Keith Koch & Kathy Shaheen  
Carolyn MacAskie  
Joleen Sanborn  
Beth Wise  
WANDA LEIBEE  
Allen Leibee  
BETH LEMEILLEUR  
Linda Stephens  
LOUIS LIESMANN  
The Clark Kleins  
PEGGY LOPRESTI  
Amy Walsh  
LILLIAN MEURER  
Genevieve McCaffrey  
A.B. & MARILYN MILLER  
Mary & Robert Reaves  
MURRY MITCHELL  
David, Arnell & Rhett McMillin  
& Gina Pickering  
CAROL MOCZYGEMBA  
Sherri & James Burdell  
DIANA LYNN PERRY  
Coy C. Summers  
ANDREW PETERSON  
Brian & Vicki Menefee

BARBARA KOTHMANN  
PLUENNEKE  
Margie & Ken Oehler  
DEE ROBINSON  
Rob Robinson  
CHARLIE ROBINSON  
Linda Stephens  
NANCY MARSH SAMPSON  
Mary Jane, Elizabeth & Paul  
Morrison  
LOIS SIMLER SESSIONS  
Karen Robards  
BOBBY SIEKER  
Martha Bass  
Gary & Carol Priour  
PATSY SWARTZ  
Violet Feller  
LOIS BELDEN THURMOND  
Karen Fair  
PEGGY TREIBS  
Marcia & Don Dietz  
AMANDA WADE  
Violet Feller  
JAY WARD  
Marcia & Don Dietz  
WAYNE WHITE  
Bell Ringers of Texas  
Matthew & Ann Heindel

BRAD WILLIS  
The Willis Family Reunion

## In Honor Of:

GEORGANNA BELL  
*For her love and support*  
Blackbird Family  
BRIAN BOWERS  
& HCYR BOARD  
Mike & Ann Hilliard  
MARIANNE CARNEY  
*Birthday*  
Sharon Stelman  
MARSHALL CRAWFORD  
*90th Birthday*  
Rosslyn Crawford  
Gary & Carol Priour  
JAY KELLEY  
Gary & Louise Moss  
AMBER KLECKA  
*Friendship*  
Betsey Wadley  
BARBARA McDONALD  
*Birthday*  
Sharon Stelman  
HARVEY & MARILYN  
VORDENBAUM  
Wayne Wedgeworth

## The Youth Ranch in brief

- A childcare family established officially on March 21, 1977
- Our mission is to provide a safe, loving, and life-enhancing Christian environment for children and young adults
- Three villages on three separate ranches with unique cultures to serve children and youth with varying needs
- Award-winning charter schools on all three campuses
- A complete array of programs for traumatized children from 5 to 18, in settings where healing and growth are individualized, plus transitional living for young adults, ages 18 - 24
- Unparalleled activity choices, including recreation, athletics, visual and performing arts, agriculture, horse and animal care, vocational education, outdoor adventure, and more
- Need-based, age-appropriate housing ranging from psychiatric assessment centers to family-style homes, to apartment-style housing for young adult graduates
- Adoption services including training and support of families
- Home and lifetime family to over 2150 children in 46 years
- Alumni Association with 750 members who maintain positive relationships with their HCYR family and one another
- Life-long support for alumni of all ages, including college, transitional living, career guidance, and help during crises

### Thrift Shop needs volunteers

Our Ingram Thrift Shop has become a huge success, contributing both to the Ranch and to 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 campus for young adults. This is only possible through many great donated items, and the volunteers who do all the work to prepare and price them.

Want to help? We really need you for a few hours a week to add to their numbers. Help is needed to sort donated items, stock shelves, greet customers, and perform tasks to make the stores run smoothly. It's a great way to serve and make friends, too! 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.

**Tax Tip:** The end of the year is a good time to think about charitable gifts. If you are age 70½ and are required to make minimum distributions (RMD) from your IRA, you can make a Qualified Charitable Distribution from this RMD. This has the benefit of lowering your Adjusted Gross Income and your income tax. You still get the benefit of the Standard Deduction if you do not itemize.

# Phase I of EH Restoration nears completion

by Gary Priour, HCYR Founder

In 2021, Karen Brune, member of the Board of Trustees of the HCYR Foundation, and daughter of Ed and Trudy Brune who helped us build most of the facilities at Big Springs Ranch over two decades, became inspired about our program for young adults living at our third campus, Enhanced Horizons. In that year, Karen and her family invested over \$300,000 in restoring a former dorm being used as a storage warehouse, and made of it a model for providing a quality home for young adult women who needed refuge and a fresh start.

Karen's response to her new calling not only inspired her family, but led to inspiring others who were also drawn to the mission when they learned about it.

Many joined and added support. Karen's niece Michelle was friends with members of the Scripps family of Fredericksburg and brought them to visit the campus. The Scripps have a Foundation, and they added funding in 2022 for much-needed streetlights to make the previously dark campus more secure, and also voted to add a second house to the renovation list.

By January of 2023, the Mabee Foundation of Midland made a

Challenge Grant to provide a path to finish funding the \$975,000 projects list that included more remodeling and infrastructure upgrades. Twenty donors, old friends and new, joined in the next five months to help meet the Mabee Challenge, and now we're in the home stretch of delivering a quality environment for young adults getting their starts in life.

Donors will have the opportunity to see what they've helped to transform at an Open House on Thursday, October 26, starting at Scripps House in the middle of the campus at 11:00 a.m., with walking tours to follow. All contributors to the EH operational budget, capital improvements, and endowment campaign will be invited.

For the past 15 years, since the Cailloux Foundation bought and gifted the campus to HCYR, Enhanced Horizons, a 35-acre village located four miles west of Ingram on Hwy 27, has served aged-out foster youth and at-risk young adults, ages 18-25, who benefit from housing, mentoring and short-term support as they prepare for the next chapters in their lives.

When young adults leave the state's foster care system, they don't usually have biological



Left, Andrew and Robert Merritt finish a parking lot at Enhanced Horizons in September as part of EH Restoration. Their company, Masters Constructions, has paved all of HCYR's roads since the very first ones in 1976. Below, Karen Brune, who inspired the Restoration Campaign by giving funds for Hope House in 2021-22, and then shepherded the planning of the Phase I projects list in 2022, works with the team to get furniture into Cailloux House as Project Manager John Meyners and Construction Foreman Bubba Elmore look on.

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.

The years 18 to 25 can be the most dangerous years in the life of a foster child. Thanks to Enhanced Horizons, we have made inroads into solving that problem, and extended our commitment to be a lifetime family for our children.

A new team of leaders is at work to render both the EH programs and the facilities the best they can be in order to serve the young adults who come to live and learn there.



## 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

## Calling all Christmas Angels! We need you!

There are many ways you can help make this a Christmas a child will never forget: 1) Adopt a wish list; 2) donate gift wrapping supplies; or 3) volunteer to join our elves to wrap the presents. Christmas Wish Lists are now available. Contact Adelfa Ramos at 830-367-2131 for more info.

## Auxiliary Twine

Dear Friends,

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the many volunteers, sponsors, underwriters, and guests of the 2023 Healing Hearts Celebration at the YO Hotel Ballroom. Many, many thanks to Scotty Gibbs and his team for creating a fun and energetic opportunity to help the Auxiliary reach our goal of completing the 2023 fundraising campaigns for Enrichment Programs and scholarships. Aaron Yates created his magic with sound and live streaming all the fun. Thank you Aaron!!

We have already begun planning for next year's event to make it even better. When you make a donation to Healing Hearts, you are making an investment in a child's life. Just read the speech given at this year's event by alumna Kim Mosel Samaniego on page 3.

It takes a village to rear and show these beautiful young people how to navigate the world.

Please join us October 30th for our HCYRA Luncheon, at The KROC, 11 o'clock. You will have an opportunity to join the HCYR Auxiliary and learn about how you can participate in mentoring, and volunteering at the Hill Country Youth Ranch Thrift Shop.

Grace and peace,

Cheryl Sieker, President  
Hill Country Youth Ranch Auxiliary

# Programs designed to discover, develop gifts



Continuously developing our skill-based programs is vital to our vision of meeting the needs and discovering special gifts in every traumatized child. We observe and watch for sparks of interest, then experiment, using the tools and teachers available to us. When we see interest, we know that talent is probably close by. A child who discovers a gift gains confidence and notices their value to others. This encourages them to stay engaged and pursue skills that they can carry forward into adulthood. Some programs have stood the test of time. Others are developed for a single child, like the time we recruited a violin teacher for a withdrawn child who came alive when playing one. Arts and animal care are both solid therapeutic fields of growth and healing. Athletics offers a physical outlet for the sports-minded. Summer work crew reveals strengths in planning, leadership and accomplishment of a different kind. On this page you will see some sample results from our successful programs in progress.

Visual Arts students continue to create beautiful works in both 2D and 3D media (above). Five of our kids are preparing for an art show at the Hill Country Arts Foundation that runs from January 19 to February 23, 2024. We consider this a program for the gifted – for those who have a special gift in one of the arts, with our job being, as with all our Enrichment Programs, to help them discover and develop the gift. The program is both therapeutic and gift-enhancing. We know that gift discovering leads to both healing and growth, and can also help with behavioral issues.

*Last year Brune School started a Six-man Football team, and this year hosted their first home game! Meanwhile, Najim School has gotten into the act with a Flag Football team (above) and is playing a slate of games.*



Krystle Ramsay (right), HCYR Executive Director, is so totally invested in our children that she spends time, not only lifeguarding during our hot summer days, but also in training future lifeguards, so that we have continuity as our programs expand. Lamar Perez (left) is working with three Big Springs kids in preparation for horse events during upcoming livestock shows. Since its inception the Brune School 4-H Program has had exceptional success at the Real County Livestock Show, winning several breed championships and earning awards for participating students.



# Finding the pearl through the courage to love

by Carol Priour  
HCYR Fine Arts Director

Thirty-eight years ago this past August, I got in my Toyota and drove into the unknown; from Austin to Ingram . . . to Hill Country Youth Ranch . . . to begin a journey that has now lasted over three decades.

Wow! What a journey straight into the heart of Love and Learning. I came here to love children and they have taught me how to love deeper than my heart could ever imagine. They are still teaching me that every day is a new beginning - that you can walk through hell and use your scars as stepping stones toward a better life.

Through their examples of healing and growth, these beautiful children have affirmed that God is always by our side – even when it appears He has forgotten us.

*“Love dilutes evil and fear.”*

On this sacred anniversary of my coming here, I received all sorts of messages and congratulations from former Youth Ranch residents. Here are just a few of them . . .

## Jackie, now age 26

Aw Momma Carol, I love this. Going to HCYR really did change my life and shape my future. At the time of my placement at the Ranch, no one really wanted to accept me. You took me in with your arms wide open. For that, I am forever thankful. So glad you're still doing what you love.

## Ellena, now age 20

And of course, through all that time your heart and soul just grew more and more beautiful Mama Carol.

## Searose, now age 45

What blessings we children received through you.

## Leticia, now age 51

You are such a blessing. I love you Mama Carol.

## Catherine, now age 52

Love dilutes evil and fear. I will always remember this quote from you, Momma Carol because you are spot on. Thank you for loving all of us Littles. I love you.



Carol Priour, HCYR Fine Arts Director, shown with an alumna and her child at an Alumni Reunion

And an important message from my 94-year-old mother, Frances . . . “Glad you had the courage to travel”. (It was a daunting feat for a young farmgirl, driving a barely roadworthy vehicle!)

This level of love was humbling. My mind flashed to the younger versions each of these now grown children. I remembered the courage and trust that each child mustered to travel through the programs and lives we helped create for them. The courage to connect and heal and learn. The courage to *become*. I was aware of those who, although they had once seemed so closed and resistant, quietly grew as we continued to plant the seeds of hope, encouragement and love anyhow. I thought about how this anniversary was one of those ‘full circle’ things . . . years ago, I helped encourage them to see the best in themselves, and now they were pointing out my best, as they remembered their childhood connections.

I had no idea that my presence would have such an impact on so many. But it was never me. I received the courage needed to open my heart, from my Creator.

And then, this morning as I was waiting in the stillness for my daily prayer to come to the surface, I stumbled across a prayer from years past. It was a revelation.

*Merciful Creator,*

*When living in the world becomes hard, my heart cries out for deeper connection with You, and, like a tough oyster shell You hold me and shield me from the winds and the water. From the cold. You listen to me and help me see that, even though I have felt so alone and so full of fear in the past, I am worthy of your love and Your time. You tell me that I am a pearl . . . beautiful and rare and treasured. And You said that the winds will still roar sometimes and the waters most likely will rage again, but the Holy Spirit will always be there within the storm. Within me. I feel it now . . . I know that I am never alone. Thank You.*

*This is what we do here . . . even in the storm, we see the pearl that is forming within the heart of every child. And, if healing is going to happen here . . . we have to connect with the Holy Spirit that lives inside of us before we can teach that child how to recognize and access the pearl inside themselves. We have to remember to believe in the presence of the Pearl, no matter what the child is going through, or what behaviors have obscured the precious gem that our Creator placed inside before their birth. Even if the child is being processed to be moved to another location, we must not lose sight of this – we must faithfully continue planting seeds of hope and courage.*

I knew an extraordinary lady named Pearl years ago, when I was helping build the Ranch in my thirties. Pearl was an Auxiliary volunteer, and had been one of its Charter members. She was already elderly when I met her, and has long since seen the face of our Lord. She always wore gloves to our Auxiliary meetings, and was quite elegant. Then one day, when I tried to hand her the salad dressing bowl, I realized why she always wore her signature gloves. As a child growing up when x-rays were new and

calibration of proper exposure time was still in the process of being calculated, Pearl had been subject to treatments that were too intense, and as result she had lost all her fingers and had only thumbs. In time she learned to do everything she needed to do with those two thumbs . . . she was traveling through life with what life had given her. Pearl's life wasn't like everyone else's, but she had learned what we teach our children here – your differences and all the things you have overcome just make the pearl inside you rarer and more precious.

And through our motto and instructions to “Love one Another” (John 15:12), we hold and shield each of our precious children from the winds and the water. From the cold. We give them the assurance that they are not alone, even though internal storms from past trauma still rage. This command to love is a most valuable gift, and it is what our Creator modeled for us as we have faced each of our own storms.

No matter how much I might think I know about the paths these children have walked down in their brutally crazy, often lonely, sometimes beautiful, but always miraculous lives . . . there have been detours, devastating losses, disappointments, fears, and dangers that only God and they know about.

As we experience the other humans God has brought into our lives, my prayer is that we can refrain from the temptation to define and judge them so we can just love them, as the great Mother Theresa taught through word and example.

So, with each child that God sends to the Hill Country Ranch, we are challenged to help that child recognize and slowly begin to discover the best in themselves – the part that was created in the divine image of our Creator. The Pearl.



He holds me like a pearl by Carol Priour

# Catherine Carson comes full circle

*Note from Founder Gary Priour: Cathy Brockett arrived at the Youth Ranch on a Friday in 1986, and by the following Monday, much had changed for her, and for the Ranch. The recession of 1986, along with bank failures, had caused havoc, including in the world of foster care. Harris County, the county with the most kids at HCYR, and where Cathy came from, was broke, and had called us to say that they would pick up all their 32 placements the following week since they could no longer fund their stays. On Monday morning, Cathy walked into my office and, after reaching out her hand to shake mine, spoke the following words that changed the course of the Ranch forever: "Mr. Priour, you don't know me. My name is Cathy. I just got here on Friday and this is the first time I have felt safe in a very long time. I slept soundly and felt loved. I've heard about the state being broke. Please don't send me back to Houston. I will work hard. I will clean houses. I will earn my keep. I will make you proud." Her face was filled with earnest emotion. I rose from my chair and said, "Cathy, you can stay. They can all stay." Not knowing how we were going to handle this budget-wise, I let the staff know that all state-placed kids could stay without charge. We let the community know our plight, and we had the largest wave of donations we'd ever experienced, covering every penny for every bed. Cathy's courage was contagious, and changed the Ranch forever. Her work ethic led her to help*

*us unload and sort weekly gifts of baked goods, vegetables and fruit from the local H-E-B. She remained grateful throughout her life, for the Ranch, and for those who helped the Ranch during that time.*

*by Catherine Brockett Carson '88*

I had the pleasure and the honor of meeting Mr. Howard Butt in August. You see, I am a Beauty Partner at H-E-B in Magnolia, Texas. But let me back up a bit.

My professional background was 20 years in retail operations at Foley's/Macy's. Then I jumped into the oil and gas arena, eventually becoming a Project Logistics Manager. Like many others, COVID took my six-figure job. Fortunately, I was able to take some time to reflect on what I wanted to do with the next 50 years of my life. What I landed on is that, without a doubt, I no longer wanted the commute or the stress.

I had lived a fast-paced life getting my career off the ground, raising my children, caring for a beloved family member for many years, all while living a fulfilling life. I have traveled to many wonderful places, visiting Milan's City Centre, walking on a tiny beach in Costa Rica filled with soft black sand (that came to our knees in some places), and I will always have fond memories of our family trip to Disney in 2006. I was able to experience urban living in a gorgeous high rise in Midtown Houston on the lovely Buffalo Bayou, enjoying fabulous restaurants, and biking to my H-E-B to pick up what I would

need for dinner. I landed in The Woodlands because of a beautiful man that I met at my 30-year high school reunion.

In 2021, I did something nobody saw coming. I decided to apply at H-E-B for a part time position in Beauty. The reasons I chose H-E-B: they have been connected and supportive of my Ranch family for over 40 years, and I saw how they supported our community and their Partners during COVID.

Howard visited our store and I was able to thank this kind and gentle man for his family's support of our Ranch. I was able to share with him that I remember H-E-B gave us home-baked goods and tubs of vegetables and fruits twice a week (for a kid who came into state's custody malnourished, this was a big deal). I was able to tell him that because of his family's steadfast support, I am standing here today. That I was given a chance to have a happy and successful life. I was also able to tell him how much I love my H-E-B and I am proud to be a Partner!

I understand that there are some in the Children's Protective Services arena who do not believe in our Ranch's family model and their belief is that this type of facility for children is unable to provide a loving family unit. I have much to say to that. In today's world, we see that there is no longer only the stereotypical family unit. You have grandparents raising their grandchildren. Single parents raising their babies. You have gay couples adopting



'Littles' who need a loving home. You have our Ranch who has provided a loving home to so many children. Want to know how many stay in touch? There are thousands of us. Your mind would be blown if you could see how we are all connected, even to this day. I was 14 when I was taken into state's custody. Today I am 52 and I still go home at least once a year to visit my Ranch family.

I am thrilled to know that my Papa Gary and Momma Carol are returning to our roots. In the 80's, I had just arrived at the Ranch when the State suddenly said I had to return to Houston because of funding issues. I was horrified as the Ranch was the first placement where I felt safe. I asked to meet

with Gary Priour so that I could see if there was any way I could stay. I remember telling him that I would behave and I would earn my keep. In that moment, he told me YES, that I could stay. I am crying as I am typing this because I remember the relief that I felt in that moment. And I remember something else. I felt his unconditional love. Today, all these years later, my Papa Gary still loves me unconditionally, as he does all of the children who come through our doors.

I truly have a heart filled with gratitude for my Ranch family, for the Butt family, and for all the others who have given time, resources, and sweat equity to ensure that not one child is left behind.

*Catherine at various times of her life, from her days at the Ranch (far right with Ranch friends), to returning to work at the Ranch (below), to raising the bright lights of her life, daughter Katie and son Nikolas (center), to her new position as an H-E-B Partner (upper right)!*

