New Projects Completed

Last winter and early spring saw two projects going on simultaneously with the old executive director’s home being converted to our Museum Hospitality Building while a new home was being built for the Executive Director.

A special donor stepped up with funds handled by supporters David Peek and Carlton Spence. The ranch board, under the leadership of Dr. Richard Peralon and Facilities Committee Chairman Bobby Cothren, initiated the projects which were spent apart from general ranch gifts and funds. Both projects are now complete except for the museum furnishings and contents.

Both buildings are beautiful in design and very suitable for the planned usage. Brian Screen of Riverside Builders and Bobby Cothren of Stellar handled the design, supervision, and work.
I hope this issue of the Wrangler finds you in the best of health and spirits. It is truly a treat for us to touch base with you in this way. Let me rare back with you as I pull up a chair and talk about something that is real and dear to us. I need to talk about boys who need a home, boys who needed a home, and boys who now have a home of their own.

Boys who need a home have always been able to find one at the Rodeheaver Boys Ranch. We are looking to help those that fit into our program. We love what we do and hope to do it as long as our watch lasts.

Boys who needed a home are those who came, got the help they needed while here with us, and then were able to reunite with their families and then went on to plan a good life. Boys who now have a home of their own are those who have a career and/or married and now have what, to them, was their goal all along.

One such young man spent three years here at the ranch, was adopted by a local family, and is now an officer in the military. He married one of our finest young ladies in this community and they are now raising their family in a nearby city. Jeff, Steve, and Ken spent some quality time with him during our last golf tournament where he was our staff “ringer” (one who can easily win because they are very accomplished in the sport!) We are proud of his accomplishments. (His success is your success.)

Another such young man came to us from another part of the country. He had some difficulties (we major in helping with difficulties); he got past them. He graduated from college and soon afterwards married his church sweetheart. They have a home with children of their own and make a life in a neighboring city. Their success is your success. Countless times we’ve had a visiting mother sitting at our conference table with her son (who is in the middle of abandonment and/or a divorce) weeping over her concern for her son who, naturally, has lost his “north star” bearing due to the tragic circumstances. We then work together for as long as it takes to provide direction which includes a loving home situation, education, and activities.

From the tear-stained faces at first visit until they wave good-bye with a smile on their faces at departure, we keep the lights burning bright so that the otherwise dark circumstances won’t stay center stage. Thank you for not getting tired of helping us do what was started here in 1950. The times are different. The challenges are sometimes more complicated. But the need is the same.

“Goodbye, Son. Come see us when you can,” are words we labor over, but look forward to saying when a boy leaves. As the days turn into months and months turn into years, it gets to be more of a joy each time we get an email, phone call, letter, or – our favorite – a surprise visit – when someone pops in and asks, “Mr. Johnson, do you remember me?” Smiles and all. They made it. Because we were there. Because you, our partners were there. And that thought should lighten your heart in times of introspection.

Come and see us when you can.
Sincerely, Ken Johnson

2013 – RODEHEAVER BOYS RANCH – 63 YEARS OF HISTORY

Author Susan Brandenburg, with help from the sages of yesteryear who are still amongst us, chronicled the new 63 year history of the ranch in her book entitled, “Rodeheaver Boys Ranch” – It’s Better to Build Boys Than to Mend Men.”

Carlton Spence of Jacksonville, Florida initiated the writing of the book by sponsoring the means for Susan to spend the time necessary to produce the work.

Dan Martinez, Joyce Oliver, Carlton Spence, and Susan contributed to the actual publication printing.

Pictured here, top, is Susan holding a copy of the book with a friend reading it below. Tommy Clay is seen here signing a book for her and she is pictured (left) with Bruce and Anne Howe along with some of our boys.

The book is on sale in the ranch office for $18.00.
looking behind the curtain

Recently the office received a call from a man who was out on Hwy 19 near the entrance to the ranch. He informed us that he had been a ranch boy in the late 80’s and early 90’s. He had never been back since he left and wanted to know if he could come by and visit for a while. We invited him in and had the privilege of visiting with him for about an hour.

As he shared the circumstances behind how he came to the ranch, his story was very similar to most of the boys who live here now. His dad had gone to prison and his mother was addicted to drugs. He had come to the ranch, not so much because of his behavior, but mainly because there was no other place for him to go.

The ranch took him in and he lived here for about four years. His mother did eventually manage to get him back in her custody, but she continued down her self-destructive path and finally agreed for him to be adopted by a loving family in the local community.

He joined the military when he finished high school and through hard work and much studying he received an opportunity to enroll in officer’s training school and was commissioned as an officer. He is now 5 years away from retirement and has a wonderful wife and two children.

During his discussion and as we were answering his questions about life on the ranch today, I was pleased to hear him describe how his experiences at Rodeheaver played a major role in him becoming the man he is today. Life for the boys on the ranch is still very similar to the way it was when he was here.

The boys still live in cottages with 8-10 other boys, with a married couple as cottage parents. The whole ranch still eats in the cafeteria, the boys still go to the public schools, and each cottage still has a home church they attend in the community. After his visit, the man left with a commitment to help us in our fundraising efforts, but he also left with a “true sense of belonging.”

For just a little while, the ranch seemed like home again. He enjoyed reminiscing about those special times in his past where the staff that was here when he needed them most, demonstrated how much they really cared and his life was never the same.

While talking to this former ranch boy who is now doing so well in life, I was reminded of a TV interview by Barbara Walters of Country Music Superstar Garth Brooks. After a meteoric rise to the top of the country music charts, Garth Brooks suddenly announced he was retiring from touring and recording new albums. During her interview, Ms. Walters asked Mr. Brooks why he would retire so young and with so many years of success ahead of him. With tears in his eyes, Garth Brooks responded, “Because Oz is not Oz.” Not really understanding what he meant by his answer, Ms. Walters asked him to explain. He said that all his life growing up as a young man, it had been his dream to become a country music star.

His motivation in life was his love for his music, but once he made it to the top and saw inside the country music industry, he said he felt like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz when she looked behind the curtain and found out that the great and powerful Wizard of Oz was actually just a little old man pushing buttons and pulling levers. The powerful Wizard of Oz was nothing more than an image that was created behind the scenes to get people’s attention and even give them false hope.

It was encouraging to see this sharp, clean-cut, disciplined young military officer coming back to visit and to hear him make the claim that Rodeheaver Boys Ranch was one of the most positive influences in the development of his childhood. I am also glad that, while the ranch facilities have improved, and the boys have more resources available than when he was here, the overall experience of living on the ranch helped mold his thinking to help him become the person he is today.

The Rodeheaver Boys Ranch staff always wants to put our best foot forward, but when those visiting the ranch, whether they be prospective donors, current donors, or former ranch boys, take a look behind the curtain, we want to make sure what they see on the inside matches what we are projecting on the outside.

Jeff King
Development Director

rodeheaver boys learn unique horse management skills at uf

The University of Florida’s Horse Teaching Unit recently hosted Rodeheaver Boys Ranch Horse Program Manager Amanda Morgan and some of the ranch boys to observe the procedures involved in the Artificial Breeding Process of managing a commercial horse program.

The university has been very generous in donating time, money, equipment, and stud fees to the ranch’s horse program.

For this occasion, not only did the University donate the stud fee, but also university farm manager Justin Callahan was also very interactive with the boys throughout the learning experience.

Our hats are off to the University of Florida and especially to Justin Callahan and the other members of his staff for going the extra mile to teach our boys the science of horse breeding through practical experience. Go Gators!
Occasionally, we receive inquiries from some of our senior donors asking about the possibility of contributing to the ranch directly from their qualified retirement programs. For those who are interested, qualified charitable distributions (QCDs) have been continued for 2013, but they will expire at the end of this year unless Congress acts. If you have reached age 70-1/2, you have the option of making cash donations to Internal Revenue Service-approved charities directly out of your traditional IRA.

Before making a decision to transfer any money out of your IRA, we recommend that you seek advise from a tax professional. There are also some requirements that a QCD must meet before the tax benefits will apply.

For those who qualify and decide to take advantage of this tax-smart opportunity, there are at least four potential tax-saving elements to making one of these transfers.

1. QCDs are not included in your adjusted gross income (AGI).
2. Money transferred through a QCD from a traditional IRA counts as a distribution for purposes of the required minimum distribution rules. This means that you can arrange to donate all or part of your 2013 required minimum distribution amount (up to a maximum of $100,000) that you would otherwise be forced to receive and pay taxes on.
3. If you own one or more traditional IRAs to which you have made non deductible contributions over the years. Your IRA balances consist partly of a taxable layer and partly of a nontaxable layer. Any QCDs are treated as coming straight from the taxable layer.
4. QCDs reduce your taxable estate.

If you are interested in making a qualified charitable distribution to Rodeheaver Boys Ranch, you need to contact the custodian of your IRA and express your desire to make a transfer to the ranch and then the ranch will provide the necessary documentation showing the ranch is an eligible IRS-approved charity. The check must come directly from your IRA to Rodeheaver Boys Ranch to qualify for the tax benefits.
The Annual Meeting BBQ this past April was special in that Bruce and Ann Howe were able to be present. Bruce was Mr. Homer Rodeheaver’s personal assistant in his latter years of ministry. He was also his driver and traveled with him to his appointments. Bruce is 93.

During the festivities, door prizes were awarded, the 50th Anniversary Browning Shotgun was auctioned to a supporter, and new board members were nominated as was the new slate of officers.

Entertainment by Wire and Wind Bluegrass group was excellent. Food prepared by the Ranch’s own Patti McClure with assistance from ranch staff and boys was the finest.

Horses were available to ride for adults and children alike. Tours went well. The serving lines were fast and the fellowship seemed to be especially enjoyed by old friends who got together once again with the ranch being the real winner at the event.
RANCH BOYS ENJOY THEIR FISHING EXPERIENCE

Each year Jerry Shawver and his group of fishermen converge on the boys ranch boat launching dock area. Their mission is to give each boy the opportunity to spend a day on the river in a professional fishing rig with a guide. Each event produces winners in several categories with award prizes and plaques. The day begins before light in the dining room with a great breakfast with all the guests. A late lunch, weigh-in, and awards ceremony caps off the memorable day. Each boy treats this special day as a “dream come true.”
Individuals and car clubs from all over this part of the country converged on the ranch this past spring for our first car show.

Under the leadership of Sidney Hobbs, Bobby Cothren, Richard Wilson, and Jeff King, over a hundred units were present to participate. Antique cars and motorcycles took the spotlight as spectators admired the entries and talked with the owners.

Lunch was great with the ranch staff serving out BBQ, and the awards ceremony saw scores of winners recognized. For the first event, organizers and participants alike agreed it was fun and plans are already underway for the next.
BOYS AND GIRLS ENJOY THE 2013 PUTNAM COUNTY FAIR

The boys (and girls) from the ranch who participated in the Putnam County 4-H Swine Competition did very well. Greg Buchanan, our 4-H leader, stated that out of the 18 pigs entered, the ranch had 13 to place. These included 3 first place awards, 1 second place award, 3 third place awards, 5 fourth place awards, and 1 fifth place award. Ranch boy Jake Johnson’s (no kin to Executive Director) pig recorded the Reserve Grand Champion Award in the Middleweight class. The Rocking R 4-H Club pig entries were quality specimens and the sales were adequate because of the Palatka community of friends. The ranch maintains a display booth, does the parking for the fair, and works the ticket gates with the help of the Azalea City Kiwanis Club. Note: The ranch and the Putnam County Fair began the same year - 1950.
Eagle Scout - Elijah Helmic

Elijah Helmic chose as his Eagle Scout project the building of a 10x10 wildlife observation deck 10 feet off the ground toward the back property line of the ranch.

“It was fun to design, purchase the materials, and help supervise the construction of the elevated deck,” stated Elijah. “With the help of Mr. Al Mathies, one of our volunteers, and Mr. Randy Tillman, one of our ranch staff members, we were able to begin right and finish with the product exactly like we planned.” The project was funded by help from Dr. Robert Mitchem, as he talked with some of his friends while pitching the need. Some of the ranch boys helped also which made it a group effort.

Steve Watkins, Director of Ranch Life, stated, “This deck can be used to let a group make observations in a teaching scenario in a safe way since stairs were built to make the ascent and descent more accessible.”

Scoutmaster Greg Buchanan states “Elijah joins a list of several ranch boys who have become Eagle Scouts throughout the years. We congratulate him for this special award.”

GP ENGINEERS HELP BUILD FENCES

Georgia Pacific engineer volunteers and ranch boys took a couple of days to take down a quarter mile of old fencing and put up new posts and 5 strings of barbed wire. Under the direction of Ernie Cremer’s team, the job was done in short order. Thanks to Ernie for also supplying the materials and doing much of the labor.
February in Florida is a fun time as “snowbirds” make their way to Florida to get a break from the snow and ice up north. This year was no exception for the usual large crowds who enjoyed great music, great food, and good fellowship. Enjoying the scheduled groups while taking the opportunity to let folks see and experience the ranch is a time the ranch staff, boys, and volunteers look forward to each season.
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