



Ranch Time Overshadows Disabilities

THE FOUNDING OF SHADOW RANCH Therapeutic Riding Center, a nonprofit equestrian facility that helps those with disabilities, required a leap of faith. Initially, Shadow Ranch was Marion Cox's dream. She'd even named it years before. But it wasn't until she met Pam Richardson, a friend who shared the dream, that Shadow Ranch became a real goal.

Marion's love of horses began in her childhood in Texarkana, and she's carried it throughout her life. Upon adulthood and a move to Dallas, she worked in various capacities while becoming an Army Reservist—a nuclear biological chemical defense specialist, to be precise. In 1991, Marion and others of her specialty were deployed to keep the threat of chemical warfare at bay during Operation Desert Storm.

When she returned, the war had taken a toll. "I had a very hard time readjusting to civilian life and being around people," Marion said. So for seven years, Marion cloistered herself in

ABOVE: After successfully shooting some hoops and performing some ring exercises from the back of horse partner Ace, Wesley Weir, age 15, takes a victory lap as Corey and Taylor cheer him on.

the cab of an 18-wheeler and earned her living driving across the country. Next, she went to work for Metro Ford, a truck dealership. Meanwhile, she began to volunteer at Runnin' WJ Ranch, a ther-

apeutic riding center in Texarkana, where, she said, "Helping them was what helped me. That's when it became a dream to open my own center. I even named it 'Shadow Ranch,' and it was never going to be anything other than that." Once it became her dream, Marion said, "Every friend I have ever had heard about my dream."

Therapeutic riding uses horse-related activities as therapy for those with physical, learning, mental, cognitive and behavioral challenges and disabilities. It's gaining recognition for helping those with wide-ranging conditions, including depression, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, cerebral palsy, developmental delay, Down syndrome, traumatic brain injuries and recovery from post-traumatic stress disorder or abuse.

In a physical sense, when someone is sitting upright on the back of a horse, they are in a position that helps foster muscle memory and balance, and promotes core strength. Emotionally, the feeling of commanding a large animal is empowering and builds confidence.

Marion brought her friend Pam Richardson, whom she'd met at church, to Runnin' WJ to witness the therapy in person. Pam had already heard about Marion's dream. "That's when the dream grabbed ahold of my heart, too," Pam said. "The first time I saw a kid get out of a wheelchair, I was hooked." Then,

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—Pam Richardson, co-founder of Shadow Ranch

about the “umpteenth” time Marion talked to Pam about her Shadow Ranch dream, Pam slapped the table and, in so many words, told Marion that it was time to stop dreaming.

With Pam onboard, Marion committed fully, leaving her job to devote all her efforts to establishing her own center. She also knew she wanted her center to be certified by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International. PATH is a leader in training methodologies and techniques of therapeutic riding.

On the advice of the Runnin’ WJ founder, Marion volunteered full-time at a PATH-certified center outside Longview called Windridge, living and sleeping in the barn office on weekdays, and returning to Dallas on the weekends. All the while, she was studying the demographics to determine the best place for Shadow Ranch. “Everything was baby steps,” she said.

In 2009, Shadow Ranch was born in Sulphur Springs. Originally, it was at a different location, but they leased the current property on January 1, 2011. In 2014, they signed a mortgage to buy. That big step enabled them to begin structural improvements to the property.

The first big improvement was to enclose the riding arena to keep extreme winter weather at bay and avoid having to cancel classes because of the cold. They also added fencing and gates to make paddocks for separating and moving horses. They also improved the hay meadow, which is a major source of food for Shadow Ranch’s 10 horses. Then they built a hay barn. In addition to property improvements, they replaced their 1959 Jacobson tractor with a 1986 Massey Ferguson.

Pam notes that every one of those important improvements came about from helping hands and sizable donations. Marion tells how Saputo Dairy Foods held a fundraiser, and the employees voted to donate the money to Shadow Ranch. That \$10,000 check built the barn. Chicks for Charities, Trans-Canada, the United Way, and the Pilot Clubs of Quitman and Sulphur Springs have all given significant donations for projects, equipment and operations costs.

Marion wants those, and all others who have donated or who are thinking of it, to know it’s appreciated. She wants them and everyone else to know what an impact the center has on the lives of those served. She says, “Come by! See for yourself what we do and how we use all the gifts that are given. Every penny counts!”

Clients come to the ranch as referrals from physicians, therapists, counselors, psychiatrists and children’s hospitals. And the program makes a profound difference. For example, there was a young girl who had been a victim of shaken baby syndrome, suffering head and body trauma. When she first



TOP: Co-founders of Shadow Ranch, Marion Cox, right, and Pam Richardson, managing director, have a shared passion to help people overcome any and all physical, cognitive or mental obstacles through equine-assisted therapy. **BOTTOM:** As Wesley Weir is readied for his therapy session, safety is foremost. Each client receives three-on-one attention during a class—or four-on-one, if you count the horse!



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—Marion Cox, co-founder of Shadow Ranch

came to the center, Marion said, “she could only walk on her tiptoes. We worked with her to build up her confidence and also her muscle strength. Today she is competing with able-bodied people on horseback.”

Many clients ride the horses in treatment, but some clients might never get on the back of a horse. Leading a horse or just interacting with one can be enough. Every treatment differs according to the client’s needs and abilities and can even incorporate a client’s other interests such as music, sports or art.

“Everything is goal-oriented,” Marion said. “We had a boy whose doctor said he would never walk again. He’d had a brain tumor removed. After two years of coming here, he was walking. That’s what we want to see—when they don’t need us anymore. But we keep them here only as long as we are helping them. If we put them on a horse, and they are ready to take off running, we know they don’t need us anymore.”

Marion said that those donating to nonprofits tend to give first, second and third to organizations that provide food, clothing, and housing—and last to service organizations such as Shadow Ranch.

“One of our adult riders has cerebral palsy, and she is emphatic that this keeps her out of assisted living,” Marion said. “We teach them to focus and concentrate. We teach them life skills. Places like Shadow Ranch are important because we help people be able to take care of food, clothing and housing for themselves. It’s a big deal to be independent!”

A single mom of three boys, Jennifer Griner said she thinks Shadow Ranch is a big deal, too. Her two oldest, aged 15 and 12, attend Shadow Ranch. Jennifer comes from a place of authority as a high school teacher, a sergeant in the Texas Army National Guard and a fitness instructor. “Shadow Ranch is amazing!” she said. “That’s our happy place. That’s our safe place. The boys know they can tell them anything without judgment or being made fun of. This is my happy place, for I



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: Seth Griner’s therapy at Shadow Ranch channels his love of art, with his canvas being Casper, the friendly horse. As therapy, Seth uses nontoxic, water-based paints to illustrate some of the things he loves, including a hamburger, musical notes and an apple, directly onto the broad side of Casper. ABOVE: Ranch hand Corey Gibson, certified PATH instructor Taylor Sandoval and ranch hand Todd Pitt—along with one of their trusty equine partners, Ace—work as a team to serve Shadow Ranch clients.

have two hours each week where my boys can talk to someone other than Mom, and I have the opportunity to breathe.”

Jennifer said it’s a healing place, too. “The turning point for my oldest son, Shad, was when he was finessing one of the horses. Shad was able to control the horse with just his emotions. It was so neat to watch. They told him to think about whatever made him the angriest, whatever got him the most frustrated. The horse read his emotions, reared up and started running. They then had Shad calm the horse down just using his body language.” Then she adds, “My middle son, Seth has not been attending Shadow Ranch as long as Shad. They are working with Seth to face his fears and anger in a constructive manner. When he’s at Shadow Ranch, he is so happy. He begs to go early or stay late to help around the barn.

“They have not only helped my boys but hosted parents-only support groups to allow parents to meet and share with other parents in the area that understand exactly what you are going through. That has helped create bonds with the parents to be supportive of each other during the times when we are not at Shadow Ranch. The staff doesn’t just care about the clients but also the families.”

Among the staff, it takes quite a few people to help with the therapy. Because Shadow Ranch is PATH-certified, there are certain protocols that must be carried out for rider safety. Every riding session requires a PATH-certified instructor, whose job it is to craft and execute the specific therapy session for the special needs of each individual. Every session also requires a person to act as a side-walker, whose job is to pay



Shadow Ranch Therapeutic Riding Center | shadowranchtrc.blogspot.com | (214) 604-8005

Shadow Ranch is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and serves up to 35 clients a week from nine counties in East Texas, with the youngest at age 5 and the oldest in the mid-60s. It is among 800 centers across the world accredited by Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International, a standard-setter founded in 1969 to promote safe and effective equine therapy. Member centers of PATH help more than 54,000 special-needs people annually with custom-designed activities and therapies designed for each client. Classes are held Tuesdays through Saturdays.

attention to the rider to ensure that they are balanced and stable. Each session also requires a leader, who stays at the head of the horse to direct the animal's movements.

Beyond the sessions, it takes a small village to run Shadow Ranch. There is a seven-member board of directors that helps make all the financial decisions. There are three paid employees: the instructor and two ranch hands, who also perform some of the side-walking and leading duties. Marion, as executive director, is working full-time in a nonpaid capacity, as is Pam, who donates many hours. But there is an enormous amount of work. There are fences to mend, horses to train, pastures to mow, and all manner of carpentry, landscaping, plumbing and other projects. Marion said operating costs take the biggest chunk of expenses. Veterinary care for the horses, horse feed and tack, and farrier services are other costs.

Now that Marion's dream has come to fruition, she has further dreams. Long-range plans include building a large barn with stalls that will also house an office and climate-controlled viewing area for parents or caretakers. She said, because of the

need, "If we had the facilities, the personnel and the funding, we could easily have 200 riders a week."

ABOVE: Seth's artwork on Casper lends new meaning to the term "painted pony."

To cover just some of the cost of services, sessions are \$40. But, Marion says, "No client will be turned away because of the inability to pay." There's plenty of work at the ranch, so parents or relatives can help out that way to pay for the classes. She also encourages anyone interested in volunteering to help out at the ranch. She said, "They don't have to know anything about horses—and if they do, we encourage them to forget it. We'll teach them everything they need to know to serve here."

Encapsulating what they do at Shadow Ranch, Marion said, "Therapeutic riding is an outside-the-box therapy."

Pam chimed in, "Researchers are just now coming up with empirical data to prove how it's helping those with PTSD, autism and other conditions."

While she is happy about the scientific validation, Pam said she and Marion already have their own: "For us to be able to witness someone's first words, first tears, first steps or their first [time] sleeping all night, and to know it's because of Shadow Ranch—this community is worth it!"

Shadow Ranch ranch hand Todd Pitt, agrees. He said, "It's awesome to be out here working with the horses and the kids."

And he gives a nod to Marion and her dream come true.

"She has a very big heart," he said. "It's astounding what she does for people."

NOTICE OF MEETING

WCEC 78TH Annual Membership Meeting

Friday, October 7, 2016

Governor Jim Hogg City Park, Quitman

ENTERTAINMENT 12:30 P.M. • MEETING 2 P.M.



THE 78TH ANNUAL MEETING OF WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE will be held Friday, October 7, at Governor Jim Hogg City Park in Quitman, at 2 p.m. All members are invited and encouraged to attend.

Beginning at 12:30 p.m., there will be musical entertainment by the singing duo Adler & Hearne, official Texas Touring Artists of the Texas Commission on the Arts. This group's sound is a spirited blend of original folk jazz with deep Texas roots.

As usual, this year's election for directors will be conducted by mail ballot and includes candidates for WCEC Districts 5 and 6. Members serving on the board of directors in these districts are: Cathy Roberts, District 5, and Jane Roberson, District 6.

All members should look for their ballots to arrive in the mail soon. Be sure to detach and mail the postage-paid ballot to arrive by noon, October 6. Members who mail in a ballot will automatically be entered into a drawing where four members will be randomly selected to receive a \$250 credit toward their electricity bill. Please DO NOT drop off or mail your ballot to WCEC. Only ballots received at the return mailing address on the ballot before noon, October 6, will be counted and entered into the prize drawing.

Be sure to save and bring the other half of the card with you to the annual meeting. This card will be used for participation in door prize drawings for those present. As always, there will be many special prizes donated by our generous vendors, as well as one grand prize, a flat-screen HD TV.

We hope to see you at the annual meeting!



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Monday, First Methodist Church, *Van*
Tuesday, Family Dollar, *Mount Vernon*
Wednesday, City National Bank, *Hawkins*
Thursday, Brookshire's, *Winnboro*
Friday, Economy Drug, *Grand Saline*

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