

*The Spirit of*



SPRING 2020

## IGNITING INDEPENDENCE. BUILDING COMMUNITY.

*By Barry Hamilton, Chief Operations Officer*

As we near the end of winter, it seems to be the best time of the year to have a few moments of reflection. Many of you know that the Ranch changed its mission statement some time ago, focusing on the Ranch's desire to ensure that opportunities are available for Ranchers to lead meaningful lives of their own choosing. Since that point, the vision of the organization has shifted to focus even more on a self-directed quality of life for the people that call the Ranch home, while also ensuring the unique country environment is utilized and appreciated.

Recently, it was decided to also update the tagline to reflect the same important philosophies that are reflected in DHR's mission and vision. Luckily, we had some help from our friends at Charles Schwab who donated their professional services to ensure we came up with just the right amount words to tell our story in a short, easy-to-remember phrase.

We began by identifying the qualities of DHR that are admired most by Ranchers. After coming up with a list two pages long, we boiled it down to three main traits: freedom to move around the Ranch, preference for a rural lifestyle and doing activities of interest.

Each of these qualities are part of everyday life at the Ranch, and clearly reinforce an organizational belief that people should have access to new experiences that may develop into an interest. These interests might then become a hobby or passion, which opens the door to many kinds of community. Staying true to the essences of what makes Down Home Ranch unique, Ranchers have the opportunity to be lifelong learners, over time growing into better versions of themselves and learning along the way from both failure and success.

Community can be a physical location or a group of people who share common goals or interests. Community can't just be thought of as where a person lays their head at night. It's also how their day is spent. The Ranch works to promote as much choice and independence as possible to ensure Ranchers are able to access their chosen communities. Being physically present in a community encourages diversity, but the magic happens when relationships are formed.

Independent choices and expression of preferences directs how a person participates in a community. The relationship with others is what builds a meaningful and inclusive community. Down Home Ranch: Igniting Independence. Building Community.





# THE KEYS TO OPPORTUNITY *By Casey Dickerson, Director of Client Services*

For many years, the Ranch has provided a home to people with IDD. In 2017, we realized that we could improve our services by increasing the number of options we have available. In addition to the HCS houses in town and the ICF houses on the Ranch, we acquired 3 micro-homes that would each be a home to one Rancher living with increased independence.

Many Ranchers prefer to live on the Ranch because of the access it gives them to their community here. They enjoy the use of the Ranch's buildings and resources as well as the ability to walk and visit with friends.

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*Adding the micro-homes as a residential option allowed for people to keep their choice of living on the Ranch while giving them more space and independence.*

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Part of what makes this program work is moving from the live-in staff model to the Supported Home Living (SHL) model. Supported Home Living is a program in which the staff provides assistance only in the areas that the Rancher needs. This could include assisting with meals, monitoring medication and aiding in the upkeep of the home. SHL helps to ensure that Ranchers can have their needs met while maintaining their own home.

DHR has now added three more microhomes, bringing our total up to six! We are excited to be able to offer the opportunity for growth to three more individuals this year.

## HOME SWEET HOME

The dream of having a home you can call your own is shared by people all over the world. In 2019, this lifelong dream finally came true for Mark. For the past two months, Mark has been patiently awaiting the arrival of his very own micro home. Every day he would inquire about his new home, giggling with joy when talking about all of the plans he has for it.

Being a true independent soul, Mark is most looking forward to having his own uninterrupted space where he can choose to be alone or have company, a luxury you can't experience with roommates. Mark has big plans for his space, stating he wants to "take care of it, keep it clean, keep the dishes washed and make dinner every night!" His new space also provides a personal parking spot and plenty of space to take care of his red-eared slider turtles. Planning ahead, he has even invited a few friends over for morning coffee!

While he has always considered himself an independent soul, this new life accomplishment truly brings it all home. When asked how getting his own micro home makes him feel, with a joyful grin on his face, he replied "It makes me feel GOOD!"







## HOT OFF THE PRESS!

Each quarter Ranchers are given a variety of different classes, however there's one class that has been a fan favorite for quite some time. Rancher Monthly allows Ranchers to see their passions and creativity displayed for all to see. Weekly, Ranchers gather together to give updates on anything exciting that is happening in their lives. From weekend activities to how many eggs were in the chicken coop, everything that a Rancher wants to share is welcome and accepted by those involved in the Rancher Monthly. Every month the Rancher Monthly is printed and given out to each Rancher and a digital copy is sent to staff and families. Those who have written an article for the Rancher Monthly beam with pride each time they see what they wrote in the hands of others. It is clear to see why these ranchers love this class so much!



## INNKEEPERS TEAM

One of the vocational arms of Down Home Ranch is the Innkeepers team. There are eight Ranchers on the team and they are responsible for cleaning and maintaining all locations on the Ranch, including our rental properties! Every week, Innkeepers visit each building and thoroughly clean the area, ensuring nothing is missed. They are also responsible for stocking each location with supplies such as paper towels, toilet paper and trash bags. The Innkeepers program gives the Ranchers an opportunity to maintain steady employment while being a part of the day-to-day operations on the Ranch. They always know they are successful when someone says, "Wow! It looks so nice in here!"





## BEAUTIFYING OUR COMMUNITY

Through the Elgin Beautification Program, Ranchers have enjoyed donating their time and talents to improving the community where they live. The idea for this program came from the Elgin Chamber of Commerce back in 2018 when there was a need for volunteers to spruce up their flower beds. Since the Ranchers are known as superior horticulturists, the word got around to Down Home Ranch and we jumped at the opportunity! The Ranchers excitedly donated plants from the DHR greenhouses and began beautifying the space. Staking claim on their community through horticulture, the Ranchers decided to dedicate themselves to maintaining the space. Since then, the Ranchers have begun tending the flowers at the Elgin Train Depot Museum as well. Big plans for this program are in the works! A utility wagon with water storage is being built so the Ranchers can start maintaining the plants all along Main Street in Elgin. The Ranchers can't wait to show off their gardening skills on a greater scale!



## READING, LEADING & SUCCEEDING!

In celebration of Halloween 2019, Ranchers spent their time serving the youth of Elgin, TX! Early in the day, seven Ranchers had the pleasure of volunteering their time reading to the kids at Neidig Elementary School. For a special Halloween treat, the school invited people from the community to come read Halloween stories to the kids. When the Ranchers heard of the invitation, they couldn't wait to join in! Through this experience, the staff at Neidig elementary are excited to begin a new partnership with Down Home Ranch. The Ranchers are looking forward to future volunteer opportunities to serve the children of Elgin!



## MEET-N-GREET WITH ROYALTY

When it comes to the Ranchers' favorite movies, many of them put Frozen at the top of their list. As you might imagine, when the release date for Frozen 2 came out, there were countless requests to go see the film! On opening weekend, a large number of Ranchers and staff set off on their theatrical excursion. The day began with some joyful carpool Karaoke, everyone taking turns singing the iconic song "Let It Go" from the first Frozen film. After sharing many laughs on the way to the theater, everyone arrived to find Elsa, Anna and Olaf waiting there to greet them! The magic of Disney and the joy of good friends gave the crowd an experience they will surely never forget!





# VOLUNTEER VIEW: GENIE SORENSEN



(left to right) Genie enjoying herself at the DHR Appreciation party; Genie and her sister Margaret at Morgan's Wonderland in San Antonio, TX; Genie volunteering in the DHR greenhouses

## What motivated you to volunteer with Down Home Ranch?

I was lucky enough to have a great sister, Margaret, who had Down syndrome, and we found Ranch Camp in the summer of 2006. She loved coming to Ranch Camp, and it was often the highlight of her year! The first year she attended, I dove head first into various volunteer opportunities and I was soon invited to join the Board of Directors. Serving on the Board allowed me to see the extent of the programs and the dreams of those at the Ranch, both the Ranchers and staff. I felt determined to be a part of the success of the Ranch.

## What makes volunteering at Down Home Ranch a meaningful use of your time?

The atmosphere of the Ranch is always 'Can Do!!' and 'Lean Forward!'. A message that's positive and uplifting, both qualities that I hope we can all find in our everyday lives. I always feel that I am doing something useful when I volunteer at DHR, whether participating in the Annual Texas Chainsaw Manicure or working in the greenhouses. Most importantly, I always enjoy working alongside the Ranchers.

## What is the biggest personal benefit that you've received as a volunteer?

Beyond a doubt, it's the friendships I have made over the years with the Ranchers, staff and other volunteers. It's a blessing to come to the Ranch and always feel the warmth and love of people who have happy lives and are doing valuable work. It's quite amazing to feel part of the DHR Gang!

## What do you wish other people knew about working with individuals with disabilities?

Courage, motivation, persistence and joyfulness are a few of the admirable qualities I see each time I am at the Ranch. So many attributes that make me proud of the Ranchers, inspired by them and grateful that they are part of my life. The Ranchers are a special group of people. 'Able and willing to work on the Ranch' sets them apart, and they live up to their potential in this supportive environment. My sister Margaret was my best friend, and I see so much of her in many of the Ranchers.

## What would you tell someone who is thinking about volunteering at the Ranch?

You will come away from the experience feeling positive, uplifted and amazed at what a wonderful life the Ranch provides!

# COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Back in September, we recognized a few of the wonderful individuals and organizations that have countlessly given their time, talents and treasures for the Ranchers. We could think of no other organization more deserving to receive our inaugural Empowerment Award than PCSI.

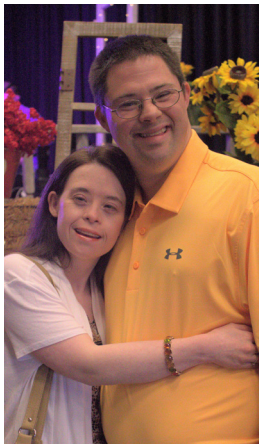
PCSI has supported us time and time again at community events, shared our mission with their networks, volunteered their time, invested in the vision and so much more. The devotion and kindness that they have shown Down Home Ranch is abundant.

Thank you, PCSI, for your tremendous amount of generosity and love you have shown us through the years. We are forever grateful for your partnership.





# ANOTHER RECORD BREAKING GALA!



We are so incredibly grateful to announce that our supporters broke the record for the highest number of attendees at a DHR gala! Through the generosity of the 375 attendees and our other compassionate supporters who were unable to attend the event, we raised a total of \$124,500!

Your generous support helps ensure that individuals with disabilities will forever have an empowering place to live, work, learn and play. To all of our dedicated DHR supporters, we truly commend you!

## *Special Thanks to our Top Sponsors:*

### Presenting Sponsor



### Blue Ribbon Sponsors

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## EVENTS ON THE HORIZON



### **Amplify Austin - Fundraiser** **March 5th - 6th ♦**

There's one unique time each year where tens of thousands of caring people come together to make a huge difference in the lives of Central Texans. It's called Amplify Austin, but the impact spreads way outside those city limits. In celebration of this year's event, DHR aims to share stories in honor of YOU, the people who make Down Home Ranch the amazing community it is today. By joining in on this year's Amplify campaign, you are proclaiming your stake in DHR and showing the world that all abilities are worth amplifying – including YOURS!

VISIT OUR AMPLIFY PAGE HERE:  
[www.amplifyatx.org/organizations/downhomeranch](http://www.amplifyatx.org/organizations/downhomeranch)



### **Spring Fling - Community Dance** **♦ April 17th ♦**

Help us spread the word about the bi-annual community dance at Down Home Ranch! All ages of the special needs community are welcome to come dance the night away as we celebrate the beauty of the Spring season! This is a great social opportunity for those in the surrounding special needs communities to mingle with other families and to make new friends!

Admission is only \$1/person and concessions will be available for purchase throughout the night. If dancing isn't your style, other indoor and outdoor activities will be available.



### **Full Circle - Farm to Table Meal** **♦ May 2nd ♦**

You're invited to join us as we come Full Circle at our third annual farm to table meal. This event is built upon the fact that our farming techniques empower Ranchers in more ways than one. From planting to watering, harvesting to food preparation, Ranchers will have played a role in producing many portions of your meal. By purchasing a ticket to this event, you are allowing the entire process to come Full Circle. Your attendance will provide direct monetary support for the vocational programs that, quite literally, helped bring your meal to the table. As an added bonus, we partner with many local farms and artisans to help complete the meal. See you at the Down Home Ranch Pavilion as we come Full Circle!

**NOW ACCEPTING SUMMER 2020 RANCH CAMP APPLICATIONS!**

[www.downhomeranch.org/ranch-camp](http://www.downhomeranch.org/ranch-camp)





### Greenhouses Get Revamped

A summer storm brought hail damage all across the Ranch, with one of the major impact areas being the greenhouses. Fortunately, our insurance covered the repairs and the roofs were replaced quickly enough that no large losses were suffered by the plants.

We have continued making renovations to the greenhouses ever since. A few of the upgrades include new heaters, framing for the hoop houses and completing an electrical safety assessment. An investment in the greenhouses is an investment in the educational and vocational training that takes place in each of them, as well as paid job opportunities for Ranchers employed in the DHR Gardens. In the end, every plant sold out of a Ranch greenhouse equates to an increase in quality of life for someone we serve.



### Paving the Way for Safe Travels

From bikes and golf carts to semi-trucks and trailers, many tires touch DHR roads every day. Between Ranchers, staff, volunteers, visitors, delivery drivers and new friends, the Ranch has over 100 people use the roads each and every day, with some days even doubling that.

Just the daily traffic was wreaking havoc on the roads, creating potholes and cracks. We are proud to announce that new life was given to a portion of the DHR roads in November 2019!



### Have You Seen Our New Ride?

Back in 2018, we partnered with our friends at Williamson County Equipment in Taylor to apply for a grant from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's Texas Emissions Reduction Plan program. This program aims to replace older vehicles and equipment that have a negative impact on the climate.

In 2019, we were officially awarded a \$39,000 grant to help purchase a new tractor and dispose of our old one. Since then, the tractor has helped us complete major utility repairs across the Ranch, spread granite across all areas of the DHR Memorial Garden, cleared pasture fence lines for the cattle herd and more. What would have required hundreds of staff and volunteer hours was able to be completed much faster thanks to this new piece of equipment.



### LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CRAIG RUSSELL

I recently spent some time reflecting on my life and the choices I made that led me where I am today. I realize that who I am is a result of many decisions made over the years. They impact how I see the world and interact with it. I wondered what my life would be like if I wasn't the one making the decisions. Who would I be? How would I be different?

I find that too often people with IDD are not encouraged to make decisions for themselves. It may be easier to just tell them what to do, but how does that affect who they are as a person? What experiences are they missing out on in life?

At Down Home Ranch, it is an important part of our culture to ensure that we are providing opportunities for the people we serve and then empowering them to make the decisions. Our new tagline, "Igniting Independence. Building Community." communicates our desire for the Ranchers. The DHR Ranchers have the opportunity to participate in programs and employment on and off the Ranch. Their ability to make decisions will result in greater independence and let them explore community in a way the best suits their desires.

We have six micro-houses on the Ranch that provide a high level of independence. The residents of these homes are learning about the challenges of running your own house. They manage food in their refrigerators, call in maintenance issues and invite friends over for coffee.

Down Home Ranch has many moving parts that need to be managed for success. It is because of the generosity of our supporters and the commitment of our staff that we are able to provide a high quality of life for the people we serve. I am very grateful for everyone that is a part of this amazing place.





*For the Amplify Austin 2020 Campaign we ask you to think about why you are a part of the Down Home Ranch community and why you give to our mission. If you feel inspired, we encourage you to visit our Amplify page and make your donation today.*

I Live Here  
I Give Here

**Amplify Austin**

[amplifyatx.org/organizations/downhomeranch](https://amplifyatx.org/organizations/downhomeranch)



## DOWN HOME RANCH, INC.

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If you would like to change your mailing preferences, please email [development@downhomeranch.org](mailto:development@downhomeranch.org)

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