

# the GOOD LIFE

Mental • Health • Dental

# SUMMER 2022



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# SILVERSNREAKER

## Splash

By Karissa Rickman  
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**T**aking it back to the 70's, the band Village People had it right with their song celebrating the fun that can be had at the YMCA. It really is "fun to stay at the YMCA." The former YMCA in Bolivar, now Bolivar Recreation and Aquatic Center, still provides that same fun of the YMCA and so many exciting opportunities for the public to enjoy no matter their age.

Some might think that the programs and other activities and services offered at the Bolivar Recreation and Aquatic Center are mainly for the younger generations, but they got it all wrong. Yes, many of the programs are for young children but the Rec Center offers many programs for anyone within the area to take advantage of. These opportunities range from sport leagues, exercise classes, and access to the aquatic center for anyone to come swim or take lessons.

The organization definitely doesn't forget about the older generations. In fact,

they offer different types of classes and options for older adults to join in both the recreation and aquatic centers. They offer the pool specifically for adults every day from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. There is workout equipment, adult sport leagues, and even a water aerobics class for the older members that started four years ago.

The SilverSneaker Splash Water Aerobics class comes together and meets every Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. The class typically has more than 10 members who come and participate in the class every week. The class is instructed by Mary Sullivan, the Bolivar Recreation and Aquatic Center Wellness Coordinator, who leads and demonstrates the exercises for the day.

Terri Noland says "This class has a variety of members regarding age, personalities, and capabilities." Noland has been participating in water aerobics for over 25 years. She says "it's a good workout that you can't do on land because as you get older things get harder, it's a good way to stay active for all age ranges." Noland says "I know of a lady that is 85-years-

old that comes, so we have a very good age range from 50 and older."

For some of the members, they choose to try water aerobics for fun or as a form of exercise but for one of the members at the SilverSneaker class it is a chance to help himself by improving his health. Dan Reed says "I was a smoker, I smoked for 50 years. I got diagnosed with COPD and I wanted to find a way to help my lungs." He has been attending the class for two years working at strengthening his lungs and keeping himself in shape too. Dan is also an example that it's not just a female class. The group welcomes men or women of any age to come and try it out.

Dr. Kyle Shoemaker, CMH Physical Therapist, says "I recommend water aerobics to patients because the buoyancy of the water allows you to exercise without having the impact of your body weight that you might normally feel when you're doing exercise on dry land."

As the years go on, the body begins to become less reliable sometimes. Exercising is a great way to help yourself at all stages of life to stay healthy no matter how old. Some doctors will recommend to their patients that they should try and participate in water aerobics classes if they are available due to the many health benefits participating in classes like this can provide. Shoemaker says "Water aerobics has cardiovascular benefits as well, it's good for your heart and your lungs. It helps you build up your endurance, flexibility and strength in general, even if you don't have a condition." Shoemaker also mentioned "I will recommend water aerobics especially to the patients I see that have arthritis or have had a joint replacement in the past. Water aerobics is a great option for them because the water allows for the patient to exercise while not feeling some of the pain that might be felt doing those same exercises outside of the pool, it's good for their joints and overall health."

Bolivar's former Roy Blunt YMCA of Bolivar had been in business for over a decade offering locals a chance to exercise by swimming, working out and offering so many different programs for people of all ages. Despite the YMCA being bought by the Bolivar Parks and Recreation department last year, the building is still offering the same services for the community.

Those who have a membership with the Recreation Center are able to attend the aerobics class for free, as it is included in their membership. Noland says "Many people worry about putting on a swimsuit and wear it in public to attend the classes, that's what we are here for and no judgment by any of us on what you wear or your capability to complete the exercises."

For years older locals have been attending the SilverSneaker Splash Water Aerobics class either for fun and others to help their health. There are lots of benefits to attending the class both socially and health wise. Check it out on the Bolivar Parks and Recreation website.



Substitute Instructor Terri Noland leads the class through their exercises




Using pool noodle weights to build arm strength



Class members grab pool noodles for their next exercise




Several of the class members doing push ups off the side of the pool



## MEDICARE

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# COUNTY FAIRS & SHOW CAMPS spring up over the Ozarks

By Joy Beamer  
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Every year across the United States, livestock shows spring up celebrating all the great things about agriculture in rural communities. These shows are public events bringing together farm children and their livestock to exhibit and compete for the best of show. From now to September, county fairs open their rings to eager participants and excited families to exhibit their livestock.

While some fair entries are cakes, jams and jellies taught at home in the kitchen; junior livestock exhibitors get training at the camp. The Dallas County Fairgrounds is home to the Dallas County Junior Livestock Show every June. Farmers have hosted a beef camp for many years and this year, a swine camp was introduced and housed at the Dallas County Fairgrounds. Earlier this summer, the fairgrounds were used for a Dexter Beef show camp.

## DEXTER BEEF CAMP

Shelby Brownfield came to use the Dallas County facility because it was accessible and convenient. Previously, she worked at the Dexter camp in Marshfield but got priced out of camp and felt the Dallas County Fair board was more accommodating.

Anyone interested in learning more about Dexter Beef or having a child come to a camp can contact Brownfield at 417-693-0810.

## SWINE CAMP

Jim Vinyard is responsible for organizing the swine camp in Dallas County. His friend, Greg Davis, MFA Livestock Specialist from Arkansas, had wanted to come to the area to teach about the swine show ring and good nutrition for livestock. He teaches show ring classes to kids in four state areas. So everything came together to bring the camp to Buffalo.

Vinyard explained that showing swine or other livestock teaches a child responsibility and how to manage a project. The animal has to be fed and watered, cleaned and cared for daily and learn about good nutrition for the breed. The children learn to prioritize, knowing that the animal is



Greg Davis, MFA Swine Specialist, starts with swine show basics with students attending Pig Camp.

a living being, not a game on a computer. The livestock projects are the youth's responsibility. They purchase, raise the animal, care for, love and train their pig.

The children showed up from around the area, including Polk County, Ash Grove and Dallas county. Joey Stokes helped with the event. He and Vinyard were pretty happy with the turnout with the first-time pig camp.

Vinyard showed for the first time in 1972. Now he is on his third group of children, teaching them the ropes about the show ring, showmanship, livestock and fair etiquette.

Davis explained to the camp that it is essential to walk the pig every day in addition to cleaning it and grooming it. It is also vital to stay immediately behind the pig so it never knows it could go backward, always moving forward as the child leads the animal around the ring.

Going to a county fair gives everyone that "All American Feeling," and pleasure is received as the crowd watches each child pursue excellence in their livestock division.

The camp stressed that judges look for a structurally correct and functional animal with solid feet and legs, proportional muscle shapes, and the animal's grooming. To achieve that, the farmer must give daily care and the best nutritional feed to get a competitive edge at the show. The youth are judged on their ability to show the animal.

Practice makes a better show day. Davis recommended that you start



Participants are following along as Shelby Brownfield, instructor, demonstrates leading the Dexter Beef.

slow, but walk and show the animal two to four times a day and slowly train to work in the ring. Also, the animals need to be brushed every day and shine to practice for the show.

Anyone interested in finding out more about next year's swine camp can call Jim Vineyard at 417-576-3103 or Joey Stokes at 417-844-9986.

## DALLAS COUNTY JUNIOR LIVESTOCK SHOW

On June 23, 24 and 25, the fairgrounds in Buffalo will host this year's Dallas County Junior Livestock Show. The fairgrounds are in tip-top shape thanks to area volunteers through the fair board, GRO Buffalo and the city of Buffalo. Activities are going on every night, including Saturday night, a sanctioned Steak Cookout and a free live concert around 7 p.m.

There are livestock shows every night. In addition, food vendors are on the grounds, including the famous steak sandwiches from the Dallas County Cattleman's Association.

John Crawford, from the fair board, was asked what motivates him to volunteer for the fair year after year. He responded, "I love Dallas County and in order for Dallas County to improve and thrive, we have to invest in youth and Agriculture as these are the two things that Dallas County is rich with."

John and his wife, Senator Sandy Crawford, have volunteered with the fair for many years. He tells us that the ag-youth learn four main things by participating in the fair:

1. What qualities does it take to make a good animal.

2. They learn to take care of animal needs and what it takes to make that project the best it can be.

3. They learn how to compete in a very demanding field but have camaraderie with other contestants.

4. They learn to tell the story of agriculture. It is a good trade that brings many rewards.

The Crawfords are huge agricultural supporters running a farm in Dallas County and fighting for agriculture in Jefferson City.

John listed the top four reasons to come to this year's fair:

1) Community. Get to know other residents. We just don't talk much to one another anymore. The fair is a great time to meet.

2) The most significant focus on agriculture for Dallas County is at the fair. If we don't focus on agriculture, we will have nothing. Agriculture spends money at local stores. No agriculture money—no local business, no local business—no Buffalo.

3) The fair is the best place to buy farm beef, pork, lamb and goat meat at the market sale.

4) I could go on for days for other reasons, but many find no value in this event, but without it, Dallas County will come to a slow Death. To coin an old song—when someone runs down Dallas County and Agriculture, they are on the fighting side of me.

John Crawford's reasons for the county fair ring true across every county in the Ozarks-Agriculture is big business and puts food on everyone's table.

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# KARATE KIDS TRAIN AT DRAGONS DEN DOJO

BY STEVE JOHNSON  
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When most people think of exercise or participating in healthy activities, they often think of running, weight lifting, cardio workouts or competitive sports with a ball of some sort. The martial art of Karate is a health system that combines the meditative mental aspect as well as the physical; promoting confidence, character, self-discipline, leadership skills, a healthy body and self-defense. This is what Dragons Den Dojo in Buffalo has been practicing for years — a balance of mind, body and spirit.

## A Grand Master in the making

Dragons Den Dojo (Dojo means training house) was started by David Mizell in 1996. Mizell, a 9th dan black belt, is currently sensei (instructor/teacher) to a score of students of all ages. Mizell, himself, was introduced to the ancient Eastern art of self defense at the age of 6 years old, when his dad, John Mizell, an ex-intelligence officer of WWII, began training him to stand up to a bully who was pushing him around on the playground at school. It was a combination of hand to hand army combat and Shorin-ryu. Little Mizell neutralized the bigger kid and the bullying stopped. He has been a karateka (practitioner of karate) ever since.

Mizell grew up on a farm in the Long Lane area. He attended Buffalo High School where he played varsity football and caught the eye of a “cute little cheerleader.” (Correction: She caught his eye). Mizell and DeeAnn Glor were both graduates of the Buffalo High School class of 1972 and were married that following summer on June 16. The couple eventually had two sons, and life got busy.

When their son Ben decided he wanted to play Mighty Mites football, Mama Mizell was concerned because he was small. They were told of a karate instructor who was holding classes in Buffalo, so Ben and his dad became students under Alan Daniels Sensei in 1996. Both father and son rose in rank to 2nd degree black belt under Daniels, and he encouraged Mizell to start instructing students of his own.

“When I began to gain my belts, it made me remember when, as a kid, I asked my dad when I would get a belt. He told me, ‘You don’t need a belt. You’ll know when you’re good.’ That is true, but now I realize that the

belts show others your status and help the student with self-confidence and a little pride,” said Mizell.

The belt ranking system also helps in an important part of karate discipline — goal setting added Mizell. From 1996 to 2000, Mizell held karate instruction at the Buffalo Fitness center. He turned the care of the Dojo over to Tim Bridges when the Mizells moved to Smithville to live and work. He soon opened a Dojo in the apartment complex where they lived. The community’s activity room made an excellent location for training. Then he moved the Dojo to St. Luke North Hospital’s Fitness Center after they built their house. The Dojo he started in Smithville is still going strong today, run by one of his former black belt students. The Mizells returned to Dallas County in 2015. It wasn’t long before he was asked to come back as the head sensei of the Dragons Den Dojo.

## A defense art based on knowledge, action and focus

Mizell has studied with many different grand masters — some of them the best in the world he says, including the late Lou Angel, who started the National College of Martial Arts (NCMA). Mizell is one step away from being a grand master himself.

The rising in ranks is based on the mirror kata, working through the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels of different colored belts backwards from 10 to zero to obtain 1st Dan black belt and then reverse from zero to 10 to get the different levels of Dan in the black belt class and reach grand master.

Goal setting is a very important part of structure in the process of gaining advancement and expertise. Mizell has raised over 50 black belts under his instruction. He says he cannot name one who has not been successful in some way. He has at least one former student in one of the following careers: doctor, lawyer, military officer, farmer, author, sniper in the Marines, CIA operative, pharmacist, movie director, etc. These are also the karatekas who have done well at competitions because of their determination and goal setting.

“I really like to stress discipline in class also. If I hear of one student screwing up, they all get the lecture,” said Mizell. “Peer pressure can be a great deterrent as well as a motivator to act out. Their classmates tell each other not to mess up. It works well because some of our students deal with challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors and communication. I remind them constantly that it’s all



Fifteen students from the Dragons Den Dojo attended and brought home 37 medals from the Platinum Open Tournament held on April 23 at the Missouri State Fairgrounds in Sedalia. Pictured are, from left, first row: Eric Sanders, Jacob Arnold; second row: Adin Jaramillo, Mason Boland, Lincoln Yocum, Zachary Ahart, Reece Gardner; third row: Devin Morgans, Dakota Garcia, Logan Smith; fourth row: Sensei Prestyn Astarita - 4th Dan, Sensei David Mizell - 9th Dan, Sensei Dean Astarita - 3rd Dan, and Cody Mackey. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

about making good choices. We begin each of our sessions and competitions with a prayer circle.”

## Success stories a plenty

Mizell’s karate students come in all shapes and sizes; male and female, young and old. Many of them have a great success story with karate being a big part of that story.

“When you teach, you learn,” said Mizell. “The students teach me new things all the time. I have taught for 27 years and even taught virtually in recent years. I taught a guy in California.”

Mizell has two other instructors helping him gear up his team for competitions. They are brothers Sensei Prestyn Astarita, 4th Dan, and Sensei Dean Astarita, 3rd Dan. The techniques used in kata hone the outer world (physical/body) and the inner world (mind/spirit). It makes the participant work both sides of the brain and can help with disorders like autism, dyslexia and anger issues.

The Dojo is located at 1058 W. Blaine St., Suite 102, in Buffalo. The Mizells give credit to Minister Steve Nally for his help, guidance and use of his building.

One of Mizell’s long-term students, Madison Foreman of Smithville, started when she was 11 years old. The Mizells reported she is now 20 and has published two books and is currently working towards her Bachelor’s in Creative Writing degree at Full Sail University. Her passions include reading, illustrating, martial arts, and spending time with family and friends. She is working on a book series for young readers. A Foreman original painting of Chinese influence sold at auction for \$5,000 and her parents were later told by the purchaser that he would have gone as high as \$10,000. It was used as a fund raiser for idiopathic juvenile onset arthritis of which she suffers from.

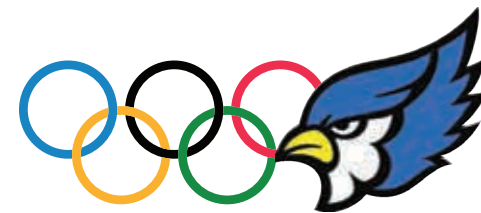
The Mizells have a long list of successful students, many of which are currently taking classes. They have recently taken groups to compete at National competitions performing in sparring and creative kata. All have brought home trophies, some first place. They have attended competitions at Atlanta, Memphis, Little Rock, Russellville, Ark., Tulsa, Wichita, Springfield, Sedalia and Neosho. They currently have three students trying for their black belt. The next big competition is set for October 1 at the new sports complex in Strafford. Mizell and Mike Scott are the co-directors and promoters of that Battle of the Midwest event.

Dragons Den Dojo meets every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. All teachers are pro bono and not paid for their work. Tuition is \$35 a month compared to \$100 per month at other dojos in Springfield. Recently they received a donation check from New to You, an OACAC sponsored thrift store in Buffalo. The check covered tuition for the month of May for all students currently enrolled.

“Donations and Sponsorships help tremendously in helping us the Dojo training going. Some kids wouldn’t be able to participate if it wasn’t for that,” said DeeAnn Mizell, whose has her own brown belt. “Also our parents and grandparents are the best to make sure their kids get to participate in the competitions. We feel so blessed to be able to share the success stories of so many of our students. I’m so proud of David for all the accomplishments he has achieved with the Dojos over the years.”

And Mizell said he will continue to be a part of the Dragons Den Dojo as long as he can. He stated that his end game is to always be a part of the Dojo. He hopes to be a consultant when others pick up the game and keep it going.

# BLUE JAYS REPRESENT AT SPECIAL OLYMPICS



## ★ ★ ★ THE MHS ★ ★ ★ SPECIAL OLYMPIC ATHLETES EARNED THE FOLLOWING HARDWARE:

“Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt” - is the motto of Special Olympics athletes, a credo that has inspired thousands of communities to support the organization and millions of athletes to participate, despite whatever challenges they might face. On April 27, Marshfield High school athletes competed against 10 other schools at the Special Olympics hosted in Clever, MO. This is the first time the Blue Jays represented in the Special Olympics and sure will not be the last! CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS BY BREANNA ROST

By Alyssa Andrews  
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The clanking of hard earned medals rang throughout the Marshfield High School (MHS) hallways on the morning of April 28. Just the day before, eight MHS athletes traveled to Clever, MO to represent at a Special Olympics Missouri (SOMO) event, a first for MHS. Athletes of every ability were able to showcase their track and field skills including sprints, long jump, shot put and more and simultaneously earning a neck full of medals to proudly show to their friends and family.

It all began with the MHS Student Council efforts towards inclusion, more specifically including special education students in programs throughout the school. Organized by Breanna Rost, the MHS Librarian and Student Council Advisor, and the Executive Council, which is composed of ten selected student leaders, both began working weekly with Mr. Ahlquist’ special education class. The two forces united working on making healthy choices, learning track and field techniques and cultivating strong friendships along the way.

Two council members in particular, Jeremy Graham and Macie James would take the lead in the athlete’s training. Graham in particular has a desire to coach in the future and took to the role naturally.

“Jeremy was in my class and a perfect fit. He is on the track team and he’s wanting to be a coach someday. It was perfect and he worked with the athletes really well,” explained Rost. “As well as Macie James... It was just a natural fit with those two.”

“Just working with the kids was a lot of fun and even including the

students in the Executive Council, just to help me out and have fun with the athletes was great,” smiled Graham. “It was just all inclusive. We all got together and had fun.”

The SOMO athletes received a large send off known as the “Walk of Champions” prior to their departure. Students and faculty filled the hallways cheering, high-fiving and wishing the athletes the best in their upcoming competition.

Partnering up with their friends from the Executive Council, the athletes went into the competition ready to win. The crew would take home a hoard of medals, smiles and memories of a lifetime.

Each athlete was honored atop a podium, a moment both athletes and onlookers would never forget.

“The athletes came back to us showing the metals and celebrating with us and jumping up and down,” reflected Graham. “Just their energy after that was probably the best and the brightest moment of the day.”

“They were so proud to be on that podium,” beamed Rost.

Almost a week has passed since the competition, but the clanking of medals can still be heard. The athletes will later be recognized at the MHS Memories Assembly for their hard work and success at the SOMO event. They will also receive athletic letters to commemorate the historic event, which is likely the beginning of a Marshfield tradition. Rost believes that even one day, MHS will host their own SOMO event, revealing the champion in all of us.

Executive Council Members include: Jermey Graham, Macie James, Peyton McBride, Owen Curley, Noah Totten, Carter Detherow, Isaac Moon, Evan Hurley, Chelsey Brown and Ragan Winegard.

### Austin Newell

100m Run  
- 1st place

Running  
Long Jump  
- 2nd place

Shot Put  
- 1st place

4x100m  
Unified Relay  
- 1st place



I ran, jumped and threw shot put. I went home with four medals. Running was my favorite part.



### Lilly Sterling

Running  
Long Jump  
- 1st place

Softball  
Throw  
- 1st place

4x100m  
Unified Relay  
- 2nd place

Got gold for throwing.

### Joseph Shaw

100m Run  
- 3rd place

Running  
Long Jump  
- 3rd place

Shot Put  
- 2nd place



I ran, threw and jumped. It was a lot of hard work and I won medals.



### Gabriel Hill

Javelin  
- 1st place

Running  
Long Jump  
- 3rd place

Shot Put  
- 2nd place

4x100m  
Unified Relay  
- 1st place

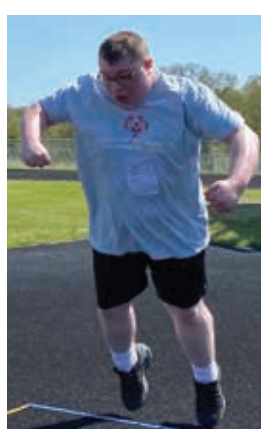
Standing on the podium, winning the relays and receiving his medals were a highlight for Gabe.

### Zander Whorton

100m Run  
- 4th place

Softball  
Throw  
- 4th place

Standing  
Long Jump  
- 2nd place



I ran, jumped, and threw. I ran fast and I liked hanging out with Jermey.



### Madison Wonderly

Standing  
Long Jump  
- 2nd place

Teeball Throw  
- 1st place

4x100m  
Unified Relay  
- 2nd place

It was fun, a lot of fun. I also jumped. Got 2nd in the relay too.

### Ryan Kays

25m Run  
- 1st place

Standing  
Long Jump  
- 3rd place

Teeball Throw  
- 1st place



Hanging out with friends was Kays favorite part.



### Gabriel Hill

100m Walk  
- 1st place

Shot Put  
- 3rd place

Standing  
Long Jump  
- 3rd place

I liked running. I won three medals.

# DOGWOOD RANCH *offers hope,* *stability for foster youth* and at-risk families

Leah Greenwood  
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**D**ogwood Ranch sits nestled on almost 60 acres in Rogersville. The sprawling landscape, large indoor arena, barn and two cabins on the property provide a safe haven for foster youth and at-risk families within the heart of the Ozarks. Dana Lopez, founder and CEO of Dogwood Ranch, works to make the Ranch a place of belonging and a place of hope where the hard cases are never turned away.

"We do not believe that there is anybody who is too far gone in mental health or too far gone in relational trauma that they cannot find hope and some stability," Lopez said. "It matters that you leave a little space open for hope and it's amazing what that can do."

Lopez moved from California to Missouri with her family in 2007. She and her husband Brian knew that the Lord was calling them to create family and long-standing relationships to fill the gaps for those who needed it most. "We thought that surely we can do something as a family to help those who need family the most," Lopez said.

Growing up, Lopez's parents always had an open door policy. "I'm an only child by birth," she said, "but because of that open door policy, I'd go to sleep an only child and wake up to find four kids sleeping in the living room, and I'd be like, 'Oh, someone had a rough weekend and needed a place to land.' I've always grown up with that heart for young kids and young people who needed a safe spot."

When developing the mission and focus for Dogwood Ranch, Lopez knew that she wanted to target foster youth — specifically, the kids in the system who were the hardest to place. Within the first few days of relocating to Missouri, Lopez and her husband immediately enrolled in foster care classes and became licensed so they could start fostering in the beginning of 2008. In their personal home, Dana noted, they have fostered 36 teenage girls.

Dogwood Ranch officially opened at the beginning of 2016. Healing Reins is an equine therapy program, and is the first of three different programs which are encompassed within the Ranch.

Sierra Pace is the full time therapist at Healing Reins. Previously, she did traditional office therapy, working primarily with foster and adoptive youth, as well as trauma survivors. She acquired her equine therapy certification and made the transition to Healing Reins a few years ago. Within the past year, Pace completed training to be fully certified and licensed in Equine EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing). This particular type of therapy helps to address significant post traumatic stress.

Each therapy session with Pace is also attended by Erika Metroka, the Ranch's equine specialist. During the sessions, Metroka is in charge of the horse and safety of the client while Pace is in charge of session planning and the mental health of the client. Metroka is the horse trainer and barn manager at Dogwood Ranch. She also oversees a number of volunteers.

Healing Reins mostly services foster/adoptive kids and military veterans. These were the two populations that Lopez felt were the most in need of creative, affordable, accessible and confidential therapy. The therapy sessions do cost money, however, everything is free for veterans.

About 60 percent of clients in Healing Reins are foster and adoptive kids. Military veterans make up about 30 percent, and the last percentage is composed of individuals and families who are struggling because they have faced significant traumatic events, even though they are biologically connected or blended families.

"We have a handful of vets who would tell you that they would not physically be alive today had they not found us and had we not found them," Lopez said. "We do this for them and we do it for the fosters who have endured hell and have experienced so much beyond what they should have in their young lives and who are so desperate for some hope."

For some of the clients of Healing Reins, this is the first time that they have touched or even been around a horse. The herd at Dogwood Ranch offers a variety so that each client can find the perfect match for their needs. "We have full-sized Quarter horses, a handful of mini ponies, a mid-size mini pony and even a mini donkey that we use," Lopez said. "When clients come out here for a meet and greet, it is their first exposure to see what horse they're going to



The staff of Dogwood Ranch have committed themselves to helping foster youth and at-risk families. From left to right, Don Juan, Erika Metroka, Brenda Crowell, Sam Crowell, Brian Lopez, Dana Lopez, Don Lopez, Margie Lopez, Kathleen Rice, Lisa Chrastina. SUBMITTED PHOTO

connect with and vice-versa. That is something we build on in that first session when they come out for therapy. Sometimes our team will also step in and strategically choose a horse for a client to work with."

The majority of the sessions involve ground work with the horses. Sessions normally begin with the client learning how to approach a horse, halter them and handle them. "We will use all of those natural interactions with a horse to gain what we need to help that child heal and work through their mental health issues," Lopez said. "We'll use any of that to help set up expectations to help them find their weak points and make them their strengths, basically — communication, anger, attitude, tone of voice and body. When they learn to be calm and kind and collected in their emotions, that is then what their expectation is when they get on the bus the next morning, walk into class with, sit down at the dinner table with. Whatever we do out here in the pasture and arena is for the purpose of replication at home, at school, in the community."

In the fall of 2019, the second program at Dogwood Ranch opened: The Haven. The Haven consists of two 2-bedroom, 1-bath cabins on the property which are available for 18-25 year olds who are single and have aged out of the system, but need help during this transitional period to become independent. Although it was never the original plan, The Haven became an all-girls facility because that was where the need was the greatest. A lot of clients who have stayed at The Haven have turned out to be single moms with their minor children.

"This is a transitional living program specific to kids of former foster youth — so, kids who are not in care anymore — who are in crisis," Lopez explained.

The Haven does have certain structured expectation around it, all put in place to encourage a healthy, non-traumatic lifestyle. There are some curfews, a sliding scale on a residence fee every month and expectations on who is invited to the property and who isn't. "We really try to use that as a practical way to help influence their relationships and make sure that they are only engaging in healthy ones and not dangerous ones," Lopez said.

Lisa Chrastina is the care coordinator at The Haven. She interacts with the girls on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis and goes over the goals that they have set to help them succeed. Chrastina works with the girls on things such as budgeting, insurance, doctor visits and transportation.

"[Chrastina] really just pours her heart and soul into those girls and is an incredible mentor and just helps lead them through some of the most challenging and scary seasons of their life," Lopez said.

The Haven also hosts life skills classes once a month, specifically for the girls who are on the property, but also for the ones who have moved on so that they can have continued connection if they want it.

"What we realized," Lopez said, "is that when kids age out of the system, those older youth who are not connected back to any safe family, really struggle statistically. A lot of what happens — and we've seen it now dozens of times with the kids in our homes, so I understand it from the inside out — they are so done with the state and the system, that a lot of them are literally chomping at the bit, so to speak, to get out of care and to be out on their own, but they really are not ready, especially without support. Over half of them end up homeless within the first 18 months, less than three percent will ever attend or

graduate from college, less than half will ever have gainful employment. These are bright, smart, very capable kids, but when you don't have some of those cornerstones of help around you...you [fall into] repeating cycles. At the broadest perspective, every program that we operate and everything we do is literally to break those cycles of trauma and to help shift a generation into wholeness. And we do that one very important life at a time. [We might not be able to boast large numbers of people helped] but we take very seriously our commitment to the one. And through the one, because they will eventually be parents themselves one day, the generation shifts."

The final aspect of Dogwood Ranch is The Village. Around 2021, Lopez acquired the additional almost 28 acres that adjoin the existing property. The plan is to start breaking ground on this project later this year.

"We're raising money right now, we need about \$175,000 just to build the access road," Lopez said. "My hope is to have it funded and built by the end of this calendar year."

The Village will be a community of about 3,500 square-foot individual family foster homes. Foster parents will agree to a three to five year commitment to live in those homes and parent the toughest kids out there, who really need a lot of support. In addition, there will be a handful of families living in The Village who will be available 24 hours a day to provide crisis intervention and run interference when a child is disruptive.

"I appreciate so much what our psych hospitals do and lock-down facilities and our rehabs and residential treatment centers — they are all playing very critical parts — but at the end of the day, when kids are hitting crisis, and they are stabilized again through those entities, they need to come home to family," Lopez said. "They need that supportive family environment because that's really where the healing happens, through those relationships. We want to be able to provide that for kids on a bigger scale, but we do that by making sure our foster parents have what they need. Having somebody who is two doors down and answering the call, and is a friend and a part of this supportive community, I think, is going to make all the difference."

Admittedly, it is asking a lot for such a large number of foster families to make this kind of commitment. As of right now, all of the "nitty gritty" details are not figured out since the main focus is on the infrastructure of getting The Village built. Once it is built, then the vetting process and fine-tuning plans can be figured out.

"We will make sure that whoever comes has experience, has a heart to parent tough kids, and is not one to easily give up," Lopez assured. "We're going to really want to make sure we bring families in through the door who really can see the long term."

It takes a fair amount of money to keep a place like Dogwood Ranch up and running. To help cover the costs, Dogwood Ranch hosts two large fundraising events every year. The first is Boots 'n' Roots, which is being held on April 30, 2022. About 140 people buy tickets to attend and enjoy a night of socializing and a catered dinner inside the barn. The evening starts with a program in the indoor arena where people can learn about what Dogwood Ranch does, hear some testimonials and listen to a special guest speaker (this year is Sara Forhertz). Then, everyone moves up to the barn for dinner and music. This event, instead of having a silent auction, features something they call "clip it and send it." A thin wire with clips runs just above the length of the dinner table. Throughout the evening, people will put their bills or checks on the wire and send it down the line. Someone is stationed in the office and gives updates on how much is raised and how much more is needed to reach the goal for the night.

In the fall, usually around the week before Halloween, Dogwood Ranch hosts a Fall Fest. This festival has a silent auction and various forms of entertainment (last year, there was a mechanical bull). This fundraising event is more family and kid oriented with different activities and food.

Additionally, Dogwood Ranch benefits from the Sertoma Duck Race and the Price Cutter Charity Championship Golf tournament.

Volunteers are always appreciated. If you are interested in volunteering, a registration link is on the website, or you can email Dana or anyone on the staff. For more information, please visit [www.dogwoodranch.org](http://www.dogwoodranch.org).

# PULLIN' FOR A CAUSE

By Alyssa Andrews  
alyssaa@marshfieldmail.com

The roaring of over-worked engines, whoops and hollers of the crowd paired with the tantalizing smell of BBQ, pork rinds and diesel smoke filled the air Saturday night in Rogersville. Any Ozark native would suggest these are all characteristic of a truck and tractor pull; an experience one could enjoy with all five of their senses.

In fact, a truck and tractor pull would grace the Rogersville City Park on April 16, all to benefit St. Jude's Children's Research Hospitals. The brain, and heart, behind the operation would be Marshfield High School (MHS) senior Jake Thornton. Thornton managed the event from start to finish, hosting over 80 drivers, coordinating multiple vendors and organizations, and checking off the completion of his senior project.

"It was a truck and tractor pull, with all the proceeds going to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital as my senior project," stated Thornton. "We do a senior project to finish off the year and it's supposed to benefit yourself, your community or the school."

Thornton set out to cover all three of these requirements with the pulls.

Thornton has been hooked on "pulls" from a young age. Just three years ago, he finally entered into the competition with his own 1988 Ford F-250. His continued love for the sport was evident by the commitment and dedication it took to pull off his senior project, tapping into new and old skills.

The choice to host a truck and tractor pull received positive feedback from his classmates, family and the pullin' community. Truck and tractor pulls use exactly that, trucks and tractors to pull a weighted sled across a dirt track. The farther the pull, the better chance the driver has at winning. Although the ride is short, drivers spend their time and money to engineer powerful engines with enough brute strength and stamina to pull the sled.

Recent rains threatened to cancel the event, leaving standing water and mud along the track. Thankfully, Thornton's connections repaired and re-built the track for the night's affair, giving way to an evening filled with fun. If truth be told, such a big task



William Colvard (10) pulled for the first time ever at Thornton's event. His "little tractor" did the job and earned him a 2nd place pull. Colvard donated his winnings back to St. Jude at the end of the night. MAIL PHOTO BY ALYSSA ANDREWS



Dustin Colvard, William's father, pulled his own tractor, placing 1st in their class. Both the Colvard boy's donated their winnings to St. Jude at the end of the night.

could only be completed with big help, an element Thornton spoke on time and time again.

"It had been mostly everybody's first time working a pull and I couldn't have asked more of them. They were great," shared Thornton. "They were familiar with watching pulls, but they weren't really familiar with the behind the scenes stuff. For it being their first time, they really jumped in the minute they got there and were ready to go... They really made the pull what it was."

Thornton distinguished himself and his young crew with neon yellow shirts, easily spotted running back and

forth throughout the evening. It was apparent that the pullin' crew was all-in as the event did not finish until almost 4 a.m. the following day. Thornton described it as an adrenaline rush that lasted 8 hours, however, the evening was not "all work and no play." Thornton made it known during his speech at the drivers meeting that the nature of the event was intended to be fun and raise charity for an organization close to his heart.

"My mom was a patient at St. Jude's," explained Thornton.

Thornton not only strove to honor his mother, who is 42 years in remis-

sion, but other brave cancer warriors from the community including both Marshfield's Hudson Gray and Morgan Green. With all proceeds benefiting St. Jude's, Thornton raised over \$5,000 for the charity. The pull's success has the MHS senior contemplating a repeat of the event next year.

"I think we're in the talks of continuing this next year. My goal is only to grow bigger with it," explained Thornton. "Get a lot bigger crowd out there, get more classes that'll make more pullers happy, classes that we do around here locally."

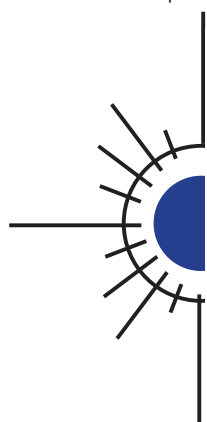
Thornton believes that charity should remain at the center of the event, however, possibly changing the benefitting charity year to year. Yet, his strong connections with St. Jude may keep things just the way they are.

"We might get into where we just want to do St. Jude every year. I love St. Jude's and I love what they do," beamed Thornton. "They're great and so anytime I get to help them is an opportunity to do some real good."

Thornton's love for the pulls have manifested into a lot of good for his community, his classmates who volunteered to work the event and his professional skills. Judging by the hundreds of spectators, all with smiles, and BBQ sauce, smeared across their faces, Thornton earned himself an A+ from the crowd and we hope his teacher thinks he's earned it too.

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