

## HOME ON THE RANCH

*With help of the community, Bryan ranch gives youths a hopeful home*

By Lydia Adams  
THE BATTALION

An old proverb says it takes a village to raise a child. For youths at Still Creek Ranch, a children's home in the Brazos Valley, the village includes a few loving adults and the entire community of Bryan-College Station.

Still Creek Ranch is a place where children from troubled and disadvantaged backgrounds are accepted into a Christian family with "house parents" who raise them like their own children. The kids do chores, attend an accredited school and work with animals, said the Still Creek Ranch principal Dr. Rosie Sanders.

Margaret O'Quinn and her husband, Danny O'Quinn, directors of Still Creek Ranch, are a vital part of this village, dedicating their lives to the well-being of children in need of love and a second chance.

When the O'Quinns came to Still Creek Ranch from the Boy's Country of Houston, a home for disadvantaged boys, in 1988, the ranch was struggling and the O'Quinns took on the roles of administrators, house parents, cooks and took care of all other operations.

"It was hard, we had to start from scratch," Margaret O'Quinn said. "We knew we'd been prepared for something God equipped us to do."

The children's smiles and hugs kept the O'Quinns going and helped them turn the program into not only a flourishing place for children to live, but also a place for them to learn a vocation, prepare for college and participate in healthy family relationships, Margaret O'Quinn said. She said they are able to have a normal childhood that they wouldn't have had otherwise. "We just love the kids. We had nothing when we came here, and it's amazing how much we've been able to accomplish with the help of the Lord and the community," O'Quinn said.

After 16 years of love and service at Still Creek Ranch, the O'Quinns are still giving young boys and girls a home, a family and a childhood to remember.

"We take kids and give them the opportunity to become their best," O'Quinn said. "We get children who have never slept in a bed, who have been cold and hungry, and we have the opportunity to change their lives."

Because the children's ranch receives no support from the government and is funded strictly by donations, the community has an important role in keeping the program alive, O'Quinn said.

"Everybody is what makes it work," O'Quinn said. "We are

the ones here every morning and put the kids to bed at night, but if it weren't for the people in the community, loving and helping us, we wouldn't be able to do it."

O'Quinn said that everything at Still Creek Ranch has been donated, from computers, cars and vans to air conditioners and groceries. She said the community is essential for the functioning of the facility and all donations are tax deductible.

"I want the community to understand how much we appreciate them. It's a gift from God to see so many people giving because they know it's the right thing to do," O'Quinn said.

holistic learning experience, such as the six-week cooking class that Still Creek Ranch students recently took with Chef Mike Chornyak, executive chef at A&M's Faculty Club in coordination with the Texas Cooperative Extension under the Better Living for Texans Program. There, the students learned proper nutrition and cooking techniques.

For the children, Still Creek Ranch provides more than a roof over their heads and decent meals; it gives them a life and a future, the owner said.

Andrea Davis, 15, lives at Still Creek Ranch and said that every day, the kids wake up early and begin working with their own animals, feeding and tending to them. She said going to school and running errands with their house parents and roommates are part of their daily routine.

"I can take what I have learned all through my life, go through vet school and own my own ranch," Davis said.

Davis said her favorite part of living and learning at Still Creek Ranch is having her own horse. This past year, all eight female residents went to state with each of their horses as part of the 4-H Club.

Abigail Rodriguez, 15, said she gained a second chance when she came to Still Creek Ranch and is now looking forward to a career in computer graphics.

"It keeps me out of trouble and teaches me different traits I need to know in the real world," she said. "I am less angry and respect myself more."

Sanders said the home seeks to build students up spiritually, academically and to help raise their self-esteem.

Sanders said that the love of people of Margaret and Danny O'Quinn, the couple who made it all happen, is obvious.

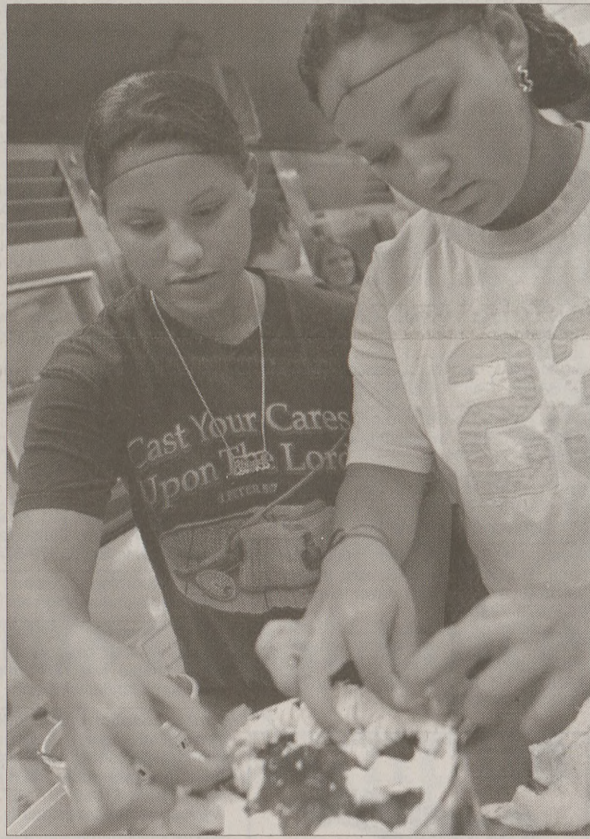
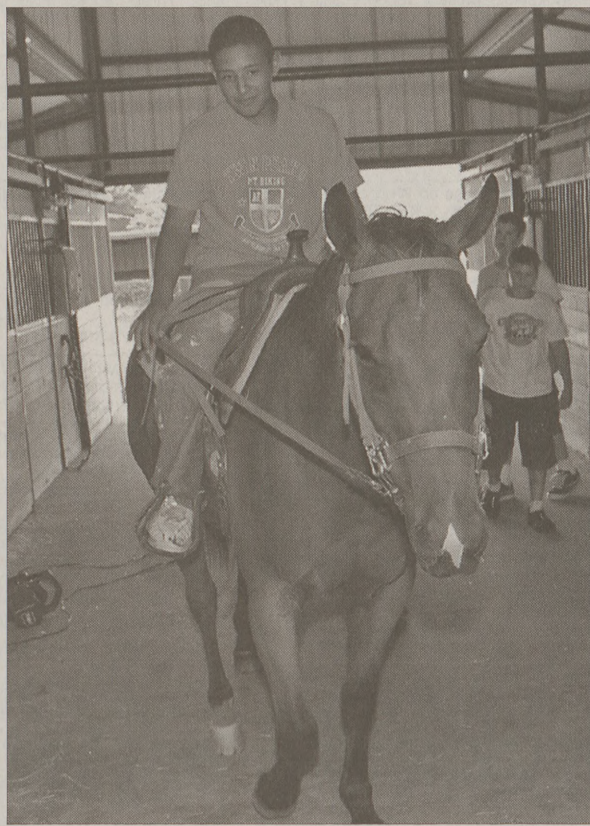
"Danny and Margaret are a uniquely gifted couple. They are committed to the vision of seeing kids' hearts and lives being mended and their passion is contagious," Sanders said.

"When kids come through here, they give them a chance," Rodriguez said.

Some may say the job is honorable, but Margaret O'Quinn says it's all in a hard day's work.

"We give all the glory to the Lord. I can't imagine doing anything else," she said. "It's been hard, but I just get back up and keep going. I do it for the kids and it's going to make a difference in their lives."

For donation or volunteer information at Still Creek Ranch, call Margaret O'Quinn at 979-589-3206.



PHOTOS BY BRIAN WILLS • THE BATTALION


Clockwise, from top left: Chef Mike Chornyak demonstrates how to season fish filets for 11-year-old Paula Rodriguez. Rodriguez and other Still Creek students are making a meal to celebrate the students' graduation from a six-week cooking course. After saddling the horse, Jacob Pena, 13, rides through the stables at Still Creek Ranch. Abigail Rodriguez (left in photo), 15, and Blaire Fields, 13, add mint leaves to a dessert that was awarded to the raffle winner from that night's celebratory dinner. Ten-year-old first-degree black belt Justin Marshall practices his weapon routine with Justin Hopper, 13, who is training for his green belt.

The home is not only looking for those in the community ready to help with their donations, but also their time through volunteer work.

Texas A&M students are always welcome to volunteer at the ranch or tutor the kids with their homework, O'Quinn said.

"They (A&M students) are such good role models," she said. "It's such a great opportunity for the kids to see them and say, 'That's what I want to become.'"

Other special opportunities in the community give the kids a



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