



Heaven's Gait Ranch, Inc. Therapeutic Riding Center

Dear Family & Friends,

With our second child due in January, we know quality time is more precious than ever, and when you tell us that “these are the days,” we finally understand what you mean.

It's funny; you spend the majority of your childhood impatient to grow up, bored of the daily grind, yet eager to take on the world. Then one day out of nowhere, you start noticing more grays and pains, and you start recalling life choices through those rose-colored glasses, wishing time would slow down.

With a toddler in tow, I can't help but wonder if I did enough when life gave me the daily chance. Some might call this “fear of missing out,” others might argue, “mom guilt” or God-forbid, “mid-life crisis.” But whatever your age, I'm sure you can relate to the wonder and awe that follows when you start asking the following questions:

Did I see my family enough? Thank my spouse and support system enough? Did I call my friends enough? Use my hands enough? Strengthen my body enough? Challenge my brain enough? Ride enough? Rest enough? Play with my animals enough? Did I help my neighbors enough? Earn enough? Save enough? Did I let go of enough? And finally, did I give enough?

Reflection is bittersweet that way because you never know when it's the last time. The last time you see your loved one in the way you want to remember them. The last time you share a quiet meal or go for a walk together.



The last time you shoot the breeze with a sibling before life pulls you in very different and demanding directions. Or the last time an old friend eagerly greets you at the gate. Very quickly, when you ponder “enough,” you find yourself recalling decades that made a lifetime of joyful memories.

This year made us more aware of how valuable your time is with us and how you've continued to make Heaven's Gait Ranch a priority even when life is coming at you fast. Despite doctor appointments, coordinating care, and striving to maintain some semblance of self and sanity, while aging maybe-not-so-gracefully, it means the world when we hear from you. Because we know how much effort goes into reaching out, following up, and showing up. So thank you, for everything. We assure you, just in case you ever wonder, your kindness has done more than enough.



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And your intentional impact, year after year, is what makes you so special because you not only choose to give, but you choose to give all that you can, whenever you can, knowing an extended family really makes all the difference.

You make a difference for HGR's horses and mini donkey, offering them purpose and comfort especially through their senior years. You encourage our veterans, prioritizing their well being and the values for which they proudly still stand. And you lift up our participants with special needs, providing opportunities for growth and healing with physical, social, and emotional support from a community that cares.

When we reflect on 2023, amazed at what we've built together, we look forward to all that 2024 will bring, knowing you're still at our side. Wishing you a happy, healthy holiday season, with more than enough love to last all year and make memories for a lifetime.



Sincerely,

Margaret Mary & Brian McClaren

Margaret Mary & Brian McClaren
Co-Founders

940 South Main Street Cedar Grove, Wisconsin 53013
E: info@heavensgaitranch.org
P: (920) 400-0628



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Creating a Legacy of Love & Hope

While many of our family and friends initially supported HGR's survival as a startup, a handful have gone above and beyond to secure our mission's sustainability. Although we wish we could publicly share how each of you have made a meaningful mark, many have asked to remain anonymous, so we quietly extend our daily appreciation by bearing witness to your incredible impact.

But how do we say thank you, year after year? No amount of fruit baskets could possibly relay the level of our love and gratitude; however, one promise we've made is to respect your gifts through daily intention. Your choice to make a financial gift to Heaven's Gait Ranch is what makes this all possible, so effort is the least we can do. It's hard to keep a barn clean during mud season, and you can't force animals to be on their best behavior, 100% of the time. But, we sure want you to know that we try.

Prior to the pandemic, about four years ago, Laury Clark visited Heaven's Gait Ranch with a friend, to watch her son's therapeutic riding lesson. She said, "It wasn't a big announced visit, but you could tell that the horses were cared for every day: stalls were clean; feet were trimmed; bathrooms were clean. Siblings had puzzles and activity stations where they could color or play in the family room, while their brother or sister rode in the arena. Everyone felt welcome, and the place was inviting." As a horse woman herself, Laury not only noticed the quality of instruction by HGR's staff but also the level of support from our volunteers. She noticed the quality of care for the horses and attention to detail in the facilities. She said, "You could just tell people cared."

Fast forward to summer 2023, when Laury remembered our mission at Heaven's Gait Ranch and mentioned it to her longtime friend, Lisa A. H. Cudahy.



After Lisa's husband, Michael, sadly passed away in 2022, Lisa became increasingly inspired to make a local difference – one that would pair a love of horses with encouragement for others to grow.

Despite the fact that Michael's father was killed in a horseback riding accident when he was young, there was no denying his wife's chemistry with horses. While he understood the risk, he appreciated her drive, so much so that Michael gave Lisa his blessing as long as she agreed to always wear a hard hat when riding.

Although Lisa's grandparents first introduced her to horses on their farm in Iowa, she didn't start taking riding lessons until 1992. Yet within six months, Lisa earned Reserve Champion at a show at Evergreen Farm and made a personal goal to go to Madison Square Garden in New York City.



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Adamant she would find a way, Lisa remained focused on becoming the best she could be, regardless of others' skepticism of her ambition as an adult amateur. Searching for the right tools she'd need to succeed, one day Lisa wandered into a tack shop in Cedarburg, where the owner encouraged her to reach out to horse trainer Cookie Beck. However, when Lisa first contacted the trainer inquiring about lessons, Cookie warned her, "I don't normally take beginners... that is, unless I like them."

Frustrated, yet motivated more than ever, Lisa riposted, "Oh, you will like me!" To which Cookie replied, "We'll see," and told Cudahy to show up the next day at 9:00 am.

"The rest is history. That's why I have a soft spot for the underdog," Cudahy said, smiling. "Once they set their mind to something, anything is possible."

With hard work and determination, Lisa not only accomplished her goal by riding at Madison Square Garden, but she surpassed her own expectations by winning Champion and Reserve, shortly after 9/11.

Lisa said, "Horses are my passion. When you're with them, the whole world goes away. You're a team, and you're always learning something. It's similar to a good marriage: you trust each other, help each other, and take care of each other. You'll have good days and bad days, but your horse will teach you everything from honor and respect to patience and resilience."

Since then, Lisa Cudahy's claim to fame has become so much more than her show record; her kind and generous spirit is what continues to cultivate her legacy. She says, "Helping people become confident in themselves makes my heart sing. And when I drive into Heaven's Gait Ranch, I can tell there's hope here. There's good energy. There's healing. There's progress."

That's why when Lisa arrived at HGR this summer, with a bag of carrots in one hand and an envelope from The Cudahy Foundation in the other, we were grateful to have made a new barn buddy – another friend of a friend, of a friend, who quietly understands what it takes for a small community to succeed. At the time, we were stretched thin, actively searching for additional talent to hire. We knew timing was everything to onboard the right team before our busiest season of the year. With Lisa's gift, HGR was not only able to recruit another PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor to our staff, but we were also able to add a reliable equine manager who could then devote more time into grooming another horse into our therapeutic riding program. With more hands, hooves, and strength on site we were able to exceed our goal of providing 1,000 equine assisted services to those in need.

Now sponsoring "Bossie" in 2024, Lisa is happy to take care of the newcomer who stepped right into mounted lessons this fall. She says her hope for our future at Heaven's Gait Ranch is "to continue to be amazing – beyond our wildest dreams." And we know that is only possible because of good people like you.



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The Spirit of Gratitude...And Giving

If you've ever wondered what kind of impact you make on our participants and their families, just ask one of our riders named Zoey.

Zoey has been a participant in HGR's therapeutic riding program for four years. During her first lesson, she recalls riding Ember in the outdoor arena and doing airplane arms, a warm-up commonly used to support one's balance and coordination. Since starting, however, Zoey insists that her favorite thing to do at the barn is grooming the horses using different brushes. She simply enjoys taking care of them, which is why this year, the thirteen year old set a goal to support the herd at HGR.

"I wanted to do a project that would help our community spread kindness," she says. "HGR is a place I love to go, and they help others like me."

At the beginning of 2023, Zoey chose to highlight HGR at her congregation, increasing awareness about how HGR helps children with disabilities and veterans. Her hope was to help the horses she loves. "Anyone can help," she encourages. "When you get your message out to the people you know, you will be surprised how many people will give." After soliciting financial support from her congregation, family, and friends, she generated \$1,446.00 for HGR in donations, specifically for the horses' daily care.

Humbled by her hard work, HGR received a refreshing view of "kids these days" as we head into 2024. We're really fortunate to be connected with solid citizens and families who are modeling positive values to their children at such a young age. Because of your support and the overall experience your generosity provides, HGR is now seeing the spirit of giving in kids who are becoming a force for positive change in their communities – one step at a time.



Zoey's mom, Britany, remains a strong advocate for her daughter's initiative, not only appreciating the horses but also applauding the volunteers who better the lives of the participants they serve. "I will continue to tell any parents considering HGR that it is amazing and has helped Zoey grow and learn in so many ways," says Britany. "HGR has the best facility for therapeutic riding in Wisconsin."

Britany originally found HGR through the Children's Long-Term Support Waiver Program (CLTS), which provides resources for children with disabilities until age 21. When Britany recognized that HGR's annual riding fees only covered 16% of the operating budget, she became eager to help. "HGR spreads so much kindness and [Zoey] wanted to give back," says Britany. "Giving back is something I will always support 100%."



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How You Can Help HGR in 2024 & Beyond

- 1 Support our Participants —**
Donations sponsor our veterans and offer scholarship assistance to our participants with special needs.
- 2 Support our Herd —** Although HGR's program animals are pledged to be sponsored in 2024 for seasonal veterinary care & hoof trims, financial support for daily equine management is needed and greatly appreciated. The true cost of care extends beyond the increasing cost of raw goods; it includes on-site human resources needed to administer them. Please help us provide the best care for our best friends when they need it most.
- 3 Consider a Corporate Matching Gift —** Many businesses offer matching donations. Does your employer care about health and human services, education, military veterans, or animals? Ask your employer today, advocate on our behalf, or let us know if this is an option, and we'd be happy to connect.
- 4 Leave a Legacy & Help HGR Build an Endowment —** Planning for the future and creating the legacy you wish to leave is one of the most effective ways to ensure a lasting impact. Making a gift to Heaven's Gait Ranch, Inc. in your will or living trust can guarantee that your legacy endures.



Text to Give: (920) 315-7551 using the keyword: horses.

When you text "horses" to (920) 315-7551, you'll receive a link to access a secure platform, GiveCentral. Here, you can make a one-time or recurring donation. As a small nonprofit working to make a big difference, we will remember you!



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**Thank you to all our wonderful sponsors
near and far; the greatest gift you give to
our participants and veterans is that of a
loving friend.**