

Joy Miller – New Horizon Ranch - 1

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

What is that light that we see? It's the light of a new day, a new horizon. Today we'll learn about a remarkable equestrian facility which is bringing new light into the lives of children and adults with disabilities. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Joy Miller is co-founder of New Horizon Ranch, located near Rantoul in Franklin County. New Horizon Ranch is a therapeutic horseback riding center. It offers various kinds of equine assisted activities and learning, psychotherapy, and summer day camp programs to individuals of all ages with physical, cognitive, social, emotional and learning disabilities.

Joy grew up in rural California. As a high schooler, she was selected for the National FFA Band which meant she came to perform at the National FFA Convention which was held in Kansas City at the time. While in Kansas City, she learned about Mid-America Nazarene University in Olathe and ultimately came there as a student.

Her faith and Christian service are important to Joy. "I thought I would be going into international missions someday, so I majored in international agribusiness so I could help developing countries," Joy said. While at Mid-America Nazarene, she met and married Brian Miller who had grown up in Olathe. They bought a rural property in Franklin County.

"It was revealed to us that our mission wasn't overseas, it was right here," Joy said. Brian worked at College Church of the Nazarene in Olathe. They moved to the farm and it seemed natural to get horses. In 2000, they attended Equifest, the equine exhibition held in Wichita at the time. There they saw a demonstration of therapeutic vaulting with handicapped children, and it intrigued them.

"We felt called to work with horses and had a heart to help people," Joy said. "We have a passion to help the underserved." They learned about the benefits of therapeutic riding for children with disabilities.

The year 2004 was a tumultuous time. "We had our first child that year, but shortly after that, my 16 year old brother was killed in a car accident," Joy said. The tragedy hit hard and their equine dreams were put on hold.

"Eighteen months later, our pastor gave a sermon with the message that, if God gives you a dream, then He's big enough to make it happen," Joy said. "Brian and I looked at each other and said, 'It's time,'" she said. They went to work to realize their equestrian dream of service.

Brian and Joy became Certified Riding Instructors through the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International and Certified Equine Specialists through the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association. In 2006, they founded their own therapeutic riding non-profit organization on their ranch.

What to call this new enterprise? "We believe that each day with a horse is a new opportunity for the child," Joy said. "It's a clean slate like the start of a new day, like new light on the horizon," she said. "And we'd been through a dark time ourselves (since my brother's death) so it was a new horizon for us too." Joy and Brian named their operation New Horizon Ranch.

In 2007, New Horizon Ranch started offering therapeutic riding classes for children and adults with disabilities. “Let’s use these magnificent, majestic animals and see how many lives can be helped,” Joy said.

The first class began with seven children. In 2015, nearly 200 people were directly served by New Horizon Ranch. Today the ranch offers a broad spectrum of therapeutic riding and educational activities in their rural setting near the town of Rantoul, population 242 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, see www.newhorizonranch.org.

What is that light that we see? Is it the light of a distant horizon? Or maybe, it’s the light in the eyes of a child with special needs who has successfully ridden a horse. We salute Joy and Brian Miller and all those involved with New Horizon Ranch for making a difference in the lives of children through horseback riding.

And there’s more. Belt buckles are now being used to further enrich the lives of these children. We’ll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.