

The Safe Haven Way

A Parent Publication of Safe Haven Farms

Fall 2014



A Community of Choice for
Adults with Autism

Building Community

A significant milestone passed quietly last month. It was five years ago in October that we purchased our beautiful property and Safe Haven Farms was born. A group of parents first started meeting in 2005 to create the vision of a farm community to serve the needs of adults with autism in Southwest Ohio. Because of the nature of their disability, many—including the founders' own sons and daughters—were living isolated and lonely lives, some in group homes in urban areas around Greater Cincinnati, with day programs inadequate to deal with their sensory, behavioral, communication and social challenges. So we set out to change that!

Our dream from the beginning was to create "A Community of Choice for Adults with Autism" that truly enhanced the quality of their lives. A community where individuals significantly affected by autism could have friends, meaningful work, a healthy lifestyle. Where they could participate in a wide variety of experiences in nearby towns and on the farm with families and friends, attend social events that welcomed them,



Community Outings



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Riding Program in Full Swing

The sweet aroma of fresh hay fills your nostrils when first entering Safe Haven Farm's incredible barn and riding facility—a testament to the expert care and hard work of farmers and staff. It is immaculate, well organized and the resident horses are content and happy (dare we say spoiled?)

It is a serene and lovely place—and magic fills the air each Tuesday as farmers hop up on their trusty steeds during the therapeutic riding program. Of course, they are well attended by their staff “sidekicks,” who seem to derive as much joy from the experience as the riders. One staffer, Donna Stoutenborough, commented that when farmer Paul first rode the horse, it was “one of the best days of my life.”

Although some were apprehensive, most first-timers beamed with pride when in the saddle. Trainers use patience and specialized techniques to introduce basic safety and riding concepts like wearing a helmet and proper sitting

position. Alex, for example, was uncertain, but after his first lesson he was so proud of himself that he could not wait to call his sister who also rides.

Chris, a seasoned rider as a young boy, pops his head in the barn every day to ask, “Can I ride today?” Pete, who is very chatty, quiets down and concentrates during his riding sessions.

These are just a few examples of the wonderful bonds formed among Sadie, Champ and Lucky and their riders. “It’s a joy to watch what happens,” said Donna Farler, equestrian coordinator. “I thought it would be so hard for some, but I discovered that you can’t

have that mindset. They can do so much more than people think.”

There is a sense of camaraderie, connection and pride at the barn. Giant posters of riders adorn the wall—a literal farm “hall of fame.” Donna saw the immediate sensory similarities between riders with autism and horses. “Horses are big strong animals but they are very sensitive to body movements, sights, smells, and noises and in this way are very much in tune with the farmers. The real connection happens when the farmers get up on the horses. The riding is very rhythmic and calming.”

The trainers use the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH) techniques.



Our current PATH Instructor, Lauren Warm is also an occupational therapist who has been teaching riding skills for ten years.



The farm is excited to expand this exceptional program to anyone in the community who is on the autism spectrum. Providing programs and education to the outside community is integral to Safe Haven Farm's mission to enhance the lives of people with autism.

Current class openings are at 4, 5 and 6 p.m. on Tuesdays. The class is 45 minutes long and costs \$35. Fall sessions that are still available are Dec. 2, 9 and 16, and then the program will conclude until spring.

Please contact Donna Farler at 513-340-0688 or email equestrian@safehavenfarms.org



Horse Sponsorships

Maintaining first-class facilities is a costly endeavor and Safe Haven welcomes donations. The horses each cost approximately \$2,000 per year to maintain. We welcome you as an equestrian patron with a donation of any amount. Individuals or groups who donate \$1,000 designated for the horse program will have their name(s) prominently



Can You Help ? We Need Your Skills

In addition to the many volunteers who come to the farm for property projects and social events, Safe Haven Farms has a need for volunteers to help in three specific areas: (1) work with our committee to help organize our fundraising events, (2) help our volunteer committee facilitate the many groups of volunteers at the farm during the warm weather months, and (3) work with our communications team to develop our presence on Facebook and other social media sites and improve our web site. If you could help in one of these areas, please email us. We need you!

volunteer@safehavenfarms.org

displayed in the barn for a year. You can mail a check or donate on-line. Be sure to earmark your donation "horse sponsor." (See addresses page 8.)

Volunteers are also needed for this expanding program—for additional information or to ask about riding sessions, contact Donna Farler at **513-340-0688**. Email her at equestrian@safehavenfarms.org

GOING OUT FOR VALENTINE'S DAY WITH SOMEONE YOU LOVE?

Avoid the crowds on Saturday night and join us for a special dinner on **Tuesday, February 17th** at the award-winning Grand Finale restaurant in historic Glendale.

Introducing **"Share the Love" with Safe Haven**, our new special event featuring a wonderful dinner and tremendous raffle prizes.

Guests can select from a three course menu—a delicious entrée, a salad and a choice of one of Grand Finale's fabulous desserts. The \$75 per guest ticket price includes your choice of pre-selected wine and beer and the gratuity.

Requests for corporate sponsorship tables are currently being mailed. Are you in the local area? Watch your mail for an event invitation. Contact Theresa at tciampone@gmail.com for more information.

Save the Date!

Feb. 17, 2015

"Share the Love" with Safe Haven

3 course dinner

The Grand Finale in Glendale

Raffle Prizes!

Share the Love !



Building Community

Continued from Page 1

be surrounded by people who valued and understood them, in a safe environment that met their individual needs. Where they could enjoy the calming presence of animals and gardening and enjoy a quiet walk in the woods.

Equestrian Program Underway

Each year since we opened, we have been expanding and strengthening our community and adding opportunities to the farm to benefit our “farmers.” This year saw the fulfillment of one of our key dreams—the beginning of our equestrian therapeutic riding program. With the guidance of Donna Farler and Lauren Warm, our equestrian instructors, our farmers have begun riding and they love it! Now we are expanding the program to include riders on the autism spectrum of all ages from the surrounding community, so they can enjoy the therapeutic benefits of riding in an environment where they feel safe and welcomed.

So Many Friends and Supporters

We have become well known in our community, and literally hundreds of people come to our farm and interact with the farmers each year. In 2014 over 250 volunteers came on site from GE Aviation, Miami University,

local churches and other civic organizations. Miami speech & language students volunteered at our nine dances this year to engage the farmers and make sure everyone had a good time. They also organized events to help our farmers paint personalized garden signs in the spring, decorate pumpkins for Halloween, and worked on several projects around the property. Over 90 people from the community came to the farm (including Elvis!) to help Teresa celebrate her 50th birthday. Typically 70-100 people attend each of our three summer picnics, enjoying fellowship and lots of good food around the picnic pavilion, and participating in the crowd-favorite

12-18 new chickens and increase our egg production significantly. Our new pond deck (compliments of GE volunteers) will add fishing and feeding the ducks to the farmers’ day. The golf cart donated by Brad Steinmann and family was very important in opening up the farm activities to more people. Some farmers didn’t want to walk all the way out to the gardens and hoop houses. But they love taking a ride in the golf cart! Once there, they get involved in planting, watering, weeding and harvesting.

Heartfelt Thanks

Thanks to the hundreds of donors, volunteers, organizations, families and



Farmers love the golf cart from Brad Steinmann.

friends who make this possible every year. We are thankful for Bill & Abby Ison for their farm management expertise, hard work and caring hearts; Donna Farler & Lauren Warm for bringing our equestrian dream to life; and our outstanding social committee for their dedicated work throughout the year to add joy to our lives. And a special thanks to the caring staff of Bitter-

sweet, for their loving support and tireless efforts to have a positive impact on the quality of life of everyone they serve.

“A Community of Choice for Adults with Autism” I think that says it all! Just look at the smiling faces in the pictures throughout this newsletter and you can see that’s it’s working.

Have a blessed holiday season with your family and friends and a terrific new year!

Denny Rogers

President, Safe Haven Farms



The Carpenter family “Chicken Palace”

Facility, Activity Improvements

Our facilities continue to expand and improve. In addition to completing the indoor riding arena, we also added a wood shop, which will provide new activities. We received a generous grant from the Daniel & Susan Pfau Foundation for a kiln and pottery wheel for the ceramics program. The Carpenter family built us a sizeable “Chicken Palace” that will be home to



A Common Voice Supporting Choice

Safe Haven Farms was founded by parents as an autism-friendly setting to accommodate the significant cognitive and behavioral challenges of some adults on the autism spectrum. Along with Bittersweet Farms, we belong to Agricultural Communities for Adults with Autism (ACAA), a fast-growing group of farm communities around the country. From ACAA's website: *"Agricultural communities are a terrific option for adults with autism who prefer the choice of a non-urban, community-based, active lifestyle that typically combines a variety of rewarding employment opportunities with quality, affordable housing and a wealth of activities in their local communities."*

In perhaps a well-intentioned effort, but with shocking disregard for personal choice, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is attempting to limit housing options for people with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) by rewriting the definition of what will be considered home and community based settings (HCBS) for Medicaid waiver recipients. HCBS waivers are the main source of financial support for adults with I/DD (including autism) to access needed staffing and other services wherever they live.

CMS is portraying farm communities as a setting which "may not" be Home and Community-Based, describing

them as "isolating" with "little ability to access the broader community outside the farm." This is certainly not true of Safe Haven Farms.

Settings on which residents work during the day next to where they live, like farms, are under special scrutiny. The vision of CMS is that all people with I/DD should be scattered across the community in urban settings, rather than in intentional communities like farms or similar clustered sites. They envision people with I/DD having jobs in the regular workforce, making at least minimum wages, working with non-disabled peers, and not being allowed to work where they live.

While this vision is certainly appropriate for many, it is not feasible for everyone. One size does not

fit all in the world of autism! Under this mandate, the founding dreams and mission of Safe Haven will be defeated. The choice of where to live and the funding for services to do so could be cut off,

meaning such programs could be shut down and their residents forced to move.

This newsletter is filled with pictures and articles that show a farm as a viable and vibrant choice for many adults with autism! It is inaccurate and inequitable for CMS to presume that all congregate settings such as farm communities, disability-specific housing, or clustered group settings are isolating or institutional, and not part of the community, and therefore, no longer eligible for HCBS waiver funding.

We believe that individuals with I/DD should have the right to choose the type of residential and day services that best meets their needs, and should be able to continue their Medicaid funding to support that choice. Further, we strongly believe that farm communities are a very effective setting for many with I/DD, as proven by the dozens of successful farms already in operation around the world. Families started most of these programs because they meet the unique needs of their sons and daughters.

Please join the nation-wide conversation that is taking place between CMS, state governments, and families throughout the country. If you support our position, please add your voice today to an on-line petition by going to <http://tinyurl.com/ohiodisabilitychoice>. Add your name and some brief comments in support of choice and farm communities like Safe Haven Farms. Spread the word. We are striving for at least 100,000 signatures. Together we WILL make a difference!



New pond deck being built by GE volunteers

Life on the Farm is Good



Spotlight on Adam

While Adam's mom may be prejudiced when bragging about his smile, it does light up the room. He has been grinning a lot since moving to Safe Haven in 2010. The affable 31-year-old can often be found on his favorite white rocking chair in front of his home, checking out all the action before he joins in.

But Adam doesn't stay put for long – he feeds the animals, performs trash detail, and delivers the mail, among other farm chores. He also loves the many community outings to bowl, to attend his Middletown church or to



participate in family picnics, where he has passed on his love of Hot Wheel cars to his niece and nephews. His affinity for autos makes him an eager "easy rider," since he is always ready to go on adventures to enjoy a car ride.

When he has spare time, he is a fan of "The Price is Right." He also loves music, especially at the monthly Hatton Center dances.

Adam had never lived away from home before the farm, so there was natural trepidation about this huge change. Fortunately, with expert planning and staff/family support, his move was smooth. "We were all pleasantly surprised about his positive transition living at the farm," said his mom, Connie. "He has made many friends since moving to SHF, and continues to enjoy being with them."

With that winning smile, who would be surprised?





Safe Haven Farms

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To all who made our fall Craft Show
such a success, a hearty thanks ! Spe-
cial thanks to Rena Blevins and her
merrie band of crafters !

Dwight A. Packard, II Joins Safe Haven Board

We welcome Dwight A. Packard, II, a lawyer with Graydon Head, as a member of the Safe Haven Board of Directors. Dwight comments, "I'm really pleased that I can lend a legal perspective to some of the issues we're facing with CMS (see p. 5). I feel that my strength is looking at the 'big picture,' making sure we're charting a strategic course."

Dwight was first hired by the board in 2010 as a legal representative. He developed an interest in the mission and execution of Safe Haven, which led him to become a member of the board. He has no family connection with autism, but Dwight notes, "Our next door neighbors have twin boys with moderate to severe autism. They're 18-years-old now, so we've watched them grow up. They rode the bus with our three girls. My wife and I have talked on and off over the years with their mom, so we know the frustrations and challenges, as well as rewards of parenting kids with autism."

Dwight is pleased to work with the other board members. "This is a great board, he says. "Every person serving here is of the highest quality, and works very hard. I'm just happy to be a part of it. I hope to contribute to its success."

Donors!



Did you know that in addition to making a one-time donation via check or on-line you can also sign up for an easy monthly donation? Just go to the "Support Us" tab on our web site, select "Donations" and click the on-line "Donate" button. After entering your monthly amount, click the "Make this Recurring (Monthly)" box, enter your credit card or PayPal information, and you're all set. Your designated amount will automatically be sent to Safe Haven monthly with no further action on your part. **Please consider helping us change lives by making a year-end donation.**