

The Safe Haven Way

A Parent Publication of Safe Haven Farms, Butler County, Ohio

FALL 2015

SAFE HAVEN FARMS

**A Community of Choice
for Adults
with Autism**

Your gifts
help support
our mission
and tell us
you value
what we do!



Safe Haven Farms is a residential/ vocational setting for adults with autism.

Founded by parents with children on the autism spectrum, the farm opened in May, 2010. The farm serves clients in residence and also provides day vocational programs and therapeutic horseback riding to others with autism from the surrounding community.



“Gardening is an exercise in optimism. Sometimes, it is a triumph of hope over experience.”

- Marina Schinz, author

Safe Haven Farm’s horticulture program took a huge leap forward in 2015 under the leadership of staff member **Mike Rogers**, with the goal of getting Safe Haven’s name out there in the Madison community (and beyond) as *the place* to purchase plants, fresh vegetables and eggs. With that in mind, a portion of the pole barn was transformed into a planting room with high quality grow lights, enabling seedlings to be planted in early February and transferred to the hoop houses by late March. Summer vegetables, started in early April, were available for a spring plant sale at the farm. Over 500 transplants were grown for Safe Haven’s gardens, hoop houses, and for the plant sale.



The Farm’s two hoop houses have been producing vegetables since early February and will continue to do so through December.

Safe Haven’s farmers played an integral part in the horticulture program by potting seedlings in the planting room, com-



posting, mixing soil, watering, transplanting, cleaning the hoop houses and garden, weeding, harvesting, and setting up the roadside vegetable stand. The roadside stand proved to be popular for Safe Haven staff, families and the local community, where passers-

by could select produce and leave a voluntary donation, which the farmers were proud to collect at the end of the day.

Many community connections were made this year for future

shown interest. The Farmers also delivered extra veggies to the Hope House shelter in Middletown. The guys and gals of Safe Haven really enjoy giving back to the community.

Next year, Mike Rogers (shown right) says the program hopes to grow and sell flowers as well as well as vegetables and herbs. “It was an amazing learning experience

for me and many of our staff and farmers involved,” Mike says. We’re working towards a CSA program (Community Supported Agriculture) and we took a big step towards that this year!”



Next year, look for an expanded pumpkin patch, which is a huge favorite for the farmers. According to Mike, work has already been started to prepare the back fields for more pumpkins. The hope is to gear up for a community event with pumpkins for sale and hayrides available for visitors to the farm.

Shane Means Business

Safe Haven volunteer **Shane O'Reilly**, 26, would work for free all week at the farm if he had his choice, says his father, Todd.

Shane, a West Chester resident, "absolutely loves" caring and tending horses and cutting grass, among his many duties during his once-weekly service time.

Shane, who has Asperger's syndrome, also works at Walmart and loves to keep

busy. "He has a lot of energy and the farm is a perfect place for him to get a physical work out. I also like him getting a sense of giving back and helping in the community," says Todd.

He notes that Shane is very independent and the farm enhances his social and organizational skills. "The farm is an amazing place and I wish there were more of them. The people there

are wonderful," Todd comments.

Shane's employment record includes positions at Waffle House and UPS, but Safe Haven is by far his favorite. "I don't know where he gets it from since I'm a city guy," quipped his dad. "He's a natural country boy!"

Shane wields the new \$10,000 Scag mower. Middletown Community Foundation awarded us \$5000, matched by a parent contribution.



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Welcome Jeremy

Safe Haven Farms' newest resident, **Jeremy Dukart**, is a charming young man with a sweet disposition. Whether he is feeding the animals or tending the crops, the 23 year old displays a willingness to please and a cooperative spirit.

Jeremy excels at horseback riding and the staff reports he has great balance. His dad, David, credits that, in part, to years of riding a tandem bicycle with his son throughout Montgomery,

where he grew up with one older brother and three younger sisters.

He has adjusted ideally to living full time at Safe Haven, due to a well-executed transition plan that staged visit times. Jeremy began attending the day program first and then slowly started spending time at the house so everyone could acclimate to the change in dynamics. His family was naturally apprehensive about his first stay, but when dad learned

that Jeremy would take naps in his new room, all were relieved. The transitional steps were very positive, and he became a full-time resident in September. "The staff is terrific and very sensitive," said David.

There were some surprises. Jeremy was always fearful of dogs and would avoid one if walking in the community. Spending time with the farm's group of canines has dispelled this fear and allowed him to enjoy their company. He was also territorial about his space at his parents' home growing up— what chair was his, etc. At Safe Haven, he doesn't appear to need such a rigid approach, and the new flexibility, along with tolerating dogs, are part of what David calls "a super positive change."



Jeremy with new friend Emily and Safe Haven staff members. Hmm, no wonder he's smiling!

Horse Program Embraced by Community

The Safe Haven Farms Therapeutic Riding Program has successfully extended into the community and many enjoy “horsing around” with our equestrian professionals.



Presently six riders come each Tuesday to experience the benefits riding offers people on the autistic spectrum. The program is accepting applications for participants to begin in the spring. “It is really going so well,” said **Donna Farler**, SH equestrian program director. “We wanted to take time to get to know the horses and train the volunteers and now we are ready to grow.”

Riders, from ages seven to 63, have developed a special connection with the animals. For example, Kelly, 16, is so enamored with riding that she signs

“horse” as soon as she arrives. “Kelly is loving her lessons—and I am loving her lessons,” her mom, Judy, wrote in an email. “We talk about them all week long. What a great team you have. They are all so warm, positive, helpful, and understanding. It’s a joyful place to be. We are so blessed by all of you!”

Owen, 8, was having so much difficulty concentrating that his mom was going to cancel his weekly piano lessons. After riding, she reported, his performance was greatly improved as he sat down and calmly played the piano.

These stories are no surprise to researchers who have found that riding can enhance concentration, language, physical and sensory performances for those affected with autism. The pure joy of riding in a beautiful atmosphere at an accepting and nurturing farm is just icing on the cake for people who often struggle with social outings.

Safe Haven residents and day program



attendees have been successfully riding for many months on gentle and well trained horses. Sassy, a new addition, has adapted well to the program. Donna noted that Sassy, 20, is in great shape because she used to be a barrel racer, is very curious, likes people and has a great temperament.

The program would not excel without the 12 fabulous volunteers who serve as leaders and side walkers. They come from many diverse backgrounds – special education teachers, university students, and retired professionals—and all relish the experience. “They lead very active and busy lives but they take a few hours each week to help someone find a way to have fun in their life,” said Donna. “They are so appreciated.” Donna suspects that some may have begun volunteering because of their love of horses, but then “they fall in love with the riders.”

For more information, contact: Donna Farler 513-422-1880 ext. 106 or 513-340-0688. Email equestrian@safehavenfarms.org Website www.safehavenfarms.org

Help us Expand the Kroger Community Rewards Program

In our last newsletter, we told you about registering your **Kroger Plus** card so that Safe Haven can benefit from the Kroger rewards program for non-profits. So far, only 12 households have signed up, yielding about \$200 each quarter for Safe Haven.

We can do better than this!

All you have to do is register your Kroger Plus card online at www.kroger.com/community-rewards and select Safe Haven Farms, organization number 34324 as the beneficiary. Each time you swipe your Plus card at checkout, Safe Haven automatically starts earning a quarterly rebate. You do not need to live in the Cincinnati area to take advantage of this. As long as there is a participating Kroger in your area, you should be able to select Safe



Emily, SH resident, goes Krogering

Safe Haven Farms from the database of non-profits. Get signed up before all the holiday feasting begins. This is an easy way to support us! Thanks for your help.

VOA Walk was, well, Cool

After a stretch of beautiful fall weather, the October Saturday morning of **Walk On for Autism** dawned cold, grey, and drizzly. No matter. . . our supporters are a hearty crew. They took their laps around the lake, enjoyed the rockin' sounds of the GE band "Title 14," snacked on donuts, brownies and other delights supplied by Subway, 10 Wilmington Place, Walmart, and Safe Haven parents and took pictures with our miniature horses. Many thanks to our participants and sponsors, our volunteers from the Safe Haven Equestrian Program, employees from the Evendale Walmart, and all who donated our fabulous raffle and door prizes. Thanks also to the purveyors of twisty balloon animals and pumpkin painting, who remained enthusiastic even though the weather dampened the demand for their talents. A tip of the riding helmet to the planners: **Denny & Ann Rogers, Ed & Ann Yanosik, Donna Farler, Mei Carpenter, Mark Williamson and Leslie Odioso. Bravo!**

Benefitting Safe Haven Farms Equestrian Program



Craft Show and Ceramics Program

The Safe Haven annual Craft Show and Open House in October brought out a bunch of crafty folks and enthusiastic shoppers. Beautiful items from many artists were on sale as were handmade ceramics magnets and ornaments crafted by Safe Haven participants.

A grant from the **Pfau Foundation** enabled us to buy a Skutt automatic kiln, and over the summer, staff and participants began working with clay and creating small items to sell at the craft show. They will also be selling their work at other local craft fairs. Proceeds from the sale of these handmade items will be used to replenish ceramics supplies so that participants can continue to create more ceramic pieces.

Thanks Pfau!



A Life-Changing Experience

By Grace Juriga

Editor's note:

Best Buddies is a nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

This past summer, Miami University's Best Buddies program won the Overall Most Outstanding College Chapter of the Year Award at the Best Buddies International Leadership Conference. Miami was up against more than 430 college programs from around the world, many of which have state offices. Schools were evaluated on the amount of awareness raised in the community by the chapter and the quality of friendships established through the program. For more info on becoming a part of Best Buddies, go to www.facebook.com/MiamiUniversityBestBuddies

Safe Haven Farms is exactly what the name implies, a haven for the “farmers” to flourish and thrive. As a student at Miami University who belongs to the **National Student Speech Language Hearing Association**, I have volunteered at Safe Haven's monthly dances for three years. I look forward to it every month. The dances consist of dinner, decorations and lots of dancing!

The first time I visited the farm I did not know what to expect. Both the farmers and their family members welcomed all of the Miami volunteers with open arms, making us all feel at home. Sitting with the farmers and eating a delicious homemade meal is always so much fun because you can really sit down and spend time talking to them. The farmers are honestly the happiest, most genuine people I have ever met. Of course the party really starts when the music comes on. The energy the farmers bring to the dance floor is contagious. There's always someone to spin around or jump to the beat with.

While volunteering at Safe Haven I met a young man named Joel. Joel was quiet, but when the music came on he had terrific dance moves. I was talking to his parents at one of the dances and they mentioned that Joel was also a part of the Best Buddies program at Miami. I decided junior year to apply to be a part of Best Buddies and when I was accepted into the program, I immediately asked if Joel was available. I'm happy to say we got paired and now I get to see and hang out with him more than once a month.

Volunteering my time at Safe Haven Farms has been a life-changing experience. I look forward to each and every visit and always leave with a smile plastered across my face. My time at Safe Haven has led me to decide to specialize in autism after graduate school.



Joel and Grace with therapy dog Lance



“Every time I go to Safe Haven I always walk away feeling more uplifted than when I got there. The love in the community is so evident and it is a privilege to be able to be part of such a wonderful group of people.”

-Madeline Tatum, Miami volunteer



In Memory of Audrey Odioso

The Safe Haven family has lost another beloved family member. Audrey Odioso passed away unexpectedly on June 5, 2015 at the tender age of 24. The entire Safe Haven family extends its love and regrets to Audrey's mom and dad, Leslie and Mike Odioso, and to her sister and brother, Lauren and Lucas, as well as to her extended family.

Audrey crackled with energy and life, her personality "larger than life." A girly-girl, she loved nothing better than to dress up, and all the better if dressing up included something from a Disney movie. A beautiful young lady, you couldn't miss Audrey in a crowd.

Audrey especially enjoyed the creative arts program at the farm and created many beautiful pieces under the guidance of art staff lead Donna Stoutenborough. As Donna remembers, "When Audrey created something, she had a definite plan for the outcome. All of her projects had a theme that came from within with very little direction from me. She would get very quiet when she was engrossed in a piece of art but take the time to look up and share her infectious smile. I will never forget her."

Audrey's faith was an important part of her life. She attended religion classes and received the Catholic sacraments of baptism, reconciliation, communion, and confirmation. She knew how to pray the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary." Like many people with autism, Audrey seemed to have a personal line to God. During a particularly challenging stay at the hospital, Leslie says she tried to make small talk with Audrey. "I tried to remind her of our phone conversation the evening before. I started the conversation by saying: 'Audrey, who called you last night? Who

talked to you?' Audrey answered in a whisper: 'Jesus. Jesus talked to Audrey.'" Leslie was left stunned and awed.

Audrey's parents give thanks that Audrey is in a beautiful place with nothing to limit her or hold her back, but the upcoming holidays will be difficult for them.

Leslie asks that we keep the family in our prayers. "Of course," she adds, "this Christmas will be her best ever—she gets to spend Christmas with Jesus!"

God speed, Audrey. We will never forget you. We hold you in our hearts.



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*The Odioso family and Safe Haven Farms
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support and kind donations.*

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*Remember February 16, 2016 and Join us at the Grand Finale
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Make a Gift to Support our Mission!

The continued sustainability of Safe Haven Farms depends on a solid financial base, where every dollar is carefully counted. Your generosity can help us meet the costs of operating our large enterprise and bring joy to the lives of those we serve.

Your gifts help ensure that the residents' homes are safe, comfortable and well-maintained. If you are a home-owner, you know there is always something needed: a new furnace, a water-heater, new carpet, etc. With utility costs constantly rising, we are looking into alternative energy sources perhaps to be funded by grants. We are fortunate to have received several grants over the five years of our existence; a firm financial footing has kept us in the running and conveyed confidence that we indeed have a bright future.

Could you help us with the expenses of maintaining and expanding our wonderful programs. Horses cost money to feed and maintain. Gardening, which provides so much food to the farmers, requires equipment and supplies. Maintaining our farm buildings and acreage is a year-around expense.

The dollars or gifts you donate promote the continued growth and development of our participants. Our vision led us to build an autism-specific setting serving the varied needs of our children. **Won't you please return your check in the enclosed reply envelope or donate online and help us continue our mission!**