

From Riding Lessons to Recovery: A Ranch Making a Difference

Paradise Acres Ranch honoured with Sturgeon County's Excellence in Agriculture Award

A chance meeting over chicken wire led a Sturgeon County family and a visionary, to join forces and transform an equine ranch into a place for healing.

In 2019, Lee and Bobby Brochu moved their Paradise Acres Ranch from Slave Lake to Sturgeon County. Lee had grown up west of Morinville, and the couple wanted to return to the area where his family still lives to raise their own family.

The Brochus were content to run their equestrian operation as a welcoming place for riding, lessons, and horse boarding. But along came Jocelyn LaCoste, a horse lover searching for free chicken wire.

LaCoste and the Brochus started chatting and LaCoste ended up buying a horse the Brochus had inherited with their new land.

That horse was the start of a friendship, which grew through numerous conversations.

Bobby says they knew mental health was a significant concern and had experienced firsthand how horses can make a meaningful difference.

Jocelyn recalls their initial discussions.

"I vividly remember us sitting down at the kitchen table, and we were like, 'What can we do to help the community? How can we provide the services that are so necessary through the power of the horses?'"

Bobby and Lee were captivated by the idea. They had the space, fields to produce hay for feed, and a strong desire to help.

People from all walks of life, from youngsters to veterans to seniors, now connect with their horses to work through their anxiety, addictions, and recovery.

One early participant stands out.

"A young girl came that felt that her life was not worthy of being part of this world," said Bobby.

"We started her out just working with the horses and spending some time reflecting on herself with the horses."

"The second visit was a session that I did with her riding through the field and then from there on, I feel like that was a really big shift," Bobby remembers.

Eventually, the young teen created videos on her experiences with the horses.

Today, LaCoste is the ranch's manager and trainer. The herd has grown to 36 and equine therapy is now a primary focus at the Sturgeon County ranch.

It's a popular venue for people seeking the alternative therapy. More than 1,000 people from across Alberta connected with Paradise Acres' four-legged-therapists in the past year.

Its success was recently recognized by Sturgeon County with an Excellence in Agriculture Award, paying tribute to businesses who demonstrate excellence in what they do and help to improve the environment, local communities, and the economy.

Bobby says they are proud of the recognition of their efforts in turning a traditional horse-riding facility into one which benefits the community.

"It's exciting, it almost drives you to push even harder," adds Jocelyn on receiving the county award.

"You know you are making a difference.