

Reining Liberty Ranch expands after receiving Good Works funding

BY KYLE KAMINSKI , Oct 4, 2016

TRAVERSE CITY — Reining Liberty Ranch usually is a quiet community.

The commotion on U.S. 31 is muffled down a rural stretch of Silver Pines Road. Neighboring farms create a buffer for serenity. The sound of horses clopping through dirt often is only interrupted by the occasional loose chicken.



But not this week. Excavators emblazoned with the Team Elmer's logo tore through the small ranch Monday to make some major improvements thanks to a \$4,000 grant from Rotary of Traverse City's Good Works program.

The cash infusion will more than double Reining Liberty's square footage, adding an outdoor footing area so programs can expand. The nonprofit's mission: use horses to improve the physical and emotional health of veterans.

"Our outdoor area was so horrible that we couldn't get the horses to the right gate to make a positive impact," Executive Director Becky Bigelow said. "The new space means we can do programs inside and outside."

Dennis Kuznicki, 70, is one of the hundreds of veterans served each year through the ranch's Horses for Heroes program. Veterans there learn to communicate with horses, work as a team and build relationships with other veterans.

Kuznicki found the ranch after post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms appeared following his three-year combat tour in Vietnam. His troubles aren't gone for good, but an eight-week program at the ranch helped melt his anxiety.

"They put me with a horse where if I had that anxiety, the horse would blow apart," Kuznicki said. "It taught me how to work myself down because I had to for the horse. It brought me down so I could connect with the horse."

Bigelow said veterans can benefit from relational horsemanship. The animals can help veterans recognize and check their own emotions. Horses breed self-awareness and that often can be the most important path to healing, she said.

Other Reining Liberty programs include helping at-risk students from Traverse City High School, hippotherapy lessons to build strength and improve balance, and guidance for autistic children looking to grow life skills.

"It helps me," Kuznicki said. "It gives me a purpose of living."

Rotary's Good Works grants are geared toward supporting projects that address unmet needs and primarily are awarded within Grand Traverse County.

Visit reininglibertyranch.org for more information about the ranch or any of its no-cost activities provided within the community.

Original article: http://www.record-eagle.com/news/local_news/grant-dollars-boost-local-nonprofit/article_5c60c1db-66a2-5bf3-8940-d174c55d3913.html