



# The Ranch Hand

A publication of In Balance Ranch Academy

Fall 2006

## In Balance Living "In Full Bloom"

Wendy Sizer, MSW  
Primary Therapist

Spring is always a time for new beginnings, and in May In Balance opened the doors of its Transitional Living program in Tucson to young men who had just graduated from the In Balance Ranch Academy. What they walked into was a group of four houses nestled together in a cul-de-sac. Each house boasts a newly furnished and accessorized living room, kitchen, den, two baths and two bedrooms.

No sooner did these young men move in than they were off again, this time vacationing with their parents and siblings and generally enjoying the fruits of great accomplishment before returning to Tucson, getting settled in and beginning the college experience in their new home.

"This is the first "A" I've ever gotten," said one resident who returned to Tucson early in July to tackle a summer-semester class at Pima Community College. It was a writing class he took, and the assignment that got him the "A" was an essay on the pros and cons of a controversial issue. The lunch table filled with therapists, fellow residents and peer facilitators whooped, hollered and clapped in congratulations.

Two days earlier, another resident beamed broadly as he told me that he had been accepted at the University of Arizona, AND he had

*continued inside, see Transition*

## Coming Full Circle — A Retrospective

by Patrick Barrasso MSW, LCSW

A lot has happened thus far in 2006. We celebrated two years at In Balance Ranch Academy and ten years at In Balance Outpatient Treatment Center in Tucson. We also brought the continuum of care full circle, by opening up In Balance Living, a transitional living program for young men in Tucson.

We graduated several young men from high school, saw many of them off to college and one to a traditional boarding school. We also welcomed two of them to our new transitional living program in Tucson, with one of them attending the University of Arizona and the other going to Pima Community College.

We welcomed fourteen of our alumni back for three days of fun and fellowship with our current students. We added our forty-ninth employee and have now successfully served sixty young men, with a current enrollment of thirty-eight. On a personal note, Betsy and I had our first grandchild. Wow, what a wonderful year it has been so far!

Our Clinical Team just spent two days in a retreat to reflect on what we have accomplished and what we need to improve upon. At In Balance Ranch Academy, we have all held ourselves to the standard that the great basketball coach John Wooden writes about. "Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of the self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you're capable of becoming." I try to instill this in our young men and staff each and every day. I am proud of everyone, including our parents, for the successful outcomes that we continue to see with our graduates!



*The recent IBRA Leadership Conference did provide time for fun and relaxation, in addition to learning some powerful community-building and leadership skills. See story inside.*

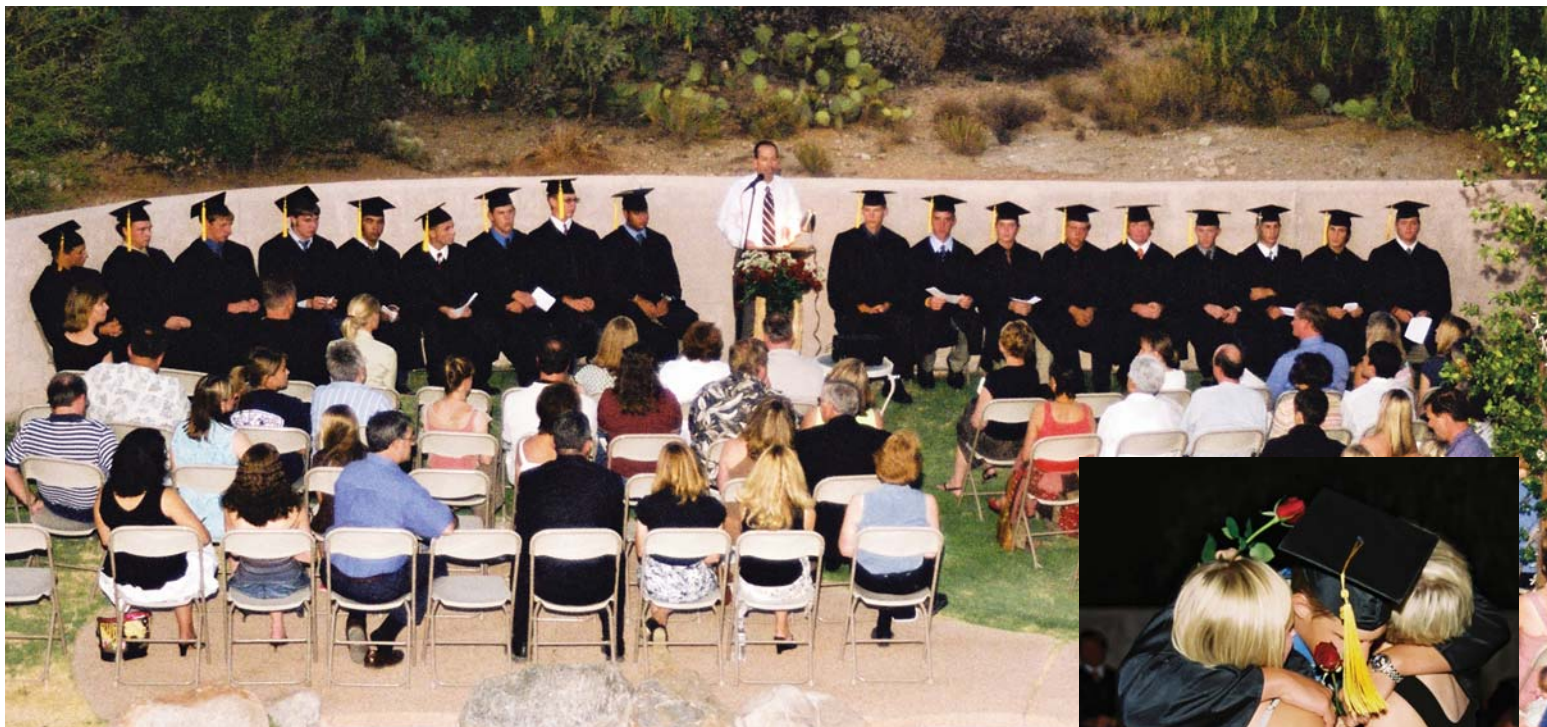
helped attendees conceptualize the strength in combining these two modalities. I strongly encourage all those in the field of adolescent work to attend this truly inspiring and greatly



I experienced one of the high points of my professional career this year as well. I was asked to present by one of the original founders of the Positive Peer Culture (PPC) movement, Dr. Larry Brendro, at the Black Hills Seminars put on by Reclaiming Youth International. What an amazing weekend to be surrounded by such pioneers in the field of adolescent treatment, all speaking the language I've used since I began working with youth in 1981 — all speaking on the Circle of Courage model (Brendro, Brokenleg, and Van Boc Kern, 2002 ). It was like being in a foreign country and walking into a gathering where everyone shared the same language and belief system. I was honored to present on using the PPC model coupled with the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous in the treatment of adolescent substance abuse users. Using the success stories from In Balance Ranch Academy

*see Coming Full Circle, continued on inside*





*A truly glorious night of togetherness, achievement and looking forward to the future, eighteen of our twenty-two graduates turned the corner and found themselves to be High School graduates. Families, friends and In Balance Ranch Academy staff looked on and shared in the excitement and sense of accomplishment.*

## *A whole lot o' graduation going on!*

**In Balance Ranch Academy Honors Twenty-two with High School Diplomas**

*by Lynda Hendricks, M.S. Ed., Academic Director*

On Friday, June 16, eighteen In Balance Ranch Academy students participated in a ceremony commemorating their dream of graduating from high school. Four other students also received their diplomas, although they were unable to attend the ceremony. Parents, siblings, extended family members and friends joined in the festivities at Patrick and Betsy Barrasso's lovely home. A gorgeous Tucson sunset provided the perfect backdrop to this important rite of passage for the new graduates.

Each student composed a speech to share with the attendees. Most of the graduates' speeches focused on the struggles they had endured with drug/alcohol addiction, experiences with school failure and resulting low self-esteem. Jake M. began his speech with the following quote, "I run on the road long before I dance under the lights." As he addressed the 80 attendees, Jake used the quote as a metaphor for the race he endured to reach his goal of high school graduation. He explained how many bumps in the road he experienced in

terms of problems in school, with drugs, and resulting family issues. Jake related his successful journey to "dancing under the lights" at the commencement and the pride he felt in being able to celebrate his accomplishment with his family. Jake is looking forward to attending college and majoring in marketing.

A prevalent theme of the students' presentations was the difficulties they encountered in a traditional high school setting and their reluctance to believe they could successfully graduate and go on to college. Many expressed their satisfaction at achieving high grades and their excitement for their future plans, which they shared with all in attendance. It is indeed rewarding to be able to help these fine young men rediscover their innate talents and encourage them to follow their hearts and dreams to find their passion in life. While parents and students are thankful for the gift of healing and academic success realized at the Ranch, the staff is equally thankful for the gift of working with the students and their families.



*An In Balance Ranch Academy tradition, each graduate goes out into the audience after speaking and presents their loved ones and supporters with a big hug and a rose.*



*Lynda Hendricks, Academic Director at In Balance Ranch Academy, makes it official! Success breeds success, as evidenced by the fact that many of our graduates are now headed to college.*



Each student was invited to share some thoughts about their educational achievements with those assembled. It was a reflection of lessons learned and obstacles overcome (with just a smattering of comedy thrown in — cowboy hat entirely optional). Each graduate was asked to pick a quote from someone famous and apply that quote to what they have learned and accomplished.



Patrick Barrasso, owner and founder of In Balance Ranch Academy later said of the event, "Feeling the sense of achievement from the boys and seeing the excitement and pride in the faces of the parents, families and supporters was one of the greatest moments of my entire professional career. Learning to succeed at living a sober lifestyle AND gaining a high school diploma is no easy feat, and these young men have pulled it off with a grace and style we can all be proud of. I am truly saddened to see these young men leave the Ranch, but I am confident in the knowledge that they are better prepared to lead a healthy and happy adult life."

### *"Dust off those rusty strings just one more time... gonna make 'em shine..."*

"This line starts off a long guitar lead by Jerry Garcia in one of my favorite Grateful Dead songs. The strings are like my good qualities and talents that I have put on the shelf to collect dust. Now I have a chance to pick them back up, and put them to good use. This time they are really going to shine.

Some of the things I have left on the shelf because of my active addiction are my passion for animals, happiness, friendliness, devotion, honesty, and responsibility. I used to have all of these things in my life, until I picked up that first drink.

When I was a kid, I had two hermit crabs, two cats, and a hamster. I bought the hermit crabs at the beach to keep as pets. They were only supposed to last for a couple weeks, but mine lived to be a year old. My hamster named Whiskers would fall asleep on my belly every night and tuck his head under my shirt like it was a blanket. I watched his birth in school and he died two years older than all of the others that had lived to be about 2 years old. My two cats, one who my family saved because she only had three legs, have been the happiest animals I have ever seen. I love just about all animals and now I can use that gift.

Because of working the Twelve Steps of NA and AA, I can actually be happy, honest, and friendly. When I was in my active addiction, I couldn't. I couldn't feel much of anything except down or up. I have been unable to be honest for years, and it's something I don't want to ever give up again.

I thought this day would never come. I used to say that anyone who wants to go to school is a nerd. Well, here I am and I can't wait to go to college. I actually have goals in my life now. I hope to graduate with a bachelor's degree in equine training, and take classes from shoeing to breeding. After that I hope to be a trainer. For years I will spend my days riding for hours and hours. When I retire, I want to move out west and have a few horses. All I know is that I want to spend the rest of my life around them, even if it means scooping their poop for a living." -Hunter W.

### *"I run on the road long before I dance under the lights."*

"Muhammad Ali would train relentlessly, running on the road, to prepare for a big fight under the lights. Tonight is my night to dance under the lights, and I have spent a long time running on the road so that I could be where I am tonight.

In November, during my junior year, I was taken from my high school to go to rehab. In January I began taking classes again, and with the methods of learning at In Balance Ranch Academy, I was able to complete eight classes and do well in them.

The bumps in the road so far have allowed me to dance under the lights tonight. I am very grateful for the people who helped me become a high school graduate. My parents have helped me so much through my education, and I cannot thank them enough. My brother, Luke, has also helped me a lot along the way; from teaching me the Pythagorean Theorem to telling me that I can go to any college that I want. I am also thankful to all of my teachers, even the ones that I didn't like." -Jake M.

## *A Proud Parent's Perspective*

*The high school graduation ceremony at In Balance Ranch Academy was an incredibly special event for our family. First of all, our son actually graduated a year early, with high marks no less, after having almost given up at his high school at home. He has said that during his using days, he wondered if he would actually ever graduate at all. What a turn-around.*

*To see this happy guy, face beaming as he received his diploma was a most rewarding and inspiring experience. To feel the strength, sincerity and gratitude in his hug afterwards was heart- and soul- warming.*

*What struck me most as I listened to the guys give their speeches on their selected quote and how it related to their life's experience was this: regardless of background, academic ability, and experience, all of which are vastly different, these guys share a common, important bond. At some point in each of their lives, they had lost hope and the belief they could succeed. Fearing they would never amount to anything, they gave up. They found their hope again at the Ranch. Being motivated enough to do the work necessary to earn a diploma is an absolutely notable achievement for our son, as I'm sure it is for many others.*

*We are forever grateful for In Balance Ranch Academy, a unique and magical place where these seemingly "lost" guys can come together and through the strength of the group, be led to find their own inner strength. Our son exemplifies this, and having his high school diploma in hand is the icing on the cake.*



## Leadership Weekend

This past August was the second In Balance Ranch Academy Leadership Weekend. Clinical staff spent an entire day going through the student roster in an attempt to choose a dozen or so students who would benefit from this event. Students were picked not necessarily on their position of assumed leadership at the Ranch, but on their potential to become Ranch community leaders. Students were picked by milieu so that each would have at least two representatives. The idea was to train the up and coming leaders of the Ranch on how to help their community run efficiently.

The weekend was a combination of lectures, exercises and group discussions. Most of the discussions were based on the book "Positive Peer Culture" (PPC) by Harry Vorrath and Larry Brendro. All of the young men involved shared their insights about the PPC with each other, and came up with some practical ideas and concepts to take back with them to the Ranch and share with the rest of their communities.

After the work was finished the boys spent a night on the town. They went out to dinner at a Mexican restaurant, drove go-carts, and

went to a movie. Carl B, a Ranch alumnus was present to help facilitate all of the activities.

—Rob Schmidt, Staff

The leadership weekend is truly one of my favorite events at the Ranch. It appears to have a profound impact on the students attending and their receiving communities. It teaches the students that they mean something and can make a difference in their communities. They often derive pride, power and purpose from their drug-using worlds and this makes it hard for them to leave that life behind. While on the Leadership Weekends they feel pride, power and purpose for healthy reasons and realize they can let their past identities go because they have a new one to put in its place. They also come to the realization there is such thing as "sober fun". Most of the students commented that this weekend was the most fun they can remember having in several years, even prior to being sent to treatment. So they realize being clean and sober can and will be more fun than using drugs and alcohol; and isn't this our common goal to get them to reach? —Tiffany Gallego, MSW

### Coming Full Circle, continued from front

educational conference next year. For more details, go to [www.reclaiming.com](http://www.reclaiming.com). Using a strength-based approach to working with teens has always worked, whether it was the tough gang youth I worked with early in my career, or the substance abusing youth we serve at the Ranch today. This approach is also what our transition program was built around and all of our staff are now trained in this strength-based model.

In Balance Living, our new transitional program, is located in the central part of Tucson. It is five minutes from the University of Arizona and fifteen minutes from Pima Community College. It is a unique, private series of duplexes that open into a central courtyard. It will house twelve young men that have successfully completed primary treatment and need support to maintain their sobriety while taking on the challenges of becoming independent. There is a huge need for this among our graduates as well as graduates from other programs. The first six to twelve months, post-discharge, is such a critical time for young people that are newly in recovery. Research, time and time again, has demonstrated that the clients who stayed in programs for longer periods of time had lower rates of drug use and criminal behavior, and higher rates of employment and school attendance than clients who stayed in programs for shorter periods. Dr. Kevin McCaulley M.D. has studied and written about the importance of the extended care model of treatment. "It provides the best way to maximize the client's chances of achieving long term sobriety. The first year of recovery is all about risk management."

We are truly excited to offer this to our students and to a few from other programs. In Balance Living is an exciting community with a strong Twelve Step program, continuous clinical treatment, sober fun and academic and vocational success. Please see the website for more details: <http://www.inbalanceliving.com>.

As you can see, we continue to find ways to serve youth. At In Balance Ranch Academy, we always are grateful to all those who have supported us in the last two years. A special thanks to Dr. Brendro for his work in providing the guidance and inspiration to serve youth in need of help and direction.

I leave you with one of my favorite quotes. "Always keep a dream in your heart. If you have a dream, then by all means do what it takes to make it come true. If you have a goal, make it something you strive to accomplish. If you have a hope, then hope for it with all your heart." —Collin McCarty

### Transition, from page 1

found a perfect martial arts class to take, AND he wanted to join Rocks & Ropes, a local climbing gym, because climbing was so much fun, AND he had figured out an ideal community service job for himself down at the Ranch. He had organized it all himself, and suddenly his stride seemed to take on new swagger.

If these gains are any indication, it looks like the future bodes well for In Balance Living. For it is here, at these nicely appointed houses, that we enable these young men (and those to follow) to complete the transition from child to adult, addiction to sobriety, emotionally challenged to emotionally stable and from an unproductive person to a solidly productive member of society.

The residents we have at In Balance Living right now come out of the In Balance Ranch Academy experience; one that is highly structured and demanding. The In Balance Living experience is just as demanding, but less structured. It offers these young men the opportunity to manage their own time, assume accountability and responsibility for their behaviors and actions while at the same time remain in therapy and in 12-step recovery. All of this takes place in a healthy environment that is safe from the kind of drug culture that permeates many college campuses and public schools around the nation.

In addition to guiding these young men in areas of college enrollment and time management, we also guide them toward full- or part-time jobs, community service projects, an exercise routine, proper household maintenance, and budgeting their finances. In Balance Living also provides other life skills training such as cooking classes, resume writing, job interviewing, and goal-setting.

Come for a visit. We're in full bloom!



# The Healing Power

By Jacqueline O'Connell-Bagnati, ACSW, LCSW



*The Chiricahuas, one of four milieus at the Ranch, traveled to New Mexico to help out at the Wolf Song Ranch as part of their commitment to community service. Under the supervision and watchful eye of the Wolf Song Ranch caretakers, the boys took to the care of the wolves and had a chance to interact with the wolves on a personal basis.*

The Chiricahuas headed out to the Wolf Song Ranch located in Rodeo, New Mexico on July 21st to learn about wolves and perform community enrichment. It should have been a routine trip of helping and caring for animals that had an abusive history, but this experience was so much more than that. Our journey started out with a tour of the Wolf Song Ranch that encompassed 70 compounds that held over 300 wolves and a mountain lion. The caretakers at Wolf Song were also trying to save the life of a two-week old bobcat whose mother had been accidentally killed. We were allowed to scratch the mountain lion, hold the bobcat, and pet several of the wolves we met. Like so many of us, these animals needed love and attention and thrived from it.

Throughout our trip we were told many stories of horrific abuse that humans had committed on these beautiful wolves. The caretakers took over Wolf Song approximately a year ago and the wolves were not well-cared for, nor did they tolerate the presence of humans. So, the caretakers rolled up their shirt sleeves and set out to improve the care of the wolves by decreasing the size of each pack and ensuring they had sanitary living conditions. They also increased the amount of food that all the wolves received, so that they all learned there would always be enough food and water for all of them. A

veterinarian made monthly trips to Wolf Song to vaccinate, spay and neuter all the wolves over the past year so the population would remain stable. This one family met the basic



*All those on the trip were invited to spend time with the wolves at their own comfort levels. One student remarked, "Before going to the Wolf Song Ranch, I thought that wolves were just out to kill. I found that this was not the case at all. Many of the wolves had been physically abused but still cared for people. I went into the cages of just about all of the wolves and felt very comfortable doing this. I look forward to going back and helping. I think it is a very good cause."*

needs of the wolves and in return their relationships with each wolf grew into respect and then love.

Wolf packs parallel the experience of families in that roles are defined and enforced. Respect for the alpha female and alpha male in a pack is paramount to the survival of a pack. I see this in the importance of the roles parents play in their sons' lives. It is vital that parents are present in their children's lives and set firm and fair rules and guidelines. They should expect that their children do their best and show care and concern for themselves and for the members of their family. This love and concern will guarantee the survival of each member of the family. The wolves demonstrated that through "tough love" each pack member can survive and thrive.

The five days at the Wolf Song Ranch was a unique life experience that will be remembered by all of us who went. Our hosts, Jo and Mike, and their three children, touched our hearts in more ways than words can ever express. Their kindness will be remembered as well as the songs of the wolves that put us to sleep each night.

*For more information on the Wolf Song Ranch, please check out their web site at <http://www.wolfsongranch.org>.*

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### In Service...

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In Balance Ranch Academy students are committed to performing community enrichment projects in a variety of ways and in many different settings.

For more about the The Wolf Song Ranch experience, please see inside.

### In Touch...

The relationship between In Balance Ranch Academy and the young men who successfully complete the program does not end upon graduation.

Rob Schmidt

"I graduated from the ranch in August of '05'. Since then my life has really begun. I'm currently in my third semester at Pima Community College, I work part time at The Ranch and am the on-site staff for In Balance's Transitional Living program. My relationship with my family is the best it has ever been. I've got friends that are honest. I feel like the longer I stay sober the better my situation gets and the better I feel. I thank God everyday that I have been given the opportunities I have. Without The Ranch I would not possibly be this excited about living life."



*Rob, left, and another alumna take Worthy the Pony for a spin around the Ranch.*

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