



PHOTO: E.J. CARR

# Let's Raise The Barn

**TALL TALES RANCH'S** plan for a more diverse and inclusive future for all.

By *Hillary Locke Mujica*

**AT A TIME WHEN** discussions of diversity and inclusion is increasingly finding a place at kitchen tables, classrooms, and board rooms, Tall Tales Ranch wants you to know about a population that is too often left out of that conversation. It is the Colorado nonprofit's deeply held belief that people of all abilities benefit when we live, work and socialize with those who are different from ourselves. Their dream to create a community that welcomes those with and without disabilities to learn, live and grow together.

Tall Tales Ranch is on the threshold of building a mixed residential and retail community in Lone Tree that will serve as a vibrant hub and pioneering example of the idea that people who are differently abled deserve the opportunity to thrive and be

valued for the unique ways in which they can contribute.

TTR calls their growing family of young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) their "ambassadors", and they are at the heart and soul of their mission.

"They inspire us constantly with their unflinching ability to celebrate and focus on what they can do, instead of what they cannot," says Tall Tales Ranch Director of Programs, Sally McCance. "We are building an unapologetically different community that's rooted in possibility, diversity, and the inherent value of all people."

Creating community is what Tall Tales is all about. When asked about what she loves best about TTR, one ambassador answered "I like yoga, I like trivia....I just like being part of the Tall Tales family." Having had to pivot from in-person programming to a new virtual

model in 2020, ambassadors adjusted quickly, demonstrating an incredible ability to find silver linings in this new way of gathering. In a recent Zoom class, when one young man announced that his grandfather was ill, the others rushed to comfort and console him, and let him know he was not alone. Bonds are already being made among the ambassadors, many of whom will someday live, work and find fellowship together at the ranch. Their unwavering spirit and positivity is what makes the Tall Tales community the beacon it has become for so many.

The development, slated to be constructed just east of I25 at RidgeGate Parkway, adjacent to the historic Schweiger Ranch, will offer vocational training and employment opportunities at their coffee shop and community event barn, as well as a variety of fitness and life skills programming, social adventuring opportunities, and events for people with and without disabilities.

“Our vision is to build a community offering extraordinary social, educational and vocational enrichment and opportunity to an underserved population that is too often left out of the diversity discussion.”

—Susan Mooney, Tall Tales Ranch co-founder and Executive Director



**THE ROAD AHEAD**

Receiving final Site Improvement Plan approval in July 2020 made way for the January 2021 kickoff of the capital campaign that will bring this project to life. With a campaign goal of \$15 million, (\$3 million has been raised so far), \$12 million of which is yet to be raised, TTR is hopeful about putting first shovels in the ground in 2023.

Investment opportunities in this community-strengthening development include the funding and naming of the community event barn, its theatrical stage, galleries, coffee shop, residential and other structures. Other opportunities include a raised garden, family trees in the orchard, benches, rocking chairs and more.

With the campaign now in full swing, TTR welcomes inquiries from potential partners who share their belief in the measurable community benefit of investment in an inclusive future.

What makes TTR’s plan uniquely different from others is the very intentional way in which they will create a neuro-diverse community between those with and without disabilities. This forward thinking design is a departure from the isolation and separation to which the I/DD community has become accustomed. By bringing people together in a conscious way, TTR will be a place where all will be valued for their unique gifts. 🌟

**TALL TALES RANCH**  
[talltalesranch.org](http://talltalesranch.org)

**THE PHYSICAL PLAN**

**TALL TALES RANCH** assembled a “dream team” to create their physical vision, which includes Godden Sudik Architects, Inc., Norris Design and Merrick and Company Engineers. Ideally located on a beautiful piece of property donated by the Schweiger Ranch Foundation, and in close proximity to a new 80-acre Regional Park, the East-West Regional Trail System, and the RidgeGate Light Rail station, with the many features:

**A COMMUNITY EVENT BARN** will offer space for programmatic activities such as yoga, dance fitness, social connection, life skills, and other educational and life-enriching classes, as well as opportunities to engage the greater community. The barn’s upstairs mezzanine is designed with office spaces for Tall Tales Ranch operations and partners (in a co-workspace way) from the community. Rental of the event barn for small weddings, conferences, and other gatherings will provide sustaining revenue as well as vocational training in catering, hospitality and events for people who are differently abled from across the Denver metro area. The ideal location—directly across the street from the RidgeGate Light Rail station—means easy access to and from everywhere the Light Rail runs.

**A RETAIL COFFEE SHOP** will serve as a community hub and living example of intentional neurodiversity by providing vocational training and employment opportunities to those with and without disabilities, and to those who do and do not reside at the ranch. The public will be encouraged and welcomed to visit the ranch’s coffee shop for the experience of enjoying a good cup of coffee and treats prepared and served by people whose experience may be very different from theirs.

**TWO SETS OF PAIRED COTTAGES** will house approximately 32 residents, offering small, leased apartments for those who can enjoy semi-independent living. A central community building called The Big Blue House will be home base for meals, activities and fellowship—a space designed to encourage gathering of the residents, friends and families.

**A COMMUNITY GARDEN** featuring raised vegetable beds and a family orchard, and walking trails to adjacent open space, will offer educational gardening and environmental opportunities to residents and visitors.

RENDERING: COURTESY TALL TALES RANCH

PHOTOS: E.J. CARR

