

# TALL TALES RANCH

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## Rolling Out the Welcome Wagon for Tall Tales Ranch

Lone Tree's July, 2020 Site Improvement Plan (SIP) approval of a paradigm-shifting, mixed residential and commercial development for the disability community is big news. Here's what you need to know about Tall Tales Ranch - an "unapologetically different" neighbor blazing trails in neurodiversity and inclusion.

Tall Tales Ranch calls their growing family of young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), such as autism and Down syndrome, their "ambassadors", and they are at the heart of their mission. "They inspire us constantly with their unfailing 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." What makes this uniquely different from the majority of options that exist elsewhere is the very intentional way in which Tall Tales Ranch

will create community between those with and without special needs. With a community event barn, retail coffee shop and gardens, the ranch will welcome all as a vibrant hub of connection; a living celebration of what happens when we embrace diversity. It is their deeply held belief that we all benefit when we live, work and socialize with those who are different from ourselves.

**"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."**

- Tall Tales Ranch co-founder, Susan Mooney

It is estimated that over 80% of American adults with disabilities are unemployed. The fact is that there is an entire demographic of people capable of, and desiring to work. When provided individualized training, and supported employment opportunities, horizons expand in countless ways. Greater self esteem. Enriching social connection. These are enormously



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valuable, measurable returns on the investment in the human experience, and something many neurotypical people (those without special needs) take for granted. This is what drives founders Susan and Pat Mooney, who have a son with an acquired brain injury, to forge ahead. That, and the determination to answer a serious question facing those in the disability communi-

ty: where do young adults with special needs go to find supportive community, and a place to work and live, after their family is no longer around to assure their wellbeing? This question reflects a growing crisis for many, and it's one Tall Tales Ranch was founded to answer. With final SIP approval under their belt, the day of opening literal and figurative doors for the IDD community is that much closer.

Tall Tales Ranch and their ambassadors are not new to our city. As a group, they have been warmly welcomed by the City, the RidgeGate community, Mayor Jackie Millet and others who share the belief that inclusion and diversity makes us all stronger. Until the construction of the ranch is complete, programming and events happen and grow in an "on the move" way at various locations and with a variety of community based partners, including Bank of America and Athleta. Each year, the ambassadors enjoy being part of the popular *Austrian Christmas* event at the historic Schweiger Ranch, who have been remarkable partners. Once the ranch is built, they will be immediate neighbors to the south, and in fact, it is the Schweiger Ranch Foundation who

provided the donated land to build Tall tales Ranch. This unique partnership uplifts both nonprofit organizations in a unique, collaborative way. Last year, the ambassadors helped celebrate the opening of the new RTD Light Rail station adjacent to their future home. And currently, several ambassadors serving on the nonprofit's neurodiverse *Young Professional Board* are busy planning a mobile coffee truck business they plan to use for vocational training, earned wages, and the opportunity to meet their future Lone Tree neighbors face to face while they await construction of the community's brick-and-mortar coffee shop.

**"Tall Tales Ranch not only supports the needs of people living with intellectual/developmental disabilities, but also Lone Tree's vision for a vibrant, complete community. We are a City that offers a wide range of opportunities for people of all ages, incomes and abilities, and we're very excited to welcome this sharing community to Lone Tree!"**

- Jackie Millet, P.E., Mayor, City of Lone Tree



Mayor Jackie Millet celebrates with a Tall Tales Ranch ambassador at a 2019 Club Greenwood event.

## THE PHYSICAL PLAN

Tall Tales Ranch assembled a "dream team" to realize their physical vision, which includes Godden Sudik Architects, Inc., Norris Design and Merrick and Company Engineers. Together with local partners, they have designed a stunning place for call home.

A community event barn will offer space for programmatic activities such as yoga, dance fitness, social connection, life skills, and other educational



The ambassador community embraces online virtual programming during the COVID-19 crisis, a shift allowing participants near and far to participate in yoga, dance fitness, games and critical social connection during a time of isolation.



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 with special needs 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 demonstrating one of TTR's core tenets, 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 a good cup of java, happy hour libations with accompanying live acoustic musical performances, and open mic nights for people of every ability and stripe.

**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. There will be 24/7 Tall Tales Ranch-trained aides, similar to the college "RA" model, to ensure resident safety, coordination with advocate services, and that needs are met. In the interest of inviting neuro and socioeconomic diversity, a small number of apart-

ments will be leased to those qualifying for attainable housing - teachers and first responders, for example - who can serve as good neighbors and stewards among this diverse community of residents.

**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.

**WHAT COMES NEXT?**

*"There are three stages of development and approval in order to construct Tall Tales Ranch,"* notes TTR Board Member, Mark Gray, *"and we have now completed two of them: the Design Review and the Site Development Plan. The final step is completing the Construction Documents and obtaining a valid building permit. Then we raise the necessary capital and put a shovel in the ground."*

Thanks to an ongoing, uplifting show of support by the City of Lone Tree, the RidgeGate community and Coventry Development Corporation, the Schweiger Ranch Foundation, and partners like HomeAid Colorado (and a list of philanthropically minded Colorado builders who have pledged to help offset some of the construction costs of the project), there are a whole lot of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities with a whole lot of hope that they will soon have a place to blaze some trails of their own.

**Tall Tales Ranch will kick off the capital campaign that will bring this project to life in January 2021.** They welcome all inquiries regarding investment in this dynamic community-strengthening development, including the naming of the Community Event Barn and a number of other naming and funding opportunities.

**Any questions, or to discuss joining the growing team of funders who believe in the measurable community benefit of investment in an inclusive future, may be directed to TTR Development Director, Heather Lauren Quiroga at [heather@talltalesranch.org](mailto:heather@talltalesranch.org)**



Tall Tales Ranch ambassadors enjoy Lasso Social Adventuring Club outings, pre-COVID - just one of several game-changing TTR programs

**TALL TALES RANCH 101**

Tall Tales Ranch is a Colorado 501(c)3 nonprofit organization established in 2014 to support young adults living with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) like autism and Down syndrome. In 2016, the Schweiger Ranch Foundation donated the 4-acre property at I25 and RidgeGate Parkway in Lone Tree (a 100-year land lease in perpetuity) to the nonprofit, after which the engineering and architectural design work began. Final Site Improvement Plan approval was granted by the City of Lone Tree in July, 2020. During those years of behind-the-scenes work, the Tall Tales Ranch community of ambassadors, their families, supporters, and partners have grown alongside innovative programming for those with special needs, including *The Lasso Social Adventuring Group, Powderhounds Ski Team, Talent Show Ensemble*, and the neurodiverse *Young Professional Board*. Sights are now set on the next phase - completing building construction plans and launching the capital campaign that will bring to life this inclusive, neurodiverse community rooted in possibility.

**WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY? Neurodiversity is defined as the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits regarded as part of normal variation in the human population. Tall Tales Ranch recognizes and respects the right of people with neurological differences to thrive and be valued for their unique ability to contribute to their community.**

**ACTION ITEM:** get involved!

- Have your company partner up with TTR's monthly *Lasso Social Adventuring Club*, which does everything from rock climbing to attending professional sporting events to community service projects

- Match up your interests with volunteer opportunities at [www.talltalesranch.org/volunteer](http://www.talltalesranch.org/volunteer)
- Learn more about how easy it is to include Tall Tales Ranch in your estate plans, donate stocks or vehicles, name TTR as a benefiting nonprofit in your employer's matching gift program, become a sustaining monthly donor, or make a one-time donation at [www.talltalesranch.org](http://www.talltalesranch.org)

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