

## **Paws for Reflection Ranch – How we got started:**

In 2004, Melode Seremet had a vision of Paws for Reflection Ranch. From the layout to the services provided, even the name of “Paws for Reflection Ranch” was given. Though not an artist, she felt compelled to sketch what she saw in order to capture as many details as possible. Thankfully, her husband Stan, was “all in” from the moment she described the mission they were to embark upon. And so the journey began. Stan and Melode began researching animal assisted therapies and activities, learning all they could.

For three years, the Seremets actively looked for properties that could become Paws for Reflection Ranch. In 2007, they found the property on Montgomery Road in Midlothian, Texas. The property matched Melode’s God-inspired sketch exactly. The Seremets took their first gigantic leap of faith of many and purchased the property. Though in dire need of repairs and maintenance, the Seremets knew this is where God’s Ranch magic would happen. They set to work, repairing, painting, and mowing the 15 acres. Motivated by two television opportunities, the Ranch vision quickly became a reality.

The focus of the first programs was therapeutic horseback riding. The riding program quickly grew to 25 riders. Soon, licensed counselors joined the team and the Ranch began offering Equine Assisted Counseling. Therapeutic Horsemanship groups were offered, as well as, counseling with the small animals.

To increase awareness, educational programs were developed, such as field trips for special needs groups. After school programs and summer day camps are offered as well. Needing a place for guests to interact with the small animals, spurred the design and construction of the Critter Cabin. Soon, Animal Assisted Play Therapy in the Cabin was added to the counseling programs.

In addition, the Ranch offers community events. Easter and Santa at the Ranch are held annually for families with special needs. These events are always well attended and provide an opportunity for families to share special times together without fear of judgment. The Ranch has also become a place for support groups to hold events, some of whom drive here from other states to participate. During the annual Ranch Rider Horse Show, riders can show off horsemanship skills to their family and friends.

From these special support groups has grown the need for additional group therapeutic horsemanship programs. Herd Strong is a program developed especially for youth-at-risk, teaching them life skills through building a relationship with a horse. Mane Inspiration, a program for ladies, was designed for women going through a life transition. We partner with an agency that advocates for victims of sex trafficking, helping them to heal and learn life skills with the help of horses. Other partnerships include a substance abuse rehabilitation facility, eating disorder facility, and both the Dallas & Ft. Worth VA’s.

In response to the rapid growth experienced by the Ranch, the Seremets took another leap of faith and constructed a covered arena in 2017. Thankfully, funding for the electrical service, lighting, and fans were donated by a previous client. Additional horses have also been brought into the programs.

Today, the Ranch professional team consists of: Stan Seremet, President/Co-Founder, a Director of Counseling Services, a Director of Equestrian Services, 8 Licensed Professional Counselors; 4 PATH Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors; 3 Equine Specialist; a Director of Educational Programs; a Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator; and an Office Manager. Several wear multiple hats. In response to requests from universities, the Ranch has set up an intern program for students in counseling, occupational therapy programs, pediatric services, and animal science majors. Volunteers are a major workforce whom we could not operate without.

The Ranch has entered into a partnership with University of North Texas (UNT) to provide internships for master level and doctoral counseling students who wish to pursue animal assisted counseling. Dr. Cynthia Chandler of UNT is internationally known for her research of Animal Assisted Counseling and has written books on this topic. She validates the work done at the Ranch is unique and life-changing therefore encouraging her students to intern here. Expenses for the internship are generously paid through a grant. There are approximately 35 animals trained to partner with these therapists.

Paws for Reflection Ranch serves more than 2,000 individuals annually. 85% of clients suffer financial hardship and need assistance in paying for services. Hoping to reduce the Veteran suicide rate of 22/day, the Ranch continues to serve Veterans at no charge and their dependents are charged at a 50% discount.

Numerous articles have been written about the Ranch, which widens the circles of supporters, clients, and volunteers. The Ranch has been featured in two books. In "Always My Hero", a previous client and Gold Star Sister speaks of the healing she received working with a horse in our Boots of Honor (Veterans) program. The Ranch was also mentioned in "Walking With Henry", as miniature donkey Henry participated in our annual Horse Show. In 2020 the Ranch was awarded First Place in the category of counseling services by citizens voting for Best of Ellis County in a Midlothian Mirror and Waxahachie Daily Light newspaper organized competition. The Ranch was also voted Best Non-Profit Agency by the Midlothian Chamber of Commerce in 2020.

Paws for Reflection Ranch is proof that dreams do come true!

On February 14, 2021, Melode Seremet died suddenly and unexpectedly and is now helping us with our mission and work from Heaven. Her God-inspired dream became a reality touching the lives of thousands of people over the 14 years she was our Visionary, President and Co-Founder. We promise to keep her legacy alive! We are proud to share we are now serving an average of 2000 clients and family members annually without the financial means to receive these needed services.