

ENABLE PROGRAM

# Infinity Acres certified by the state

Nonprofit held ribbon cutting to open flagship ENABLE program

By **BEN R. WILLIAMS**

**RIDGEWAY** — After receiving state certification, Infinity Acres Ranch is ready to open its doors to more clients than ever before.

On Tuesday, the nonprofit ranch — which features a menagerie of animals and offers tours and activities for children and people with special needs— held a ribbon-cutting to celebrate the official grand opening of its flagship ENABLE program.

ENABLE stands for Enriching, Nurturing Animal-Based Learning Experiences. In what began as a volunteer program, ENABLE uses the ranch's animals — including llamas, alpacas and many more — to help children and adults with intellectual and physical disabilities; for example, by strengthening motor skills, balance and coordination.

Now that ENABLE has received state certification, the ranch will be able to bill



Bulletin photo by Ben R. Williams

Infinity Acres Ranch on Tuesday celebrated the official grand opening of its flagship ENABLE program with a ribbon cutting. Cutting the ribbon is area attorney and former state legislator Ward Armstrong; right of Armstrong are Infinity Acres owners Rick and Laura Steere.

Medicaid directly, and participants will even be able to have their transportation financially covered, according to Infinity Acres owners Laura and Rick Steere.

“We started off as a volunteer type of program, just to see how well (ENABLE) would be received,” Laura Steere said. “It was extremely well received, and therefore we did all of the licensure to

make it an official program licensed by the state. This now allows us to bill Medicaid directly, so the clients can participate at no cost to them. In fact, they can even get their transportation covered. That’s huge, and there’s a big need for it in our community.”

Right now, Rick Steere said, the program has two participants and meets twice per week — although, he

added, the two clients love the program so much that they have lobbied to have a third day added. While that isn’t in the cards quite yet, he said, as the number of participants expands, the scope of the program will expand, too.

“Our hope is that with this launch, it will help raise awareness in the community and some of the local providers, parents and group

homes will see this as a wonderful opportunity,” Laura Steere said.

ENABLE can accommodate up to about 15 clients, she said, and “as we grow in numbers, we will expand our hours.”

Already, she said, they have appointments set up this week and next week to meet with potential clients. Part of the meetings, she said, is to make sure the clients are good fits for the program. As it currently stands, Laura Steere said, the program is intended for adults with disabilities who do not have severe mobility issues and are able to handle animals gently and follow directions with a group.

“It’s hard for us to say no,” Rick Steere said, but it’s important to have clients come out and visit before they enroll in the program to make sure that it’s a good fit for all involved.

“We want them to come and visit, and then with the caseworker’s observations and our observations, we will realize if the person’s a good candidate,” he said.

The Steeres have been working toward the goal of state certification for the last few years, Laura Steere said, and it was no easy task. How-

ever, she said, even the people responsible for providing the certification said they were impressed with the operation.

“It has taken a huge amount of effort from a whole lot of people,” she said. “We’re so grateful for our board of directors and the people at the local businesses and organizations that have supported us and encouraged us. We’ve had a lot of donations. Donating the school house was a big part of that. We had to meet all of the state regulations for the facility, and we have done that, thanks again to the generosity of a lot of people. ... We finally have met all the regulations and we have a proven program that is very unique in its design. There really isn’t another one that does that type of interactive animal husbandry program for adults with disabilities. We’re very proud, and we’re excited.”

To get more information on the program or to set up an appointment, call Laura Steere at 358-2378 or visit the recently revamped Infinity Acres website at [infinityacres.org](http://infinityacres.org).

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