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NEWS

Halleck Creek gets major land donation

by **Sam Mondros**

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Nicasio's Halleck Creek Ranch has tripled in size: Last week, philanthropist and horsewoman Maja Kristin gifted it her nearby 120-acre Rock Rose Ranch. The nonprofit Halleck Creek Ranch has connected children and adults living with disabilities to horseback riding and equine therapy for over four decades. Board president Josefina Plaister said the additional land will allow the ranch to expand its reach to greater numbers of people who don't have access to horses.

“This incredible gift from Maja Kristin is a pivotal moment in Halleck Creek Ranch's long history,” Ms. Plaister said. “The new property will allow Halleck Creek Ranch to serve more participants and families, expand upon its innovative programming and inspire new collaborations with the larger Marin and Bay Area nonprofit community.”

The transfer of the property was finalized last Wednesday, and a planning process will take place over the next year. Ms. Plaister said that Bill Manheim, the board's vice president, was instrumental in working with Ms. Kristin to identify shared goals and secure the land.

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“Maja’s got wonderful sustainable pasture management,” Mr. Manheim said. “Her horses—they need very little hay to supplement. They live almost entirely off the pasture. She wanted to train us in that process and spent a few days out here showing us how that might work.”

Ms. Kristin has been a donor to Halleck Creek for over a decade. She said maintaining the pastoral character of her property, which boards 15 horses, and finding an experienced organization with the capacity to work with other nonprofits were her primary goals in considering where to donate her land. “The timing was just perfect,” she said. “Halleck is right there and when I reached out, they said they were looking to expand their outreach and wanted to preserve the land.”

Rock Rose Ranch, located on Nicasio Valley Road four miles south of Halleck Creek Ranch, is equipped with two barns, an arena, a round pen, a 20-acre pasture and five miles of trails through open hills and dense redwood forests. A large main house and additional outbuildings could be used as spaces for events during Halleck Creek’s summer camps and nonprofit programs, Ms. Plaister said.

At 60 acres, Halleck Creek operates six days a week with 10 part-time staff and over 130 volunteers. Lessons, trail rides, summer camps and additional programs are offered in collaboration with Bay Area nonprofits to around 150 individuals weekly. The ranch, which is fully A.D.A.-accessible, has several paddocks, a large, covered riding arena, a hay barn and a caretaker’s home. A deeded riding easement on an adjoining 280-acre property allows riders to explore the diverse trails of the Nicasio Valley.

Joyce Goldfield and Duane Irving founded Halleck Creek Ranch on his family’s land in 1977. Duane had helped establish the Morgan Horse Ranch with rancher Boyd Stewart. After Ms. Goldfield, a volunteer at the ranch, was bucked off a Morgan named Dill Pickle, she spent five months in a full body cast. Mr. Irving formed a bond with Ms. Goldfield and began connecting with children with disabilities who were visiting the ranch during school field trips but were unable to ride due to liability issues. Mr. Irving and Ms. Goldfield soon decided to turn his childhood ranch into a facility that could lead these kids on the adventures they might otherwise miss out on.

Halleck Creek is entirely donor-supported. Ms. Plaister said she will reach out to the community for support while they grapple with operating at triple the size. At an annual fundraiser scheduled for Sept. 22, she will share more information about the changes.

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