



# A Ranch Built From a Heart of Gold



By Sasha Lewis

**W**hat happens when parents become too old to properly care for their child with special needs? What happens when parents are no longer present to help see that their child is set up for success, regardless of his or her disabilities? These were questions that weighed heavily on CEO and founder of the Golden Heart Ranch in Agoura Hills, Rose van Wier Hein.

Rose and her husband, Bill, were not expecting to have to answer these questions many years ago, until one day, their youngest son, Justin, was diagnosed with epilepsy after suffering two grand mal seizures and then deemed autistic shortly thereafter.

As one could only imagine, this family suddenly faced many difficult questions and fears. What happens now? How do you provide the best life possible under these new circumstances?

How do you keep your child safe? Although Rose and Bill were entirely grateful to raise their son, regardless of the hardships, it was tough news to accept.

When given the opportunity to travel internationally to visit a farm in the Netherlands with a similar paradigm to Golden Heart Ranch, Rose decided it would be a good opportunity to educate herself on what a future could look like for Justin. She toured the farm and met many parents and volunteers who worked there to help provide guidance and support. It was a place that felt safe, and upon her return to the States, she knew the answer to the unrelenting question of Justin's future. Inspired by that trip, Rose founded the Golden Heart Ranch, which is being developed here in Agoura Hills.

The Golden Heart Ranch is a nonprofit organization that will provide a setting for residential living along with programs and



events for the special needs community. The ranch's cooking center, organic gardens, chickens, art center, and clubhouse will provide a place that encourages social skills, life skills, and opportunities for vocational training, which can lead to meaningful jobs within the broader community. It will become a hub for those living there to turn "thriving in life" from a possibility into a true outcome. The Golden Heart Ranch will provide the utmost care and support so these young adults can live peacefully and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

With their values of empowerment, integrity, unconditional love, safety, and personal growth, just to name a few, the Golden Heart Ranch will be an amazing place that will help their residents live fulfilling and productive lives, with the comfort of knowing they are truly home.

For more information on Golden Heart Ranch, please visit [goldenhearttranch.org](http://goldenhearttranch.org). ■

Although many efforts have gone into trying to determine causation of autism, there have been fewer efforts made in providing housing, safe living conditions, and meaningful employment for people with autism. In the state of California, more than 90 percent of the 300,000 children living with special needs won't be able to ever leave home. So what happens when parents are no longer able to care for their dependents? They have to resort to out-of-home living; but many of these places do not provide young adults with enough mental stimulation and create the risk of causing isolation for them. At Golden Heart Ranch, residents will be able to stay for their entire lives with consistent support, friendship, care, and love. Golden Heart Ranch provides a setting where young adults will have the opportunity to reach their full potential through onsite jobs such as office management, gardening, livestock care, woodworking, and artisanal food production. Residents will be involved with the broader community through events that include social activities, jobs within the surrounding community, and volunteer positions on and off-site.



Programs and events will be open to all in the special needs community and will be available through the online portal, the Social Living Club. This includes supper club for going out to dinner with friends, ranch days for working on the property, hiking club for physical health and well-being, along with art for self-expression. These are all in addition to the many camps and outings the ranch will offer. One club that is sure to be successful is the cooking club, which allows participants to shop, decorate, prepare, and serve food. Club members are rewarded as they share their creations with friends and relish in the joy that comes with accomplishing another practical skill which can carry over to meaningful employment.