

Guesthouse they get to help out with the chores like bottle feeding the many calves. Claudia Bee did her share of the work while making friends with this calf during a visit in July. Her parents, Jeff and Becky Bee of St. Charles, say they are already planning a return trip because the kids had so much fun.



Above: Horse lovers come to Meadow View Ranch to spend time with their pets and ride the many trails. From left, Mindy Gerten, Meadow View employee Michelle Thelander and Clinton "Doc" Hole hit the trail. Following the ride, Doc proposed to Mindy with some help from Heidi, who put flowers and the ring in her boots while the couple was out sightseeing. The frequent guests here are from Oklahoma.

Horse Motel

Meadow View Ranch & Guesthouse offers a refuge for pet-loving travelers and wayward animals

by Jim McCarty

Horse owners often face a real dilemma. They want to travel. But what do they do with their pets? It's hard enough to find a motel that takes dogs or cats. So what are the odds of finding one that allows horses?

At Lebanon's Meadow View Ranch & Guesthouse not only are horses welcome but other pets as well. One recent guest brought two horses, one donkey, some chickens, two cats, two dogs and a pig named Orville.

"I have lots of pets," says owner Heidi MacQueen. "I wouldn't want to leave home without my pets."

How the ranch near Bennett Spring State Park became a horse motel was as accidental as Heidi and her husband, Craig, finding the 200-acre ranch in the first place. The couple was living in busy Riverside, Calif., where Craig worked as an aircraft instructor and Heidi, who speaks several languages, worked as a translator. They decided to visit Craig's brother in Lebanon and were amazed at the beautiful landscape and friendly people they met there.

While in Laclede County they looked around for land. They found a farm for sale, decided they loved it, made an offer and were surprised when the real estate agent told them they were the new owners. The Laclede Electric Cooperative members saw it as a perfect base for Craig's fre-

quent business trips and an eventual place to retire.

They built a small cabin for Heidi's parents to stay when they visit from Germany and for the frequent stays by Craig's pilot friends.

"My husband's friends said, 'Can we come visit and stay with our horses?'" Heidi recalls in perfect English accented with her

native German. "They say you can be a horse motel. We travel a lot and we never know where to go.

"A year later I had the Web site up and we started being a horse motel. You go on the Internet now and check out horsemotel.com. There's one in every state."

Life on the ranch offered a real change of pace for the couple, and



especially Heidi who always lived in apartments in Germany. "It's like being on vacation," she says. "It was so quiet and the people are so nice. We did the rat race for six years in California, going to work where you had to get up two or three hours early so you didn't get stuck in traffic. I'm still on vacation!"

When Heidi can find time away from her chores she likes to sit on the porch and drink coffee. On a typical day the only sounds she hears are the chirping of birds and the far off lowing of cattle.

The change in pace and scenery has worked wonders for Heidi, who credits the move for improving her quality of life. Heidi has lupus, a disease that causes her body to attack its own cells. In 1997 she was in a coma. When she recovered and moved to Lebanon a year later she couldn't make the short walk from the house to the barn.

After seven years in the country, it's hard to tell Heidi has any health problems. She's up early every morning tending to an increasing list of chores, assisted by neighbor Jill Thelander and her daughter Michelle.

Not long after buying the ranch, the MacQueens added horses. "It was one of those things where Craig's brother had Clydesdales and we said, 'Well, we bought a farm, now we need some horses.' So we got Scotty and Dianna who have since died."

One thing led to another. Along



Cambell Bee helps Michelle with the morning feeding during his stay at the guest ranch. The ranch is home to numerous Holstein calves that are bottle fed.



Heidi MacQueen points out hiking trails to guests Jeff, Claudia and Cambell Bee from St. Charles during the family's stay at Meadow View Ranch & Guesthouse. Heidi and

her husband, Craig, moved from California to the ranch in Lebanon to escape the rat race of the city. Now they let guests do the same and bring their pets with them.

came their next horses, Misty and Goldie who Craig couldn't pass up because they grew up together. Before long the couple was opening the gates for any wayward animal that needed a home.

Heidi quickly gained a reputation as the person to call when animal abuse was discovered or someone could no longer care for a pet.

When the local sheriff discovered an abused donkey, the animal came to stay at Meadow View. Heidi nursed him back to health and today Max is a permanent and much-loved fixture at the ranch. His morning bray is the wakeup call for guests.

Her latest addition is Capote, a thoroughbred race horse put out to pasture. In just a few weeks at his new home, Capote had the shine back in his coat and was putting on weight. Today there are 14 horses on the ranch, if you count the miniature pony.

"They make us happy," says Heidi. "I always say I don't know how long we are going to have these animals but I want to make sure the time they spend here will be a good time."

Another feature at the ranch is the Holstein calves kept in small pens with a tarp over their heads for shade. Dairy cows aren't always good mothers, so Heidi buys the calves, bottle feeds them and then graduates them to increasingly larger pens until they are ready for a new home.

When they leave the ranch the

calves are easy to handle thanks to all the loving attention paid to them by Heidi, Jill and Michelle.

One young guest asked Heidi what kind of animals she had. He was surprised there weren't any pigs. "So I'm looking to get a little pig now," Heidi says.

Her guests sometimes get put to work feeding the growing number of calves on the ranch. All the calves have names and they are treated

more like family pets than cattle.

"They come in the morning and say 'it's time for your chores,'" says Jeff Bee, whose wife, Becky, and kids Cambell and Claudia, got their introduction to farm life at the ranch this summer. "This is the first time we've been here, but we already decided we are coming back at least once a year."

A stay at Meadow View is an exercise in relaxation. The lone guest cabin features a long front porch with

an inspiring view of a pasture full of wildflowers. Trails wind through heavy timber and across little creeks. Wildlife, including deer and turkey, abound in the secluded acreage.

Besides the guest cabin, Meadow View Ranch offers "the Hayloft," a studio apartment built over the machine shed. Both offer fully equipped kitchens and outside seating areas with gas grills. Baskets full of fresh fruit, specialty teas and other goodies greet each visitor.

The ranch offers a day spa to go with the outdoor attractions. Guests can choose from Swedish massage, hot stone therapy or reflexology from licensed massage therapist Rita Carr.

A stay in the guest house, which sleeps four, costs \$60 for the first person and \$8 for each additional person. The loft apartment is \$50 plus \$8 per person. It also sleeps four.

Located so close to Lebanon's many tourist attractions, Meadow View offers the advantage of peace and quiet that is hard to find at Bennett Spring or one of the motels on Interstate 44.

As one guest put it, "It's going to be hard to stay in another hotel ever again."

Meadow View Ranch & Guesthouse is located just off Highway 64 west of Lebanon. For more information, call (417) 533-8133, send e-mail to vacations@meadowviewranch.com or log on to meadowviewranch.com.



Heidi, left, knew little about caring for animals before moving to Lebanon. But with the help of Michelle (pictured here) and Jill Thelander, she quickly caught on.