

Annual grants benefit Ellsworth County projects

BY LINDA MOWERY-DENNING

ELLSWORTH COUNTY • R

Traci Piper has big plans for her family's more than eight acres near Black Wolf.

She is scheduled to travel to Bend, Ore., in June to observe the operation of a 12-year-old youth ranch.

When she returns to Ellsworth County, she hopes to move ahead with a youth ranch here. It's a project she and her husband, Greg, a corrections counselor at the Ellsworth Correctional Facility, have talked about for several years.

"It's basically a service to people in our community to reconnect families and children with horses and farm life," Traci said.

The Pipers recently received their first grant. The Smoky Hills Charitable

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Traci Piper
Smoky Hills grant recipient

Foundation awarded the couple \$800 to write a 501 3 (c) application for their planned Circle Up Youth Ranch.

"This is an important grant, not just for the not-for-profit, but for the children and the community," Traci said.

In March, the Smoky Hills Charitable Foundation awarded \$6,127 in grants.

Others went to:

- Kanopolis Sunflower Civic Club — \$2,000 for Christmas decorations for the City of Kanopolis.
- Ellsworth County Cancer Fund — \$2,000 in seed money for a Walk for Life.
- Ellsworth County Historical Society

— \$1,327 for repair to the roof of the Hodgden House Museum.

• The National Drivers Hall of Fame — \$500 from the Joyce Nagel Health, Education and Recreation Fund, a donor-advised fund within the foundation.

• Also, in April and May, the foundation expects to distribute scholarships from the Eleanor Hunter, Geraldine Anschutz and Jack R. Janousek funds.

Chairwoman Judy Toman said the foundation received applications totaling \$7,750. The foundation's fiscal year is from July 1 to June 30, so the dollars the foundation awarded this spring were based on the fund as of June 30, 2008.

"So, depending on what the economy does during the three months, will determine the amount we'll have to give next year," Toman said. "Foundations

throughout the country are affected by the downturn in the economy just as individuals and companies have been affected."

The Smoky Hills Charitable Foundation is administered by the Salina foundation, which also oversees other similar organizations in north-central Kansas.

Toman said Salina provides bookkeeping and other support the Ellsworth foundation could not otherwise afford.

The mission of the local foundation is "to meet charitable community needs through leadership, grants and donor services."

Since 2003, the first year grants were awarded, more than \$29,000 has gone to support Ellsworth County

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projects. This year's grants won't be included in that total until the scholarships are awarded.

Traci Piper said she was "very excited" about the grant. The Pipers have seven children.

Traci homeschools them and also operates a day care.

Children are her passion.

"We want to turn out children who have a sense of responsibility and a sense of a greater thing, a Creator," Traci said. "You know

how St. Francis does a horse program? We'd like to get them before they go to St. Francis."

Traci said the youth ranch, which will be seasonable, will have other features beyond the horses. She also has plans for picnics and hoedowns.

The ranch will be a place "where we have good fellowship and fun," she said.

Because the operation will be not-for-profit, the ranch will rely heavily on volunteers, Traci said.

She thinks Ellsworth County is a good place to find those.

"It's going to be that one-on-one type of thing. That's why we're going to look for volunteers. Ellsworth is so rich in people who understand people and understand horses."

Traci said she and Greg talked about starting a youth farm when they lived in Minnesota. But that didn't happen and they moved to Ellsworth County in 2005.

"We love this community and we love the people. We were supposed to do it here," she said.