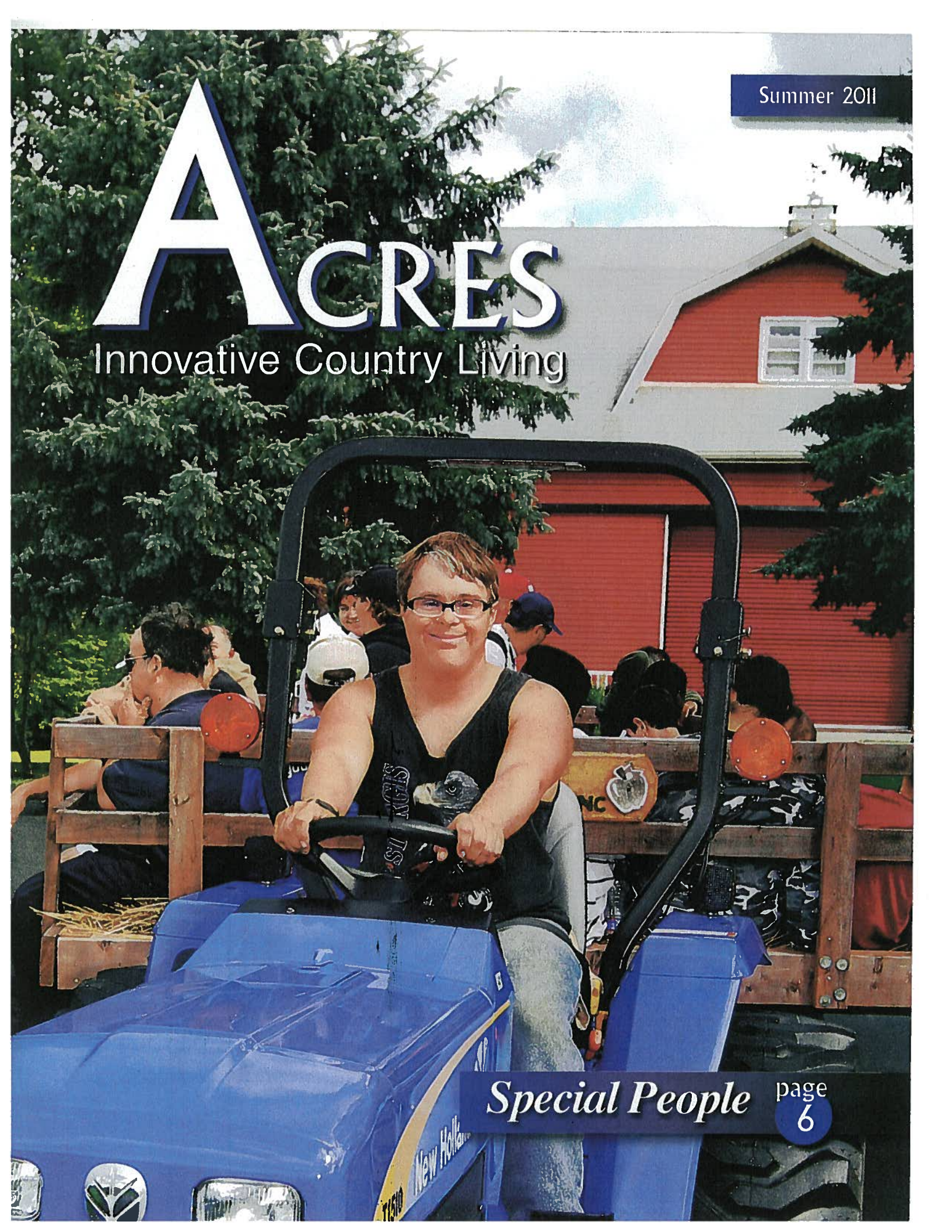


Summer 2011

# A CRES

Innovative Country Living

*Special People* page  
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# Special People Down

*These special needs adults thrive in an atmosphere of work, learning, and caring.*



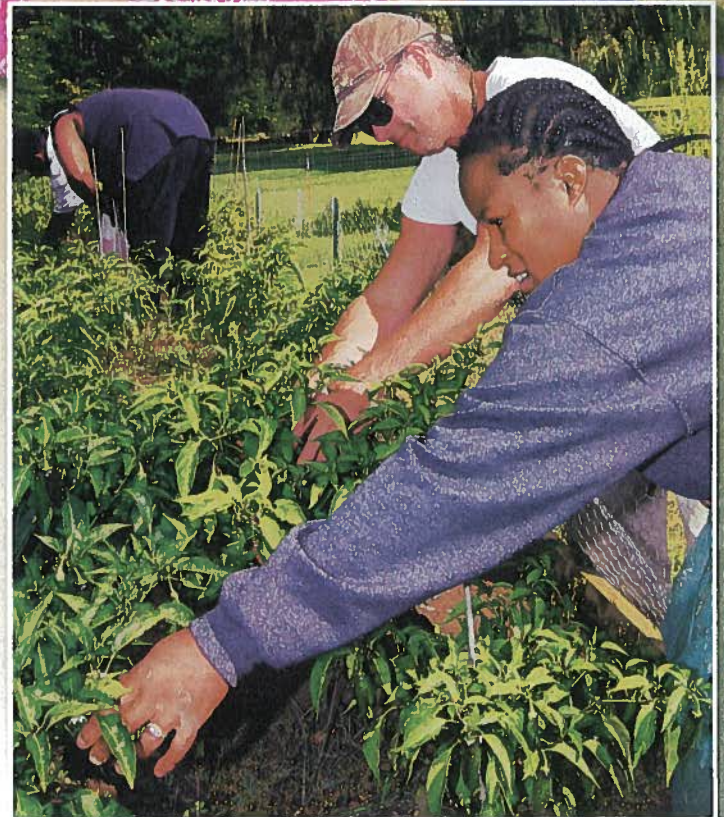
*Jill Perencevic, center, Director of The Purple Cat, with clients Diane Dickey, left, and Stacy Woods.*

**E**ach weekday near Youngstown, Ohio, a large and caring family gathers at Farmer Casey's Ranch to do a little work, get in some play time, and pick up a bit of farm education. These are people to whom life has given strong portions of difficulty...Down's syndrome, autism, brain damage, low intelligence, or severe physical disability.

Almost none of them will ever drive a car or hold a full-time job. Some cannot get around without assistance, and others require round-the-clock supervision just to live day-to-day.

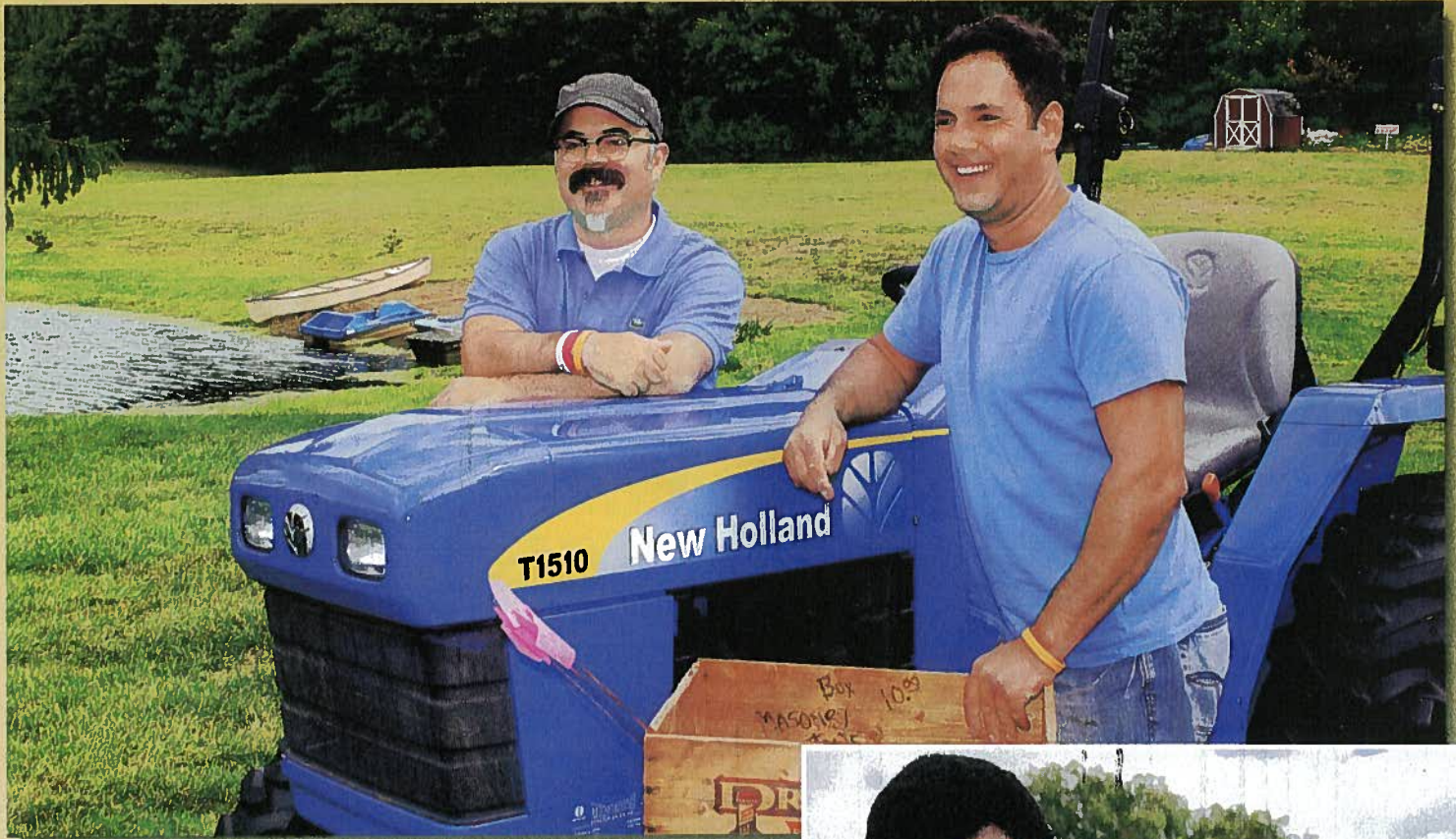
But at Farmer Casey's Ranch, a unique day habitation program, they all find something they can either do or learn to do, real work for pay in most cases, adding meaningful activity to their lives which otherwise would likely consist of sitting around all day with nothing to do.

At the ranch, actually a small farm, they find exuberance in work related activities as they harvest vegetables, groom the grounds, and help each other. Each person learns a work skill based on his or her abilities...a tractor needs to be maintained, chickens and rabbits fed, and produce processed for marketing, all with a monetary reward at the end.



*Pam Kelly picking peppers with staff member Wes Booher.*

# on the Farm



Above, Jim Sutman, left, Director of ISLE, the parent organization of The Purple Cat and Farmer Casey's Ranch and Tony Santangelo, ISLE Director of Maintenance and Transportation. Right, clients Dwight Boggs, left, and Ralph Dooley picking peppers at Farmer Casey's Ranch.

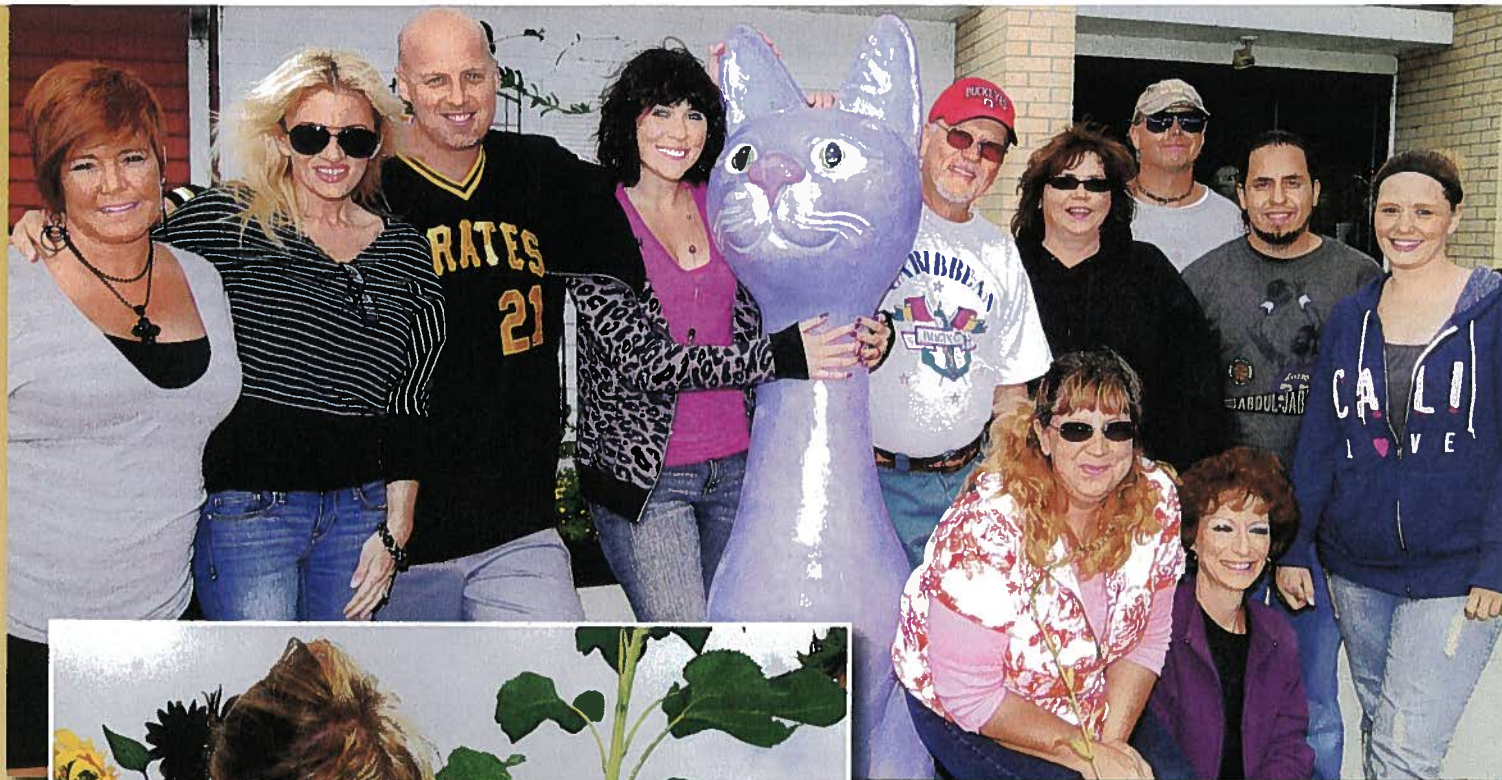
The ranch is part of an organization called The Purple Cat, a creative day program for adults with disabilities. Named after a well-known stained glass window in the Youngstown area, The Purple Cat teaches daily personal skills leading to independent living and provides a creative environment for those with disabilities to reach their personal goals.

Eighty percent of those in The Purple Cat program are paid for the work they do in a training environment. They receive instruction in maintenance and lawn care, clerical and janitorial work, and retail sales. They also provide daily and community living skills ranging from cooking and housekeeping to computer use and reading. Healthy eating habits are taught, and exercise is offered daily.

"Our approach is to exalt the intelligent individuals and pair them up with lower functioning persons," says Jim Sutman, Director of Iron and String Life Enhancement, Inc. (ISLE), an organization that provides a wide range of activities and services for the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled in a two county region of eastern Ohio, and the parent organization of The Purple Cat. "The individuals in this program become quite a caring community as they assist and look out for each other," he added.



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Staff members posing with the Purple Cat, from left, Colleen Bratsven, Michelle Testa, George Case, Amy Rigby with the cat, Steve Horvat, Coni Mitchell, Wes Booher, Gil Pagan, and Kelly Buhro. Front row, Cindy Blinco and Lynn Horvat.

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Jerry Lyda, Jr. (cover photo) is a 29-year old man in the Purple Cat program who has Down's syndrome. Jerry lives independently in an apartment. His housemate, Isaac, is disabled with spina bifida, and necessary staff assistance is provided for him. Jerry is engaged to a young woman named Alyssa, and has hopes of getting married in the future.

Sutman says Jerry's parents "have done a marvelous job introducing him to farm and landscaping equipment. Jerry has been safely operating equipment since he was a teenager, and he drives our New Holland tractor and can drive for hayrides as well as operate the brush cutter."

Jerry is now a lead farm maintenance person caring for the ducks, chickens, and rabbits at the ranch. He operates the New Holland tractor to cut grass and takes others in the program on hayrides. He had previously worked at a supermarket, stocking shelves and unloading trucks. He also plays and coaches in the Special Olympics.

Amy Stanislaw is another Purple Catter who has benefitted from the ranch program. Amy is 54 and has mild developmental disability. She lives in a supported living facility with two other women who share the 24-hour staffing that is provided.

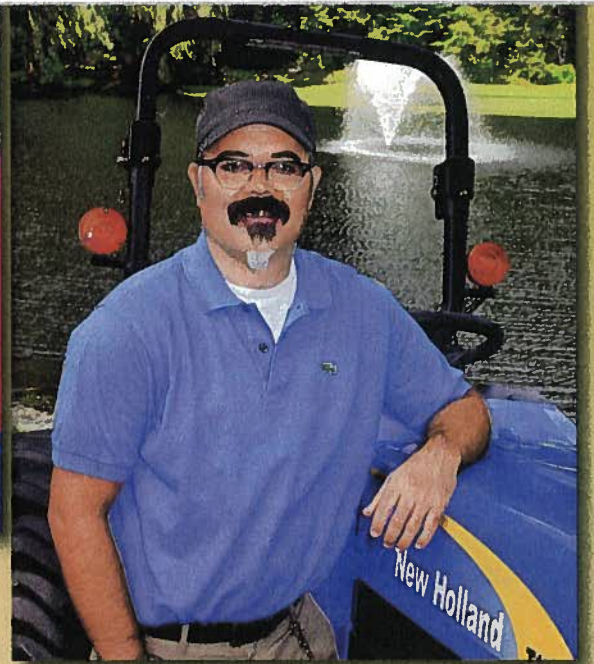
She has been working at the ranch for over two years and prides herself in cleaning up after the Canada geese which frequent the lake. She also cares for the farm's dogs, Pearl and Jose Tito. "She is very important to the outside landscaping at the farm," Sutman says. "She prefers to work rather than participate in classroom or art activities."



Jill Perencevic instructing Alyssa Seehrist.



*Special ranch hands in front of a display of hot pepper jelly, a product of the farm, from left, Ernie White, Diane Dickey, Stacy Woods, Amy Stanislaw, Tommy Morris, and Mark Gott. Bottom, Jerry Lyda Jr., takes the group for a hay ride.*



*Jimmy Sutman, Director of ISLE, at Farmer Casey's Ranch.*

Dwight Boggs is recognized as one of the most physically able Purple Catters. "He is vital to our operation, an important aide in assisting others," says Sutman. "He is a strong, dependable worker and often participates in special projects at the farm. Dwight resides with his mother, Desiree. At 28, he has experience working in a restaurant, and although he does not have a driver's license, he is quite able to drive golf carts, transporting those with physical disabilities around the farm.

The person largely responsible for the creation of Farmer Casey's Ranch is Jill Perencevic, affectionately known as JillP by both staff and clients. Jill is the Director of The Purple Cat and the creative force behind its unique programming. "She genuinely loves the people in this program and is constantly seeking innovative ways to find employment for those with disabilities," Sutman said. Jill discovered the farm property and her vision for it led The Purple Cat to develop the Farmer Casey programs.

While Farmer Casey's Ranch may not look like a high production commercial farm, it does have quite a list of products that are grown, harvested and sold to the public. Among them are herbs, hot peppers, tomatoes, pumpkins, zucchini, cucumbers and eggs. And while the produce from this unique farm may not be sufficient to pay all the bills, it would be difficult to put a dollar value on the human benefits of this program.

Article by Gary Martin • Photos by Mike Boyatt

New Holland dealer: Miner's Tractor Sales, Rootstown, Ohio

