



Dade City News

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# Veterans Find Long-Term Housing Through Program

by Joe Potter

A sign at the entrance of the Circle of Veterans ranch on Bower Road says "The Healing Begins Here."

It is an accurate depiction of the success of the program that helps displaced veterans find long-term housing.

Retired U.S. Army Maj. Tice L. Ridley and his wife, Samantha, founded Circle of Veterans nearly two years ago. They started up the housing assistance program last November and 56 vets have already successfully completed the program.

The Veterans Administration issues a voucher to veterans who successfully complete the housing program to help pay for an apartment, Ridley said.

Many of the veterans who come to COV have to learn basic daily living skills such as preparing their own meals, looking for work, arranging for health insurance and handling their finances, Ridley said.

These concepts are foreign to many of the vets because they had become accustomed to being provided them all for free while they were active duty members of the military, Ridley said.

"I didn't know I had to pay for health insurance after I came out of the Army," Ridley said.

COV works with two mental health providers to assist veterans who are participating in the program.

One of the programs shows veterans how to work with horses. The horses are fed and brushed and cared for but are not ridden.

Two people work fulltime at COV and one person works part-time. The fulltime employees are Manuel Guevera, who manages COV in Ridley's absence, and Tabita Mercer, a case manager who helps

veterans make and keep appointments with doctors and social workers.

Robert Smith, the part-time employee, provides nighttime security for COV. Smith is one of the program's success stories. He came to COV after having served in the Army for nine years. He completed the program in 60 days and is currently a part-time student at Pasco-Hernando State College.

"I have nothing to say but awesome things about the program. It's been a blessing," Smith said.

"We've seen people do a complete 180 from the time they got here," Ridley said. On the other hand, some people may only stay at COV for a few days and realize they need a more clinical environment. "In that case, we take them to a program that will better fit their needs," Ridley said.

Ridley himself has 80 percent disability following his more than 18 years of active duty service.

The couple bought the isolated property in Lacombe three years ago because the pace of life in St. Petersburg was too intense for him. They did some remodeling on the 4,200-square-foot ranch house, which had sat vacant for four years.

They also bought some mini horses, a regular pony, some alpacas and goats and planned to offer the ranch for weekend retreats for veterans and their wives.

Eight veterans at a time can stay in the four-bedroom, five-bath house.

The typical stay is for 60 days. Veterans who want their own apartments move through the program quickly, frequently finishing it in less than two months.

More information about COV may be obtained by calling (866) 499-7526 or visiting [www.thecircleofveterans.org](http://www.thecircleofveterans.org).

# Pirates Homecoming

This year's homecoming theme for Pasco High School is "Pirates Bring Out The Home In Homecoming."

Celebrate with the Pirates during the school's homecoming parade today at 6:30 p.m. The parade will start at Pasco Middle School, 13925 14th St., and will end at the old Jim Browne dealership

downtown on Seventh St.

The Pirates will face off against Springstead for the homecoming football game at home on Friday at 7:30 p.m.

The homecoming dance will be held on Saturday starting at 8 p.m. at the Dr. Donald McBeth Activity Center.

## Trick-or-Treating Safety Tips For Halloween

- Plan your trick-or-treating route before you leave and show the kids where you'll be going.
- Double check any costumes with masks.
- Use reflective tape on dark costumes.
- Carry a flashlight or reflective stick.
- Make sure all kids know they should never enter an unknown home.
- If your child has an identification card (a school ID, etc.) make sure to bring it along.
- Make sure an adult is with anyone under 16 (if older kids are going in a group, set a time for them to be home, or follow them at a safe distance).
- Check all candy and treats before eating.

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