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## VOLUNTEERS IN THE NEWS

### Community Supports Camp Casey in its Quest to Conquer Cancer 'One Neigh at a Time'

Through horse-related activities, Ferndale-based nonprofit Camp Casey brings smiles to sick children.

By **Angela Allen** 5:50am

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Great causes always bring people together. Add in some tasty chili, autumnal draft beers, and high spirits, and you've got yourself a wonderful Sunday afternoon. Such was the scene behind Dino's Lounge on Nov. 7 at the Camp Casey Cowboy Chili Cook-off, held to benefit Ferndale nonprofit Camp Casey.

Camp Casey is a nonprofit dedicated to helping children living with cancer and their families through equestrian activities. It was founded by Ferndale resident Molly Reeser while she was a student at Michigan State University in 2004 and helps dozens of children each year.

The inspiration behind Camp Casey is a little girl named Casey Foote, who passed away from bone and brain cancer at the age of 12. Reeser met Foote while working at a riding stable during college. Throughout her treatment, Foote went to the stable regularly for riding lessons.

"She became a large part of the stable because she was really energetic, just a little spark plug, really excited about life," Reeser said. "She loved horses and she didn't want anyone feeling sorry for her."

After seeing how much joy Foote got from her time with the horse, Reeser was inspired to do something to bring a similar happiness to other children going through cancer treatments.

#### In the beginning there was a horse

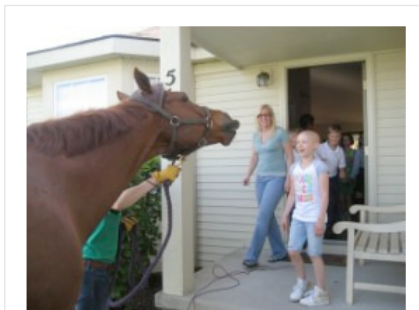
Camp Casey's mission began as a one-day event in 2004 for children going through cancer treatment at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing, where Foote received her treatment. Reeser, with the help of an army of volunteers, organized a one-day horseback-riding extravaganza at a nearby stable, which focused on offering services to sick kids. Twenty children, along with their families, signed up.

"I think I put \$200 on my credit card to buy pizzas and arts and crafts supplies," Reeser said. "We organized it so that while certain kids were riding, others were giving the horse a bath, the others were doing arts and crafts, having a drawing lesson. We got really creative with activities because we only had a few horses."

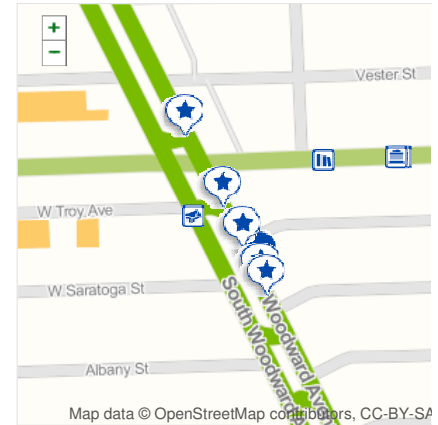
The event was a success, which was a great feeling for Reeser. But it was a note that she received shortly thereafter from a 5-year-old boy named David that really lit the fire. He thanked her "for the best day of my life." That note inspired Reeser to make Camp Casey a regular event. She held two more one-day events in July and August, and did the same the next four summers after that.


#### Camp Casey evolves

After graduation, Reeser came to Ferndale. She started to think about the future of Camp Casey and how best to reach as many children as possible. She began with one-day retreats at riding stables across the state. Yet it was another child that shifted Reeser's focus of Camp Casey.



PHOTOS (5)



At one of the retreats, a young camper got sick and had to be rushed to the hospital before she got a chance to interact with the horses. A few days later, when the girl was able to receive visitors, Reeser and a group of volunteers brought the horses to the girl's house. That was the beginning of what Camp Casey is now, a year-round program that caters to the kids. 

### Horsery House Calls, Outlaw Outings and Cowboy Camp Outs

Camp Casey's horse is named Moe. He surprises the children by showing up at their homes. The Camp Casey crew brings Moe, lunch for the family and arts and crafts for the children. The afternoon visit with Moe is spent going on horseback rides, grooming the horse and making treats for Moe to eat. This Horsery House Call serves the majority of the children.

Camp Casey also offers is Outlaw Outings, which are organized family oriented activities such as a trail ride cookout, trip to a professional sporting event, ice skating, bowling and more.

Finally, there are the Cowboy Camp Outs. They happen twice each summer and include an all-expense-paid two-night vacation at a dude ranch at the Double JJ Ranch on the state's west side and the Black River Farm and Ranch near Port Huron.

### Ferndale businesses support Camp Casey

Reeser, along with Equine Director Amy Gill and Public Affairs Director Lauren Maiman, run all aspects of Camp Casey. As a nonprofit, Camp Casey relies heavily on donations and fundraising events for the majority of its funding. With two-thirds of the Camp Casey team and multiple board members living in Ferndale, the community has been generous in supporting Reeser and her endeavor.

Reeser said the recent Cowboy Chili Cook-off is a perfect example of the generosity and spirit of the Ferndale businesses and residents.

"Dean (Bach, owner of Dino's) has been incredible to us, helping us meet with the city," Reeser said. "And he really guided us through" setting up the event.

Chris and Krista Johnston, owners of [Woodward Avenue Brewers \(The WAB\)](http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/woodward-avenue-brewery) (<http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/woodward-avenue-brewery>), the [Emory](http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/the-emory) (<http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/the-emory>) and [Loving Touch](http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/loving-touch-2) (<http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/loving-touch-2>), as well as other watering holes [Sneakers](http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/sneakers) (<http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/sneakers>) and [The Post](http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/the-post-bar) (<http://ferndale.patch.com/listings/the-post-bar>) have also been supporters of Camp Casey.

Last week's Cowboy Chili Cook-off was a great success and pulled in more than \$8,000 that will help them take Moe to more children in the area as well as organize Outlaw Outings over the winter.

### But chili was involved, right?

Betsey Roehl took home the gold in the cook-off, with Edie and Tim Abramczyk in second place and Woody's Diner third. The winners were determined by a public votes in the form of donations to their favorite chili, as well as the taste buds of three guest judges: Monica Gayle of Fox 2 Detroit, DJ Buckhead on 98.7 AMP Radio Detroit and 9-year-old Jacqueline Commyn, a onetime recipient of Moe services. Commyn had Wilms' Tumor, a type of cancer, but is now in remission and supporting Camp Casey.

With the support of local volunteers, donors and businesses, Camp Casey has been able to grow and evolve each year. It also didn't hurt that [NBC's Today Show featured the organization over the summer](http://allday.todayshow.com/_news/2010/06/09/4487433-healing-cancer-stricken-kids-with-horseback-therapy) ([http://allday.todayshow.com/\\_news/2010/06/09/4487433-healing-cancer-stricken-kids-with-horseback-therapy](http://allday.todayshow.com/_news/2010/06/09/4487433-healing-cancer-stricken-kids-with-horseback-therapy)). From that spotlight, the Camp Casey crew received calls not only from families of children who would benefit from a Moe visit, but also from people interested in expanding Camp Casey in other areas around the United States.

"Camp Casey is starting to become a little more of a household name in Ferndale, which is important to us because we're from here," Reeser said. "We love Ferndale, and we are excited about the way Ferndale has embraced our program."

**Molly Reeser thinks there should be a Camp Casey Day in Ferndale. What do you think? [Tell us in the comments.](#)**

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