

Nature as therapy

FARM DESIGNED FOR PEOPLE WITH BRAIN INJURIES

Martin Foil III took his Davidson College education into the computer software field, but a personal passion interrupted his business career.

Foil – or Marty, as he’s known to his friends – was troubled by what had happened to younger brother Philip, who suffered a traumatic brain injury 20 years ago in a head-on traffic collision.

“I saw what happened to him, and I knew there had to be a way of doing more for people with traumatic brain injuries,” Marty Foil says.

Foil is putting that passion to work these days, assembling a network of volunteers and lining up financial support to complete construction of Hinds’ Feet Farm, a Huntersville

facility that one day will provide living quarters and a recreation site for those with brain injuries.

“We’re getting close now,” Foil says, sitting in his office near the crest of a hill on the 36 acres that will make up Hinds’ Feet Farm. “It’s going to happen.”

Architects’ plans are completed. Work on a 5,000-square-foot





residence building, which will house six full-time residents, begins later this year. Construction is scheduled to start this summer on a barn and riding area.

Other buildings and pastures already are finished.

The Hinds' Feet Farm Foundation has raised \$300,000 of its \$900,000 goal, but Foil says other money and materials have been pledged.

"We'll get there," he says.

The motivation

But why?

The answer to that question, Foil says, can be found in the life of Philip Foil. After he suffered a serious head injury in the crash two decades ago, Philip was in a coma for four months before regaining consciousness and

starting years of rehabilitation. Eventually, he recovered enough to move to a home for people with brain injuries.

"He moved to a couple different places, but it always seemed as if they were in urban areas," Marty Foil says. "Over the years, I began wondering why we couldn't do something away from the city."

Foil also became an advocate for people with traumatic brain injuries. He and other family members even went to Washington, pushing for more research and help for those afflicted.

He put together the annual Davey Allison Golf Tournament, a fund-raising event for people with brain injuries, named for the late NASCAR driver who died of head injuries suffered in a helicopter crash in July 1993.

Five years ago, Foil bought 36 acres on Black Farm Road, east of Huntersville, with the idea of developing a facility to help people with traumatic brain injuries.

The only current residents are four-legged. Three horses – Baby, Macy and Shayday – will be used for equine activities at the farm. Residents and patients using a day camp program will be able to groom and ride the horses, with help from volunteers.

Community project

Already a considerable amount of work is completed. Five Lake Nor-

OPPOSITE: Marty Foil with Baby, a Percheron that will be used for therapeutic and carriage riding.

LEFT: Davidson College pre-med students volunteer at Hinds' Feet Farm. Residents and campers will need help from such experienced people when they ride.

ABOVE: Davidson College students constructed a trellis for the grounds.

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Marty Foil has a collection of helmets to help protect those with traumatic brain injuries.

man-area Scouts – Allen Clark, Brian Oullette, Joe Philippi, Luke Savage and Ryan Tincher – have completed Eagle Scout projects. Their work includes a barn where horses can get shelter in one of the pastures, a special ramp for brain-injured patients to mount horses, and several trails through the wooded acreage.

Other volunteers from Davidson College and Queens University of Charlotte have landscaped areas, built benches and designed trails.

Foil isn't afraid to ask for help. "There are a lot of ways in which people can help," he says. "Not every gift is money. Volunteer work is a big help. So

Continued on page 100



Marty Foil

ABOUT TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURIES

A traumatic brain injury is defined by the Centers for Disease Control as a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain. About 1.4 million people suffer such an injury each year.

Men are 1 1/2 times as likely as women to suffer such an injury. The highest at-risk age groups are ages 4 and younger and ages 15 to 19.

Continued from page 28

are donations of building materials."

When completed, Hinds' Feet Farm – named for a Bible passage from the book of Habakkuk that says God will provide the support for people to succeed, giving them sure footing like a mountain deer – will serve patients in three ways.

The long-term residential center is aimed at helping those with the most severe injuries.

"These are people who have gone through treatment and won't get better," Foil says. "A nursing home is not the place for people like that. They need involvement in the world around them."

The farm also will have a day camp center, to serve about 10 people a day.

"A lot of day-care programs last three to four hours," Foil says. "That's not day care – that's respite. Families have to go back to work. They've got to try and pick up the pieces in their lives."

At the day camp, higher-functioning brain-injured patients will spend the day in activities such as horses, horticulture, speech and occupational therapy, and arts and crafts.



The arts and crafts multi-purpose building.

The farm also will open its multipurpose center, which has a full kitchen and a meeting room, to advocacy groups and families of patients.

"The quality of life is a concern beyond patients," Foil says. "It involves the whole families, too."

Full farm experience


Foil has some special plans. Inside a storage barn on the property is a 1957 International Farmall Cub tractor. He has named it Mary Ann.

"Mary Ann will have an important job at this farm," he says. "You can't have

a farm without hayrides. We're getting a trailer that will be accessible to our patients. Mary Ann will pull it.

"I can even see us getting involved, with our patients, in the annual North Mecklenburg Christmas Parade. Imagine how much fun that would be!"

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says therapy is an important part of the recovery for those with traumatic brain injuries.

"Whether it's riding a horse, working with flowers or doing some other sort of task, we plan to keep people busy," Foil says. 

AT A GLANCE

Hinds' Feet Farm is at 14625 Black Farms Road, Huntersville. Its 36 acres eventually will have a residency, barns, an office building, a multipurpose room, pastures and walking trails.

Its organizer is Martin Foil III. He is 43, a Concord High School and Davidson College graduate who bought the land five years ago and heads the Hinds' Feet Farm Foundation. Foil is looking for volunteers and donations of money and materials.

For more information about Hinds' Feet Farm or to make a donation, contact Foil at (704) 992-1424 or mfoil@hindsfeetfarm.org. The Web site is hindsfeetfarm.org.

The 14th annual Davey Allison Memorial Golf Classic will be played July 23-24 at Birkdale Golf Club in Huntersville. It benefits Hinds' Feet Farm. For details, check www.daveyalisongolfclassic.org.

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