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N Centrepiece



BENJAMIN PUERTAS in the saddle with his son Nicolas as family members strike a pose. He said sharing that experience with his son was amazing.



ONE OF THE RANCHERS showing some children a rabbit, one of many animals to be found on Nature Fun Ranch, (top)



THE RANCHERS and their guests at the open day.

Burden 'too heavy' to carry

Lane: Fun Ranch will have to charge for services

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THE NATURE FUN RANCH can no longer afford to foot the bill for all the Government referrals of troubled youth, says founder Corey Lane.

This is why it will soon be time to break out the invoices. "The first time we got significant assistance from Government was from February, where 16 different agencies are now referring youth to us. However, they do not send a cent, and I will be invoicing. We can no longer carry that financial burden," Lane said Saturday.

He revealed the ranch at Bruce Vale, St Andrew, was not doing well because the COVID-19 pandemic had affected them in a major way. His wife Latoya outlined their struggles. "Before COVID, we had a number

of social enterprise projects on stream designed to generate income for us, which is recycled back into the ranch upkeep and during summer we usually have a significant number of school and camp tours, but everything got cancelled. So all that income was cut. We were also working on building a cafe where our clients could eat with us as well, but our donors redirected their funding to other areas after COVID hit. So that, and a lot of other programmes are now on pause. Now, we are reaching out to the utility companies to give us an ease," she said.

Had to be fed

Not only all that, but Latoya said many of the ranchers had stayed at the ranch during the lockdown period as a measure to ensure they did not get into any trouble. This meant the youth had to be fed at a time when

finances were already low. Lane said it was not all bad, though, and despite the gloomy financial forecast, there were still rays of sunlight shining through.

"I've always seen the ranch as in a position of being in trouble, though there have been some positives. While the rides have all but dried up, which brings in the majority of our income, we've seen an increase in egg and agricultural sales. But more important than funding is the programme itself, and during COVID, we were all brought closer together and managed to finish many of our programmes early as the ranchers were here all day," he said.

Lane also said that he was not ungrateful for the increased Government referrals as he thought it vital for youth to have positive influences in life. "I think the country must look



TREVOR ELEYEY (left) and his son Trevonte were experiencing the ranch for the first time together.

to entities like the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of Education to prevent crime rather than the attorney general and the judicial system. Here,

we deal with approximately 40 youth and, in light of current society, we would like to increase that to 200; we believe that is a must," he said. (CA)

Opening eyes to what's up at the centre

IT WAS open day at the Nature Fun Ranch on Saturday as it partnered with Food, Art, Music and Entertainment (FAME) Festival Barbados for the first time.

FAME co-founder Rodney Lejeune said the group held a charity event every year and this time around it was working with Nature Fun Ranch to bring awareness. "We want to bring people to the ranch so they can understand what happens here, which is to work with the most vulnerable children on the island. All funds raised today will go back into the ranch's upkeep," she said.

One of the major sponsors was Mount Gay. Client experience manager Anies Jordan said working with communities was important to them, so they were "more than delighted" to help. Assistant ranch chief Latoya Lane said the day included horse rides on a track, horse riding tours of the surrounding area and ranch tours. She said the turnout had been promising. "It's been good. Normally we may have big tours with schools, but for a fun day, it's been pretty good," she said.

Excellent place

Benjamin Puertas and his family were among those taking advantage of the open day. He was seen returning to the ranch from a riding tour holding his son Nicolas in front. He said the ranch was an excellent place.

"I'm impressed by the quality of the horses. I think contributing to a cause like this is very important as it deals with social issues with the youth and with animals. It is good to expose children to farm life instead of being in front of a screen. As a physician, I know animals can be very therapeutic and I am glad to be a part of this effort," he said.

Trevor Eleyey was also there with his family. He said he had never been to the ranch before but wanted his son Trevonte to experience it with him. However, he said he was unsure if they would get the opportunity to ride the horses as rain had begun to fall. (CA)