

Summer at the Rockin' C

This energetic couple shares their ranch with hundreds of happy campers each year.

Each day, Janie Clapp leaves the Rockin' C Ranch for Janie's Cakes, her bakery in nearby Tyler. Husband Matt and their son, Travis, stay home with cows, horses, 200 pampered hens, and 145 kids per week who come for summer camp at the Rockin' C.

While her pound cakes bake, Janie pauses for coffee and lifts a booted foot. "These are ostrich, and they were my Christmas present this year from Matt. They are more comfortable than tennis shoes," she says.

Janie stays on her feet all day, working with her daughter, Katherine; Anthony Croft; Carol Allen; and Tara Hornecker, as they make pound cakes from scratch and pour flavored fillings into the Bundt pans.

Janie teaches Katherine as her great-grandmother "Papu" once



PHOTOGRAPHS: MEG MCKINNEY

above: "We get a lot of exercise at the ranch," says Janie Clapp of the Rockin' C, where she and Matt live and run a summer camp.



taught her. "We'd visit her in Austin, where we'd take these long afternoon naps in summer," she recalls. "Papu would see me struggling to sleep, so we'd cook. When everyone else woke up, we'd have these goodies."

"It's an all-around cake," says Janie of her pound cake, the centerpiece of her Tyler bakery.

Cakes and Campers

After her own summer camps in the kitchen, Janie married Matt, a soft-spoken rancher and former linebacker for Oklahoma State University. Janie opened a Pappagallo shoe shop, but the kitchen kept calling her. She closed the shoe store and founded Janie's Cakes, creating sculpted birthday and wedding cakes. ▶



above: Campers' chores include bottle-feeding calves. **right:** Visitors stop in at Janie's Cakes for pound cake by the slice or to go.

After a new partnership, she began concentrating only on Papu's pound cake, adding her own twist of flavored fillings and toppings made with eggs from the ranch. There, chickens bask in elegant quarters that Janie and Matt call the Hilton Hen.

While Janie bakes, Matt fills the campers' days with the fresh ingredients of work, play, and pine-scented air. Counselors awaken the youngsters early for breakfast and then chores. They clean their cabins, collect eggs, work in the kitchen, dig postholes, paint, and build small items such as picnic tables.

Roundups and Nights at the Dive In

"They bend half the nails, but that's the way they learn," Matt says of the camp's carpentry projects. He devotes the rest of the day to fun. The campers learn how to saddle and ride horses. They round up cattle, go to the archery range, negotiate a ropes course, swim, pause for daily devotionals, and enjoy a little hammock time. They also gather on a hill for a campfire under the stars.

On Thursday nights, older kids go to the Dive In—a movie projected on a big white canvas stretched above the lake. Kids settle back on the dock or float in inner tubes while munching popcorn and watching the movie. Janie and Matt watch it too—a peaceful moment compared to the



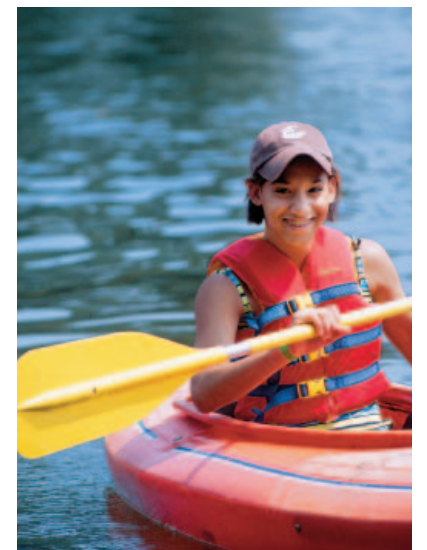
above and right: Eggs from Rockin' C's Hilton Hen go to town and become pound cake ingredients.



Choose Your Pound Cake

Many love The Plain Jane. Janie makes it like the others with no preservatives or artificial ingredients. Other cakes include The Berry Jane with raspberry curd; The Cinnamon Jane with Saigon cinnamon buttercream; The Tart Jane with lemon curd; and The Italian Jane with Italian cream sauce. You can visit Janie's Cakes at 420 East Fifth Street in Tyler; (903) 592-6150. Order her cakes online at www.janiescakes.com; she ships nationwide.

right: "There's something about the outside of a horse that's good for the inside of a person," Matt says. **below:** Campers gather for singing, services, and evenings around the campfire.



above and right: Campers cool off on a summer day at Lake Janie.

Matt quips, recounting his style of play when he collided with a competitor. "My head dribbled on the floor. I was literally seeing stars," he says.

Then, driving home and still badly hurt, he spotted a man beating a woman outside a bus station. When he asked the man to stop, the enraged assailant turned on Matt, and they fought before police arrived.

Learning Life From Scratch

While recuperating, Matt sensed he had been given another chance. "I thought, 'What would life have been like if he'd had a gun?'" he recalls. "Janie would be raising the kids by herself. I said, 'I'm going to listen to

what the Lord is telling me and start this camp.'"

With both financial and hammer-and-saw assistance from old teammates, church members, and area businesses, he founded the Rockin' C Ranch Christian Camp in 1997. Youngsters are from many income levels. Last summer, the camp accepted 500 children on scholarship, many from the Judge Glen Phillips Memorial Scholarship Fund.

Matt and Janie just want the youngsters to have fun at play and work and to learn a few life lessons.

Perhaps the Rockin' C has already prevented some from growing up into the monster who nearly killed Matt. At least, he believes, the camp is making a difference. **GARY D. FORD**

Rockin' C Ranch: (903) 858-3308 or www.rockincranch.org. Day camps are offered for ages 5 to 8. Summer camps (boys, girls, and coed) range in age from 7 to 16. Adult and youth retreats and outdoor education sessions are available year-round.