

# Bondin' 'round the campfire

*Brown County resort offers 'Old West' setting for corporate retreats and team-buildin' r roundups*



BJ Photo/Robin Jenstad

*Rawhide Ranch is owned by Dan "Hoss" Cartright, left, and David Stirman, right. Jenniffer Cartwright, center, Dan's daughter, manages the ranch.*

By **Shari Held**  
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There's no TV, not a single telephone in the hotel, no fax-equipped office area, and to top it off, cell phones often don't work. At Rawhide Ranch resort, you're connected with only your companions and Mother Nature. And that's one of the reasons it's becoming a popular destination for corporate retreats, company picnics, training seminars, weekend get-aways and other events.

Located off State Road 135 just south of Nashville, Ind., Rawhide Ranch is about as close as one can get to the "Old West" in Indiana. Rolling hills, untamed vegetation, a variety of wildlife and a mix of woods and wide-open spaces transport visitors to another place and time.

"When you drive up that hill, it's like you're going to Colorado or someplace out West," said co-owner Dan Cartwright, who was nicknamed "Hoss" long before he got involved with the ranch. "That's the environment we wanted to create.

"Business has really exceeded my expectations this past year," he added. "I think it's the result of a lot of companies coming to Rawhide Ranch instead of going out of state for their events. The economic situation this year has probably benefited us as much as anything."

Cartwright, who serves as operations manager, and co-owner David Stirman, who manages the administrative side of the business, share a love of the Old West—horseback riding, simple food eaten around the campfire, sleeping outdoors in the shadow of the Rockies. For years they vacationed in the Western states, sometimes on working dude ranches, sometimes on trail rides. Although the



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*Rawhide Ranch is located off State Road 135 just south of Nashville, Ind.*

thought of owning a ranch was appealing, especially when they were out West, it was just that—a passing thought.

Then, a little more than two years ago, a fortunate encounter presented Cartwright with the chance to turn the thought into reality. At a horse auction in Lexington, Ky., a mutual friend introduced Cartwright to the then-owner of Rawhide Ranch. He left the auction with more than he had bargained for—the opportunity to purchase the budding business that seemed made to order for him and Stirman.

Both men, who live in the Indianapolis area and met while serving on the board of the Indianapolis Public Transportation Corp., are seasoned investors. Cartwright is general partner of D&S Investments, a local development company that owns and operates several apartment complexes

on Indianapolis' south side. Stirman, an attorney, operates several automotive-related franchises in Southern California and owns Salon 01, a Carmel beauty salon operated by his wife.

Still, they had to weigh their desire to bring a version of the Old West to the Midwest against their inexperience in the hospitality industry and the fact that this would be a long-term investment.

In the end, it wasn't even a contest. They purchased Rawhide Ranch in September 2001.



Rawhide Ranch features the Ranch House, the Buck Inn and a modern asphalt floored barn with 32 stalls that house the ranch's 14 horses, as well as guests' horses

The Ranch House can be rented for special events or vacationing families (it sleeps up to eight guests) and has a huge attached deck.

Buck Inn, located above the barn, can accommodate up to 50 people. Rustic, hand-crafted Amish furniture decorates the parlor and the sleeping rooms. The parlor is divided into two theme areas—the cowboy side with the Calamity Jane Room and the Doc Holliday Honeymoon Suite, and the hunting lodge side, which is decorated with mounted animal trophies and features rooms named after legendary gun manufacturers, such as Browning, Colt and Marlin.

Other attractions of the 50-acre ranch include riding arenas, stocked fishing ponds, miles of trails and two whirlpool baths nestled in the privacy of the woods.

While technological amenities for connecting with the outside world may be at a minimum, there are plenty to provide comfort and convenience. All buildings are air-conditioned. The Ranch House comes with a fully equipped kitchen, old-fashioned footed tubs and brightly colored quilts. Each room in the inn has its own private bath, and a microwave, refrigerator, coffee pots and outside grills and campfires are available in common areas. A surround-balcony showcases the scenic view.

But it's the natural surroundings and the experience that are the real draw.

"I think the ambience at our facility is what people really appreciate," Stirman said. "Brown County has a very laid-back atmosphere. Most of us come down

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