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Sentinel & Enterprise

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CORNERSTONE RANCH IN PRINCETON

Susan Connell left a rough start in the dust to pursue her true passion, turning her love for horses into a rewarding job. And now she's enjoying the...



COURTESY JASMINE NELSON

Susan Connell, founder, and owner of Cornerstone Ranch in Princeton, is pictured with Dudley, one of her horses on the ranch.

Ride of a Lifetime

By Cheryl A. Cuddahy
Correspondent

PRINCETON » Autumn in New England is famous for its dazzling foliage painted with vibrant hues of red, orange, and yellow. The air is crisp, nature is alive, and it seems like the perfect time to take in the season by horseback.

Susan Connell, founder, and owner of Cornerstone Ranch is a passionate and dedicated person whose sole mission is to

leave the world a little better than she found it and offer everyone a chance to connect with her stable of gentle horses.

"I take great pride in being able to connect the bond between people and horses through our services," Connell said, "Because I genuinely believe that there are many wonderful life skills out there that only a horse can teach you."

Though Connell grew up in an upper middle-income family that owned a horse farm, she

said her life was not exactly the picture-perfect scene you would expect to see.

"When I turned 14, I left home and became a ward of the state shortly afterward," she said. "This became the catalyst for me jumping to seven different foster homes, which undeniably took a toll on my overall well-being. As a way for me to break out of my own mind and clear intrusive thoughts, I began running as a healthy way to cope. And coming in at a close

second was my rooted love for horses."

While living in a foster home, Connell was set up with a job at a horse farm.

"The state's work program knew I had a background involving horses, so they let me take on that role," she said. "But my adventure geek side took over, and on day two of the job, I decided to take one of the horses out to the local convenience store to buy some soda.

HORSES » 10A

CAMPAIGN 2020

Trump: 'I'm feeling great'

President makes first public appearance since his hospital stay

By Jonathan Lemire and Aamer Madhani
Associated Press

WASHINGTON » President Donald Trump on Saturday made his first public appearance after being hospitalized for the coronavirus, defying public health guidelines to speak to a crowd of hundreds even as the White House refused to declare that he was not contagious.

Trump took off a mask moments after he emerged on the White House balcony to address the crowd on the lawn below, his first step back onto the public stage with just more than three weeks to go until Election Day. But, five days after Trump returned from Walter Reed Medical Center, his health remained a mystery as White House officials refused to reveal if he had tested negative or if he was still at risk of spreading the virus.

His return was a brief one.

With bandages visible on his hands, likely from an intravenous injection, Trump spoke for 18 minutes, far less than at his normal hour-plus rallies. He appeared healthy, if perhaps a little hoarse, as he delivered what was, for all intents and purposes, a short version of his campaign speech despite the executive mansion setting.

Though billed as an official

TRUMP » 10A

ELECTION 2020

Senior warning sign for Trump: 'Go Biden' cries at The Villages

By Tamara Lush
Associated Press

THE VILLAGES, FLA. » Sara Branscome's golf cart whizzed down the smooth asphalt path that winds through The Villages, the nation's largest retirement community, an expanse of beautiful homes, shops and entertainment venues that bills itself as "Florida's Friendliest Hometown."

Branscome's cart was festooned with two American flags that flapped in the warm afternoon breeze. A line of oncoming carts bedecked with balloons and patriotic streamers chugged past while honking. Branscome jabbed her left foot on the horn pedal, then gave a thumbs-up.

"This gets you rejuvenated and ready for the next month or so, so we can do this and win. It gives you hope," the 60-year-old retiree said.

Then she let out a whoop and two surprising words: "Go Biden!"

It's not a cry that might be expected to resound in The Villages, and it's certainly not one that is encouraging to President Donald Trump. Older voters helped propel him to the White House — the Pew Research Center estimates Trump led among voters 65 and older by 9 percentage points in 2016 — and his campaign hoped they would be a bulwark to cement a second term.

They remain a huge chunk of the electorate. Pew estimates that nationwide, nearly 1 in 4 eligible voters will be 65 and older. It's the highest level on record, going back to 1970.

But there have been warnings that older voters are in play. To be sure, Trump has solid support among older adults, but his campaign has seen a drop-off in its internal research, according to

campaign aides, and some public polls suggest Democrat Joe Biden is running ahead or just even with Trump.

Mostly, it seems, older voters have been put off by Trump's handling of the coronavirus, which affects these voters more acutely than others. They were particularly alarmed by Trump's performances at daily task force briefings in the spring because his remarks showed an uneven handling of the crisis and inspired little confidence.

The president has tried to shore up his popularity with older adults. He has emphasized themes of law and order, and has warned that Democrats would preside over a sundering of the suburbs. He has promoted his prescription drug policy. And he has kept up steady visits to Florida — after Maine, the state with the oldest population — and advertised heavily there.



JOHN RAULX / AP

Supporters cheer and wave signs as voters arrive at the Sumter County Elections office drop off their ballots after taking part in a parade of over 300 golf carts supporting Democratic presidential candidate former Vice President Joe Biden Wednesday in The Villages, Fla.

But whatever improvement he saw is now in jeopardy. The president's own COVID-19 infection has refocused attention on the virus and his handling of it. If the 74-year-old Trump can't safeguard his own health, some wonder, how can he be trusted to protect other older adults who

are far more vulnerable?

In few places could any significant drop-off spell doom more profoundly than Florida, a state Trump almost certainly will win. Older adults historically are the most reliable voters, and Florida is infamous for its tight

SENIORS » 7A



Horses

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There weren't any saddles around, so I just threw myself whatever was handy on top and rode my trusted steed down a few main roads into town."

Big mistake!
"Needless to say, my little stunt didn't go over too well, and I was canned from that job and placed in a boring office one," Connell said. "However, I still yearned for the opportunity to be mounted back on a horse riding free again. You bet I finally achieved that."

Fast forward to the present, and you will see a successful woman who has been running her own 55-acre ranch occupying Princeton and Rutland for the last 20 years, with help from her three children, two of whom are still an active part of ranch operations.

With the season of autumn upon us, Connell said she loves this time of year.

"First and foremost, there are beautiful colors all around," she said. "Once the happy shades of yellow and orange have exited the stage, the forest becomes more comparable to a glade. Now you can see the forest through trees."

Connell said this makes riding a unique experience within the same season.

"Another good thing about fall is the vegetation is less abundant and the horses are less apt to try to stop for snacks," Connell said. "We explain to people horses are vegetarians, which they are grateful for knowing once they see the rate of consumption."

Trail rides are walking, and Connell said this has proven to be a much more relaxing experience for all involved.

"We go over a whole bunch of helpful information beforehand and offer assistance along the way," she said. "The consistency helps the overall well-being and happiness of the horses and keeps riders on the same page."

From trail rides, riding lessons, riding workshops, horse-drawn wagon rides, sleigh rides, birthday parties, group outings, to family outings, Connell is thrilled to offer it all, she said,



COURTESY JASMINE NELSON

Susan Connell is shown driving two of her horses, fondly named Frick and Frack, at Cornerstone Ranch in Princeton.

"because I know firsthand how therapeutic horses genuinely are, and I want to share that with those ready to understand it."

The ranch is beautiful all seasons, and winter is no exception.

"Horse drawn sleigh and wagon rides through the beautiful trails at the ranch during winter-time are a unique and fulfilling experience," Connell said. "Our new Percheron horses, Frick and Frack are eager to meet new people and have made great strides with their training. They are a beautiful sight to see when pulling the sleighs and wagons."

Percherons are native to France and they join Hercules and Dusty, a Hafflinger pair of horses at the ranch, who will also be pulling the sleighs and wagons. Hafflingers are native to Austria.

"From the high point of the horse drawn ride you can see all the way to Boston on a clear day,"

Connell said. "The journey is reminiscent of our pioneer days and customers are forewarned they may have pickle cravings afterward." Referring back to how our ancestors used to pack pickles on journeys to stave off scurvy from lack of vitamin C.

"The horses are sporting eight feet of authentic brass bells and kids are given bells to jingle along the way," she said. "The experience is truly unique."

Activities are held mostly outdoors and varied, so there is something for everyone.

"We see many more families at the ranch staying after rides; less hurried, enjoying the campfire and music," Connell is happy to say. "We serve sandwiches, hot chocolate, hot and cold beverages and ice cream, desserts, snacks from our concession trolley — there is definitely a great vibe going and it's heartwarming to see families outdoors having

fun together."

Connell added that since most activities are held outdoors, encompassing lots of space, it naturally makes social distancing easy to adhere to COVID-19 precautions.

Running a ranch has involved a lot of hard work and sleepless nights to get to where Connell is today.

"We have so many beautiful horses for visitors to enjoy, and tons of incredible employees and volunteers that all have helped shape Cornerstone Ranch to become the thriving place it is today," she said. "I am wholeheartedly filled with happiness every single day to be living the life I have always dreamed of."

Connell added that the special vibe is reflective of all the wonderful people from all walks of life who work, volunteer, visit and patronize.

"A combination of wonderful

forces, each with their own gifts, talents, and strengths make the ranch a truly special and unique experience," she said. "And let's not forget the horses, horses, horses — they are wonderful, kind, and majestic creatures — unlike any other animal on earth with irresistible innocence and natural beauty that warm hearts and lift souls. We provide access within reach to happy places-in-time for so many. It takes a ranch."

Connell welcomes the community to come and experience them for yourself.

"Just don't take my horses to the convenience store," she said with a smile. "Deal?"

Cornerstone Ranch is located at 29 Dowds Lane, in Princeton. For detailed information or to make reservations, e-mail Riding@CornerstoneRanch.org or visit <https://www.CornerstoneRanch.org>

Trump

FROM PAGE 1A

event, Trump offered no policy proposals and instead delivered the usual attacks on Democrat Joe Biden while praising law enforcement to a crowd of several hundred, most of whom wore masks while few adhered to social distancing guidelines.

"I'm feeling great," said Trump, who said he was thankful for their good wishes and prayers as he recovered. He then declared that the pandemic, which has killed more than 210,000 Americans, was "disappearing" even though he is still recovering from the virus.

In either an act of defiance or simply tempting fate, officials organized the crowd just steps from the Rose Garden, where exactly two weeks ago the president held another large gathering to formally announce his nomination of Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court. That event is now being eyed as a possible COVID-19 superspreader as more than two dozen people in attendance have contracted the virus.

Trump had hoped to hold campaign rallies this weekend but settled for the White House event. But even as his health remained unclear, he planned to ramp up his travel with a rally in Florida on Monday, followed by trips to Pennsylvania and Iowa on subsequent days. It was not clear if Trump posed a risk to those he would fly with on Air Force One or encounter at the rally sites.

Before the speech, White House officials said they had no information to release on whether the president was tested for COVID-19, meaning he made his first public appearance without the White House verifying that he's no longer contagious.

Security was stepped up around the White House before the event, which was called a "peaceful protest for law & order" and predominantly attended by Black and Latino supporters. Police and the Secret Service closed surrounding streets to vehicles and shut down Lafayette Square, the park near the White House that has long been a gathering place for public protest.

As questions linger about his health — and Democratic opponent Joe Biden steps up his own campaigning — Trump has more frequently called into radio and TV programs to speak with conservative interviewers, hoping to make up for lost time with just over three weeks until Election Day and millions already voting.

Biden's campaign said he again tested negative on Saturday for COVID-19. Biden was potentially exposed to the coronavirus

during his Sept. 29 debate with Trump, who announced his positive diagnosis barely 48 hours after the debate. The president had not been seen in public — other than in White House-produced videos — since his return five days ago from the military hospital, where he received experimental treatments for the coronavirus.

On Saturday, all attendees were required to bring masks or were provided with them, and were given temperature checks and asked to fill out a brief questionnaire. Some in the crowd removed their mask to listen to Trump.

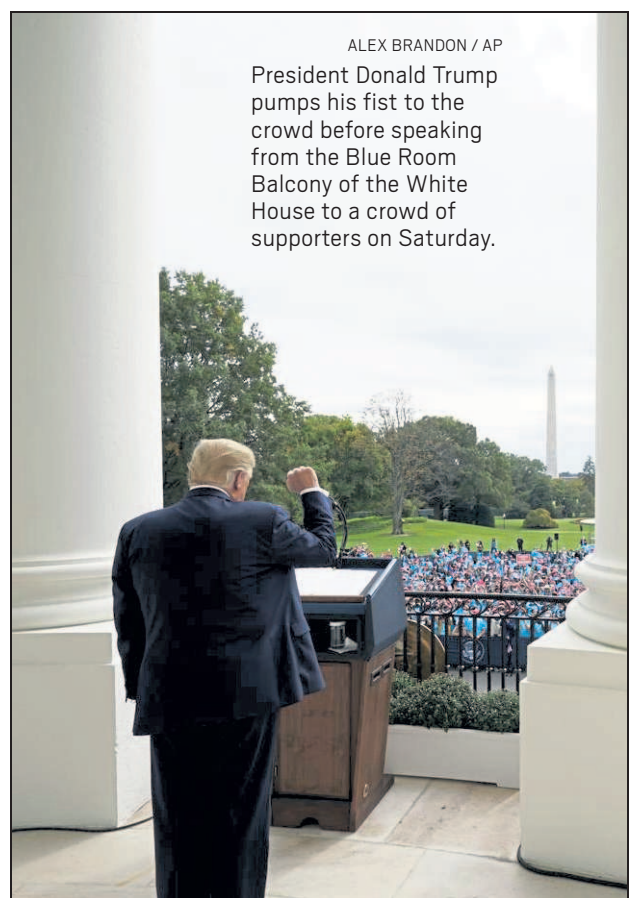
Trump's Monday event in Sanford, Fla., what he's described as a "BIG RALLY," was originally scheduled to be held on Oct. 2, the day after he tested positive. Ahead of his Saturday event, Trump used Twitter to share news articles about problems with mail-in ballots in New Jersey, Ohio and Texas. Trump has repeatedly made unsubstantiated claims that universal mail-in voting is beset by widespread fraud.

Trump's return to public activity came as Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious-disease expert, cautioned the White House again to avoid large-scale gatherings of people without masks.

He said of the Barrett event in an interview with The Associated Press, "I was not surprised to see a superspreader event given the circumstances." That means "crowded, congregate setting, not wearing masks. It is not surprising to see an outbreak."

District of Columbia virus restrictions prohibit outdoor gatherings larger than 50 people, although that rule has not been strictly enforced. Masks are mandatory outdoors for most people, but the regulations don't apply on federal land, and the Trump White House has openly flouted them for months.

Confined to the White



ALEX BRANDON / AP

President Donald Trump pumps his fist to the crowd before speaking from the Blue Room Balcony of the White House to a crowd of supporters on Saturday.

House as he recovers, Trump spent sizeable chunks of the past few days making the rounds of friendly conservative media, calling in to Fox News host Sean Hannity on Thursday night and spending two hours live on air with radio host Rush Limbaugh on Friday in what his campaign billed as a "radio rally." Holding court on his reelection battle, his fight against the coronavirus and revived negotiations with Democrats to pass an economic stimulus bill, Trump made a direct appeal to his base of loyal supporters, whom he needs to turn out to the polls in droves.

In a Friday night interview on Fox's Tucker Carlson's show, Trump was asked if he has been retested for COVID-19. "I have been retested, and I haven't even found out numbers or anything yet. But I've been retested, and I know I'm at either the bottom of the scale or free," he said.

White House officials, however, have declined to

answer when Trump last tested negative for the virus before his diagnosis or release detailed information about lung scans taken while Trump was hospitalized.

Aides to the president insist that it is safe for Trump to return to his regular activities, including campaigning. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines call for the infected to wait at least 10 days from the onset of symptoms, Fauci noted in the AP interview. That onset for Trump was Oct. 1, according to his doctors.

The president's White House physician, Navy Cmdr. Sean Conley, added that Trump was showing no evidence of his illness progressing or adverse reactions to the aggressive course of therapy he has received. While reports of reinfection in COVID-19 victims are rare, the CDC recommends that even people who recover from the disease continue to wear masks, stay distanced and follow other precautions.

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