

Red Mountain Ranch Up Close

Bringing neighbors closer to their community

February 2011

BLANCOS KEEP SECRETS AND COMFORT LITTLE SOULS AT SUNSHINE ACRES

By AnnElise Makin

Blanco brought out the tears, but this is apparently his job.

Blanco, a monkey made of nearly indestructible white fabric, is a therapy doll. This time, however, the tears were shed out of relief and gratitude.

Recently, Renate Allen, the creator of My Blanco therapy dolls, delivered 10 robust monkeys to Sunshine Acres Children's Home. Her friend, Susie Lindahl, an Arbonne area manager, had raised the funds for them over the holiday season.

Executive Director Sean Sloan and his wife, Michelle, a teacher at the children's home, readily welcomed the troupe of Blancos. A pair of earlier such donated therapy dolls had apparently served their mission well.

"You can do whatever you want with it," Renate explained to a group of children at the school library. "You can draw on it, write on it, stab it with a marker, tell it anything—it is just a doll and does not talk." Each Blanco comes with a set of markers, and when the monkey needs to clean its slate, it goes into the washing machine.

"We are hoping Blanco will help our children, especially those who don't use their voice to express their needs and feelings," said Michelle. Currently, two counselors serve the community of 70 children of all ages. The children's home currently is considering hiring additional psychological staff.

"That first Blanco died a thousand deaths," recalled its creator, Renate, after she had placed her dolls at Sunshine Acres. Blanco No. 1 was stabbed, run over and thrown into the pool. Although it kept quiet, the doll helped the child tell the story.

Renate and Susie met each other at the Red Mountain Community Church, and identified with this charitable act, each one for their own good reason. Not just by coincidence would their paths lead them to Sunshine Acres.

Renate, mother of two, with a degree in psychology, invented the Blanco doll based on a tragic story that unfortunately happens every day.

A toddler, whose mother and Renate were friends, was sexually abused. Therapists failed to filter a valid statement from the little girl. So, the case could not be criminally prosecuted.

Aside from the crime going unpunished, the underestimated hurt continued to consume the distraught mother and child for years. Renate searched her soul and racked her brain for a way she could help. Then, Blanco suddenly popped up.

"Girls are taught to always be sweet, pretty and good," Renate said. "They are not allowed to get sad or wild or angry by our culture." But a hurt psyche needs an outlet.

That growing girl later spilled all her grievances on Blanco, like "I wish you were dead," "you lied to me," and

whatever bugged her. Thus she was able to mitigate the pain. At the recall of this memory, Renate's eyes welled up.

Susie, for her part, had always been curiously drawn to the Sunshine Acres Children's Home. After taking a tour with Michelle, she discovered why she picked it as a charitable cause.

"I grew up in an alcoholic home environment, and there was a lot of violence," Susie said. "When I got to see how well kids are cared for here in a loving family," she said while starting to choke up, "I don't even want to think about what they must have been through."

"I told nobody about my secret," Susie continued. "Although, the teachers must have known something was wrong, I wished I could have told somebody."

If nobody else, Susie could have told Blanco. Blanco listens patiently and is made tough to take on all the blows. So, the anger and the hurt get out.

On Renate's account, she gets fonder of Blanco every day, as it seems to do a great job. She is contemplating sending a Blanco to her favorite character, Detective Olivia Benson, from the TV show *Law and Order Special Victims Unit*.

Renate is a fervent follower of the show, although it is hard for her to watch. Besides, actress Mariska Hargitay is an activist regarding abused women's issues. And Blanco can comfort any wounds at every age. ■

If you are interested in the My Blanco therapy dolls, or would like to sponsor or donate one, go to Renate's Web site at <http://myblanco.net>.

To reserve a tour, make a donation, or receive additional information, call Sunshine Acres Children's Home at (480) 832-2540, or go to www.sunshineacres.org.



CASINO NIGHT Benefits Save the Family

Submitted by Save the Family Foundation of Arizona

Save the Family Foundation of Arizona, an East Valley nonprofit organization, is excited to announce the return of Hearts of Gold Casino Night on Friday, Feb. 25, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., at Villa Siena in Gilbert.

This event features food, drink, casino-style gambling and a silent auction. Of course, 100 percent of the proceeds benefit Save the Family and their mission of empowering families to conquer homelessness.

Evening activities include a hosted cocktail hour, food and beverages, casino-style gambling, a silent auction and raffle.

Villa Siena is located at 890 W. Elliot Road. Reservations are required for Hearts of Gold Casino Night and can be made at www.savethefamily.org.

For more information, call Erin McIntire at (480) 898-0228, extension 265, or send an e-mail to erinm@savethefamily.org. ■

Mission Statement

Family homelessness is damaging to everyone it touches. Save the Family empowers families to conquer homelessness and achieve lifelong independence.



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