

# TIMBERS

## MAGAZINE

### A LIFE CHANGED

Israel

### GROWING OAKS

Gavin & Anissa

**ON THE COVER**  
Incoming ASCENDants:  
Albert, Skylar, Clay, Toren



BigOak.org

ISSUE TWO  
**2025**

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

GET TO KNOW  
Max Reeves

COLOR WARS &  
SUMMER ACTIVITIES

UPCOMING  
Legends Classic &  
Legends Huntsville



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

## BOARD MEMBERS

Big Oak Ranch is owned  
and operated by Big Oak  
Ranch, Inc. and its Board.

Below is our working  
Board of Directors:

**Craig Beatty (Chairman)**  
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CS Beatty Construction, Inc.  
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Royal Automotive, Inc.  
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(retired)  
Birmingham, AL

**Nick Wright**  
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Special Events  
Management  
Tuscaloosa, AL

## JULY

Jayden	7-02-16
Jonathen	7-06-07
Layla	7-06-13
Katherine	7-09-13
Aleya	7-10-12
Gavin	7-13-14
Carter	7-16-12
JP	7-18-10
Wells	7-18-23
Maddi	7-21-23
Leo	7-22-13
Jeremiah	7-23-12
Mark	7-23-13
Hudson	7-30-12

## AUGUST

Arabella	8-04-09
Jayden	8-06-10
Emma	8-07-13
Julian	8-08-13

Julio	8-08-13
Landyn	8-09-10
Chistopher	8-09-10
Rudy	8-11-08
Makayla	8-18-14
Jacob	8-24-09
Keidy	8-24-10
Jayda	8-24-17

## SEPTEMBER

Olivia	9-02-11
Joshua	9-05-09
Jillian	9-06-06
Clayton	9-08-06
Avery	9-09-08
Bailey	9-10-09
Cordell	9-15-08
Aurora	9-18-09
Ariana	9-19-08
Jayden	9-21-09
Aaliah	9-23-10

Nickayla	9-24-08
Diana	9-27-02
Zy-Anna	9-29-17

## OCTOBER

Nicholas	10-03-07
Wensley	10-04-11
Koby	10-05-09
Cooper	10-06-13
Jax	10-07-12
Leah	10-12-09
Skylar	10-17-06
Braxton	10-22-17
Olivia	10-22-18
Alexis	10-23-09
Raemah	10-23-12
Shiloh	10-24-18
Menyon	10-26-11
Alijah	10-27-13
Liam	10-30-13



Since 1974, Big Oak Ranch has been called to meet the needs of over 2,000 children, ages 6 to 18, from all over the United States by giving them a solid, Christian home and a chance to realize and fulfill God's plan for their lives.

Big Oak Ranch is a non-profit, non-denominational organization that is privately funded and operates debt-free. Because of God's blessings and our faithful supporters, over the last 50+ years we have grown from living in a farmhouse serving five boys to currently serving over 200 children at Big Oak Boys' Ranch in Gadsden and Big Oak Girls' Ranch in Springville, as well as through our college ministry at ASCEND in Birmingham, through Big Oak Cattle and through Planting Oaks, our international outreach ministry and Child Placing Agency.

Yet, there are still millions of abused, abandoned and neglected children across our country who need intervention on their behalf – with nearly 6,000 of these children in the foster care system in the State of Alabama. Therefore, as we continue to scale toward 20 homes each at both the Boys' Ranch and Girls' Ranch over the next decade, we are extending our mission of relieving the suffering of children through Big Oak Ranch Communities for foster children in Alabama. Our 10-year vision is to strategically span the State of Alabama, building Communities within Communities, while striving to retain the culture that we have created over the last 50+ years of serving children. Together, our goal is to have the greatest impact and influence this country has ever seen for abandoned, abused and neglected children.



# A NOTE FROM BRODIE

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## From Wilderness to Promised Land

It's more than a biblical story—it's the journey we walk every day with the children God brings to Big Oak Ranch.

This summer, the days were long and full: poolside laughter, porch swing conversations, shared meals around the table, and quiet moments when trust began to grow again. But make no mistake—this season has been more than sunshine and s'mores. It's been a sacred space where broken stories began to heal, where obedience became a way forward, and where God's promises took root.

Just like the Israelites in the wilderness, many of the children at Big Oak Ranch have experienced wandering—through loss, pain, betrayal, and instability. But here, they're learning that the wilderness is not their destination. With loving houseparents guiding every step, they're being led to a promised land lovingly formed by their promise-keeping Creator.

Thank you for helping lead them.

Your faithful giving provides food, clothing, and shelter. It creates the opportunity for our children to experience daily examples of obedience—obedience that looks like patience when anger rises, forgiveness when trust is hard, truth when lies once shaped identity, and rest when fear once ruled.

This summer, our kids were reminded—some for the first time—that joy follows forgiveness, that healing grows in community, and that God multiplies every seed of obedience. They didn't just make memories. They made spiritual progress.

And while we often talk about the transformation we see in them, let us be honest: The call to obedience isn't just for the kids. It's for us, too. Whether your wilderness is fatigue, unforgiveness, anxiety, or something unnamed—there is always a next step of trust that leads to freedom. In one mission, as one family, we walk this road together.

At Big Oak Ranch, Hope is alive and truly changing everything—moment by moment, heart by heart.

Thank you for helping us lead these children out of the wilderness and into the land God has promised for them. May this also be your journey.

Keep Planting,



Brodie Croyle  
CEO

*Brodie, Kelli, Luke &  
Sawyer Croyle*





# UPDATE FROM THE BOYS' RANCH

GROWING OAK



**GAVIN, 17**

**ATHLETIC • STRONG WORK ETHIC • DEPENDABLE**

- Has lived at Big Oak Boys' Ranch for six years
- Lives in the U.S. Army Home with houseparents Jeff and Christi Meador
- Is a junior at Westbrook Christian School
- A part of the Big Oak Cattle Crew
- Is a member of the WCS football team
- Loves riding and working with horses
- Enjoys coaching Fellowship of Christian Athletes
- Owns his own car, a Kia Soul
- One of his favorite places is the beach
- Likes playing pickleball with his friends



Every group of boys that enters our home each week invariably has positive words to share about their Resource Parents. Whether it's an exciting activity or the opportunity to spend time in a family setting outside the Ranch community, Resource Parents play a critical role in the social and spiritual development of our young men's continuing journey into Christian manhood.

*- Jack Ferrante, Relief Parent at the Boys' Ranch*

Learn more about Resource Parenting.



Canaan enjoying a beach day in the sand.



The Bryant Home had a great and windy vacation!



Cooper and Liam are ready for a pool day!



The boys take on Pop Smith in arm wrestling.



Nice catch Joshua!



Happy birthday Jayden!

"THE SPIRIT WHO LIVES IN YOU IS GREATER THAN THE SPIRIT THAT LIVES IN THE WORLD."

1 JOHN 4:4

## ITEMS NEEDED FOR THE BOYS' RANCH

- Gain Laundry Detergent & Booster Beads
- Sturdy Laundry Baskets
- Alarm Clocks
- AAA/AA Batteries
- Toiletries (soap, shampoo, deodorant, tooth care)
- 3-Ring Binders & Tab Dividers
- Big Joe Beanbag Chairs
- 13-Gallon Trash Bags
- Ziploc Bags (all sizes)
- Dawn Dish Soap
- Pillows & Zippered Protectors
- Non-Gummy Multivitamins

PLEASE SEND DONATED ITEMS TO:

Big Oak Boys' Ranch | 250 Jake Mintz Road | Gadsden, AL 35905



# UPDATE FROM THE GIRLS' RANCH

GROWING OAK



**ANISSA, 18**

**HARDWORKING • POSITIVE • ORGANIZED**

- Has lived at Big Oak Girls' Ranch for a little over one year
- Lives in the Brewer-Calhoun Home with houseparents, John and Amanda Gasser
- Is an upcoming senior at Westbrook Christian School
- Ended her junior year on the A/B Honor Roll
- Attends Church of the Highlands with her family and is involved in the youth ministry
- Enjoys being around horses
- Worked diligently and saved enough money to buy her very own car this month
- Plans to go to ASCEND and obtain a college education after high school graduation
- Desires to pursue a career in social work, specifically in the field of adoption



Becoming a houseparent is one of the greatest blessings that I didn't know I needed. Not only are we able to impact this generation, but also the generations to come through sharing God's unconditional love. It is an amazing thing.

- Ashley Marotz, Housemom at the Girls' Ranch

Learn more about becoming a Houseparent.



Axlin had an amazing dance recital!



Chamma is showing off her face painting skills.



Kynlee made a new friend!



Summer is for skating with Chloe!



Nevaeh purchased a car!



Makayla is enjoying snack time with the turtles.

"HE WILL COVER YOU WITH HIS FEATHERS AND UNDER HIS WINGS YOU WILL FIND REFUGE."

PSALM 91:4

### ITEMS NEEDED FOR THE GIRLS' RANCH

- Gallon Size Freezer Bags
- Shampoo/Conditioner/ Body Wash
- Persil Laundry Detergent
- Garbage Bags
- CeraVe, PanOxyl Face Wash
- Bug Spray
- Label Maker
- Dishwasher Tabs
- Feminine Products
- Kitchen Garbage Bags

PLEASE SEND DONATED ITEMS TO:

Big Oak Girls' Ranch | 6000 Shelley Drive | Springville, AL 35146



# Color Wars

## SUMMER ONE 2025

Our Big Oak Ranch family came together for a day of worship, fellowship, and fun at this year's Summer ONE. From snow cones at the Kona Ice truck to the high-energy Color Wars where kids filled the sky with clouds of vibrant powder, every moment celebrated the joy of community.

The event wrapped up with a splash, thanks to our local fire department, who joined in with a firetruck to hose off the colorful crew!









# WAKE the WORLD AL.org

## Alabama





# GOLF DAY WITH THE LEDGES





# A LIFE CHANGED

## ISRAEL'S STORY



*Israel, age 16*

My story starts the day my mother died. I was five. As the youngest, I didn't understand the impact it would have on my life. My dad remarried and my stepmother was young and had a time taking on the responsibility of raising five kids. I can see how difficult this must have been. I had a hard time adjusting too.

When my dad and stepmother began to have children, things got complicated. Dad had a hard time getting work, so the family split. My older sisters moved in with my grandmother, while 10-year-old me stayed with my dad, stepmother, younger sister and brother. It was difficult to be separated from my sisters, but I pressed on.


Years passed and things got more difficult. We moved a lot, changing schools often. Money was scarce. School was hard being poor. But my dad loved us greatly and shared the love of Jesus.

My dad became disabled making it harder to make ends meet. Eventually my dad and stepmother separated, and I went to live with my grandmother. I was still close to my dad and loved him, but felt abandoned. Seeing him periodically was nice, but not the same.

After moving in with grandmother, we attended church and I was reunited with my sisters. Life became stable – the basics were always there. I left survival mode. I was doing better overall. Later, I had the opportunity to spend a summer with dad. He asked if I would move back. I agreed, but soon I found myself in that familiar situation.

Those years were difficult. We had no power for months and sometimes no running water, but I wanted to be with dad. God provided - I never went hungry, and I always had a roof over my head, even if those roofs changed frequently.

I got older and started getting into trouble. I got caught shoplifting - my wakeup call. I decided this isn't how I wanted things to be. One night I came home late and there wasn't anyone there to let me into the apartment. I ended up waiting in my car listening to dangerous things happening around me. I did not want to live here.




*Israel at age 15*

- 17 years old.
- Resident of Big Oak Ranch for 1 year.
- Lives in the McElrath Home.
- Is a junior at Westbrook Christian School.
- Member of the Westbrook Warrior football and track teams.
- Attends Meadowbrook Baptist Church.
- Plans to attend college after high school, and then go on to Veterinarian School.
- Loves anything associated with the outdoors (hunting, hiking, biking, etc...)
- Has a great sense of humor, with a tremendous love for the Lord.

### Growing Oaks ...

## Israel



*Israel at age 17*

"Let the past sleep, but let it sleep on the bosom of Christ, and go out into the irresistible future with Him. Never let the sense of failure corrupt your new action."

Oswald Chambers

I had no idea where to go, so I reached out to my friend, Julianne, looking for advice. She began calling friends to point me in the right direction. Mr. McClain, told us about a guy that he used to play football with - John Croyle - and this Christian place for kids who needed a home. He set up a visit. A week later, I was dropped off at Big Oak Ranch. I knew that I needed a change and was hoping this was it.

Angie Johnson, a social worker, greeted me and John sat me down to talk. He asked if I was serious about moving to the Ranch and told me it would be a big change. I told him I wouldn't be here if I didn't mean

*Israel was featured as the Growing Oak  
in the 1998 Timbers*





*Israel with his Ranch family*



*1997 Westbrook Football Team*



*Israel with his houseparents*

it. He said, "If you can promise me you are serious, I'll find a place for you." I agreed and we shook hands. He was right about the big change and the next months were difficult. With so many new things at once I started to doubt. I was just a kid, but I kept going back to Jesus, trusting that things would work out for the best.

My houseparents were a blessing and treated me like their own. Mom Speer became a mother to me filling that empty hurt space left from my mom's death while Pop Speer was a rock. He taught me you must do the right thing. My time with them was full of meaningful, memorable moments.

Mrs. Angie was another who had a big impact on me. She was always there when I needed to talk and encouraged me. Now we are friends, and I appreciate this relationship that carries over from my days at the Ranch.

Before I came to Big Oak, I could not have imagined an environment like Westbrook Christian School. At Westbrook I was surrounded by coaches and teachers who genuinely cared and wanted success for each student. Phil Williams, Ferris Hall, Mrs. Tee Croyle, Mrs. Talley, Coach Osborne, Larry Fuhrman, John and Mrs. Greer – they all cared not just about your success in the classroom or on the field, but in life. At Westbrook, I graduated with an advanced diploma.

I met my wife, Angela, at Westbrook. After graduation, we went to college near each other. I proposed to Angela and realized I needed to seriously plan. I moved back to Southside to be a marine technician at Buck's Island. We married in 2006. Two daughters followed, Rebekah and Arianna.

Angela and I love each other and enjoy our lives together with our kids. We attend church and enjoy serving our community. Our girls have been blessed to attend Westbrook and enjoy some of the same traditions that we remember.

I have worked at Buck's Island for over 20 years. I earned a promotion to management and lead several departments. Being at Buck's has been one of the best things. I've put my mind and heart into something, and it has been a success for my family.

The most important thing I have in my life is my relationship with Christ. Looking back at the path my life has taken, I can see His hand at work.

I became a believer at a young age. My dad always told me about the love of Christ and as I got older, I knew I needed Him more. My growth started at the Ranch. It is because of Christ I am where I am today. He gets all the credit. The Lord put people in my path who kept me safe and strengthened my foundation in Him. I firmly believe that if we allow Christ to open and close doors in our lives, and call to Him, He will answer.

*Israel*

*Israel with his wife, Angela, and daughters, Rebekah and Arianna*





# GET TO KNOW

## Max Reeves

Chief Financial Officer  
Big Oak Ranch & Westbrook Christian School

After more than 30 years in the retail automotive industry, I never could have imagined the path God had waiting for me. But in June 2024, He opened a new door, one I hadn't expected, yet one that was clearly part of His perfect plan. That's when I stepped into the role of CFO at Big Oak Ranch, and what a blessing this journey has been.

I grew up in Vestavia Hills and attended Auburn University, where I earned a degree in accounting and most importantly, met my wife, Lori. I began my career with a CPA firm, then entered the car business where I would spend the next three decades. When that chapter came to an end, I found myself in a season of waiting and wondering. I remember asking the Lord, "I'm 61... what now?"

God didn't leave me waiting long. A colleague happened to mention that Big Oak Ranch was searching for a CFO, and the idea immediately stirred something in my heart. After reaching out to Greg Belcher, a high school classmate and board member at Big Oak Ranch, I felt peace and clarity. The interview process started, and on June 3, 2024, I began what I now see as a calling, not just a career.

Transitioning from the business world to ministry life has been like moving from a place where it's "every man for himself" to where it's "every man for each other." The heart and mission of Big Oak Ranch have changed the way I see leadership, service, and purpose. Whether it's working with other staff members, the Big Oak beach trip, or an afternoon spent deer hunting with some of our boys in Marengo County, I'm reminded daily that this work is deeply relational and deeply rewarding.

People sometimes ask if I miss the car business or if I'll ever go back. My answer is simple: "This is where God wants me. There's nowhere else I'd rather be." I count it a tremendous honor to serve alongside those who are pouring into the lives of our children and staff. It's more than a job, it's Kingdom work.

As for life outside the office, Lori and I have been married nearly 38 years. We've been blessed with two amazing daughters, Ellen, who is married to John David Shelnutt, and Caroline, who is married to Josh Johnson. Both girls live in Atlanta, which means we get to spend time with our three precious grandchildren: Griffin (5), Sadie (4), and sweet baby Camille, who is six months old.

This season of life has been filled with reminders that God's plans are always better than our own. I'm grateful every day to be a small part of the life-changing work being done at Big Oak Ranch.

*Max*



Max and wife, Lori





# SPOTLIGHT



On June 16–17, 2025, leaders from across the Planting Oaks network came together for two days of training, collaboration, and encouragement. With a focus on equipping those working directly with children from hard places, the Planting Oaks Summit featured practical sessions, real-life experience, and relevant tools for the work ahead.

To learn more about the 2025 Summit, visit our blog *Mission Moments* at [bigoak.org](https://bigoak.org).



THE 11TH ANNUAL LEGENDS CLASSIC  
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA  
SEPTEMBER 21 & 22, 2025



THE 4TH ANNUAL LEGENDS AT THE LEDGES  
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA  
OCTOBER 19 & 20, 2025







**BIG OAK RANCH**  
Business Office  
6000 Shelley Drive  
Springville, AL 35146

### HELP US BE GOOD STEWARDS OF GOD'S MONEY.

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"...SO THEY WILL BE CALLED OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,  
THE PLANTING OF THE LORD, THAT HE MAY BE GLORIFIED."

ISAIAH 61:3

All contributions received for specific projects/needs shall be applied to those areas. Occasionally, we receive more contributions for a given specification than can be used for it. If that occurs, we add these funds to operating support that allows for the care of our children and the programs benefiting their overall development now and in the future.