

TIMBERS

MAGAZINE

A LIFE
CHANGED
Jeff Anthony

GROWING
OAKS
Nicholas
& Sophia



ON THE COVER
Shaffer Home



BigOak.org

ISSUE THREE
2025

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: _____

P21 RODEO & ACTIVITIES : ON RIVER TIME & JH RANCH TRIPS : GET TO KNOW Mike Donohue

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:

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Special Events
Management
Tuscaloosa, AL

NOVEMBER

Creede	11/01/16	Liam	12/04/12	Eli	1/10/12
Isaac	11/02/15	Tynesha	12/04/12	Laila	1/12/12
Elizabeth	11/02/17	Elliana	12/04/18	Paul	1/13/09
Cristian	11/03/10	Caden	12/06/12	Luke	1/15/13
Quinn	11/03/14	Melody	12/07/17	Chaslin	1/15/15
Austin	11/07/12	AJ	12/07/07	Ella	1/19/11
Victor	11/09/07	Evangeline	12/08/10	Makenzie	1/19/10
Gail	11/09/04	Kyleigh	12/10/04	Charlie	1/20/12
Aiden	11/11/09	Chad	12/10/07	Ava	1/24/17
Taylor	11/12/04	Baird	12/13/10	Masen	1/26/16
Toren	11/13/05	John	12/19/11	John	1/28/15
Serenity	11/14/11	Vada	12/21/11	Maddax	1/31/08
Faith	11/17/15	Drake	12/21/12		
Journey	11/19/18	Axlin	12/27/08		

DECEMBER

Ashden	12/01/08
Canaan	12/03/12

JANUARY

Eli	1/02/20
Elyn	1/04/08
Gavin	1/05/08
Atticus	1/06/13
Briar	1/07/25
Nevaeh	1/08/08
Lexeigh	1/09/14
Chloe	1/09/18
Meagan	1/10/07

FEBRUARY

Elijah	2/02/09
Ariyanna	2/04/08
Mason	2/05/06
Andrew	2/05/08
Alex	2/06/12
Sophia	2/12/08
Scottie	2/18/20
Jaxon	2/19/09
Kensley	2/20/12
Jameson	2/27/20



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

Same demons. Different day. Same war. Different battle.

When God's Kingdom advances, the enemy does not sit quietly. As Ephesians 6 reminds us, our struggle is not against flesh and blood. The work of Big Oak Ranch is not only about homes, family and healing—it is about spiritual ground being claimed for Christ. And that means we are always in a battle.

So, what do we do? We put on the full armor of God. Truth that holds everything together. Righteousness that leaves no cracks for the enemy to enter. Peace that steadies our steps. Faith that shields us from despair. Salvation that guards our minds. And the Word of God, which silences the enemy and makes him flee.

Obedience is the closest thing to perfection we will ever know this side of Heaven. It's not about flawless performance—it's about choosing God's way when everything in us wants our own. Obedience brings strength in the battle, clarity in the noise, and unity in the mission.

This is how we move forward at Big Oak Ranch—and how we invite you to stand with us. Your prayers and support are more than kind gestures; they are acts of war against the enemy's plan for children's lives. Every time you pray, advocate or give, you are part of tearing down strongholds and raising up sons and daughters who know their true identity in Christ.

Armor on. Obedience chosen. That's how we fight the battles in front of us—at the Ranch, and in our own lives. And it's how you are called to fight as well.

As you lead your family and raise your children in a world filled with division, murder and conflict, remember that these physical responses all point to a spiritual enemy. Put on the armor daily. Stay alert. Speak truth. Pursue righteousness. Guard your mind. Cling to faith. Wield God's Word. Fight your battles with obedience and surrender, knowing victory belongs to Christ.

Thank you for standing with us. Together, we press on in the war that matters most.

Keep Planting,



Brodie Croyle
CEO

*Brodie, Kelli, Luke &
Sawyer Croyle*



UPDATE FROM THE BOYS' RANCH



NICHOLAS, 18

HARDWORKING • RESILIENT • COMPASSIONATE

- Has lived at Big Oak Boys' Ranch for seven years
- Lives in the Spradling Home with his houseparents, Jonathan and Angela Rachel
- Is a senior at Westbrook Christian School
- Played soccer during one season for Westbrook
- Is Head Wrangler for Big Oak Cattle
- Will soon purchase his own vehicle
- Attends a local church with his family
- Plans to join ASCEND after graduation
- Wants to study zoology in college and beyond

“God designed us to need each other to do His work. We need people to come alongside us modeling what the love of Jesus looks like inside of family and for our kids to have an even greater support system. Resource Parents provide a time of refreshing for the houseparents where they know their kids have a consistent place to belong while they are away.

- Housemom at the Boys' Ranch

Learn more about Resource Parenting.



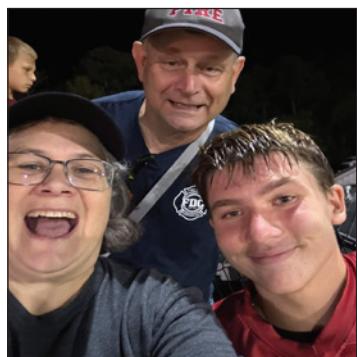
Happy Birthday Julio!



Paul caught a lizard!



Human pyramid!



JP and his houseparents are having a great football season.



Baking cookies with the Elise Home.



Wensley is always cheered on by his housemom.

"YOU THEN, MY CHILD, BE STRENGTHENED BY THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS."

2 TIMOTHY 2:1

ITEMS NEEDED FOR THE BOYS' RANCH

- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Deodorant
- Shampoo
- Body Wash
- Laundry Detergent
- Dish Tabs
- Dishwasher Rinse Aid
- Plastic Pitcher
- Tissue Kleenex
- Electric Pencil Sharpener
- Gingerbread House Kits
- Advent Calendar
- Camping Chairs
- Advent Devotionals
- Small Plastic Containers w/Lids
- Quart Freezer Bags
- Gallon Freezer Bags
- Parchment Paper
- Bed Pillows
- Portable Stadium Seats
- Outdoor Christmas Lights
- XL Cookie Sheets

PLEASE SEND DONATED ITEMS TO:

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

UPDATE FROM THE GIRLS' RANCH



SOPHIA, 17

HARDWORKING • FUNNY • THOUGHTFUL

- Has lived at Big Oak Girls' Ranch for a year and half
- Lives in the Neugent – Mouron home with her houseparents, Mike and Suzanne Miller
- Is a senior at Westbrook Christian School
- Has been a member of the WCS color guard for two years and was selected to be a captain this year
- Attends First Baptist Church Trussville with her family and is involved in the youth ministry
- Is working and saving to purchase her own car in the near future
- Plans to go to ASCEND and obtain a college education after high school graduation
- Desires to pursue a career in the field of social work
- Is gifted in creative writing and has won awards for her poetry

Dusty and I started out as resource parents. I can honestly say that I didn't feel like what I was doing could be that helpful. Now, as a houseparent, I can't imagine doing this ministry without resource parents. Not only do they give houseparents the opportunity to refresh, they also offer a unique connection with our children that lasts for years. What one weekend a month can do to encourage, motivate, and validate our children is amazing.

- Amy Wheat, Housemom at the Girls' Ranch

Learn more about Resource Parenting.



Twin Day!



Aaliah made a snowman!



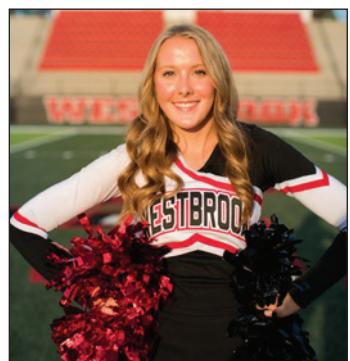
Fun at the Georgia Aquarium!



Danisha made the Homecoming Court!



Nevaeh and Judah had a great day at the Teddy Bear HOG ride!



Makenzie is rocking it on the Westbrook cheer team!

"GOD IS IN THE MIDST OF HER; SHE SHALL NOT BE MOVED; GOD WILL HELP HER WHEN MORNING DAWNS."

PSALM 46:5

ITEMS NEEDED FOR THE GIRLS' RANCH

- Laundry pods
- Dishwasher pods
- Dish soap
- Toothpaste
- Glass cleaner
- Persil Detergent
- White Bath towels
- Razors
- Deodorant
- 24-36 oz Disposable Containers with Lids

PLEASE SEND DONATED ITEMS TO:

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



BIG OAK RANCH P21 RODEO



At this year's P21 Rodeo, our children presented their strengths and stepped into new confidence. More than a showcase of hard-earned skills, it was a celebration of their growth and resilience. For over 50 years, Big Oak Ranch has been a place where children can find Hope, family, and a brighter future. Moments like these showcase the fruit of our mission.



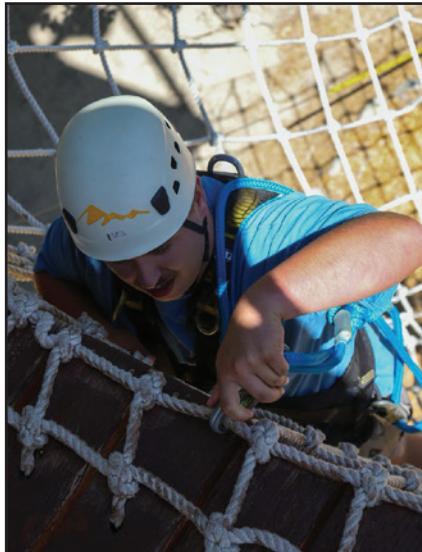




Each year, Pathway 1 ASCENDants embark on a journey to JH Ranch for the Second Wind experience. This annual trip challenges and inspires students through hiking, whitewater rafting and camping (including a 24-hour solo).

Throughout their time at JH Ranch, our kids are encouraged to face fears, discover God's purpose for their lives, and deepen their relationship with Jesus. It's a powerful week of growth, reflection, and adventure; one that marks the beginning of a new season as they transition into the ASCEND program.





“The trip to JH Ranch was life-changing to say the least. My relationship with the Lord grew in ways I never thought it could. I was able to let go of years of generational trauma. I made life-long friends and experienced true joy during that week.”

– Clay, Pathway 1 ASCENDant



A LIFE CHANGED

JEFF'S STORY



Jeff, age 12

My story may break some hearts, but it should be used to give hope. No matter where we are in life, we can change the outcome.

When you decide to take control of your life, it will be a challenge. To change your life, you must change your mind.

My childhood before the Ranch was not the best. I never knew my father, and my mother left us with people we did not know, and never returned. We were poor and I remember being abused and neglected. We moved around frequently, and by the time I was 12, I had attended four schools.

In 1996, I was 12 when my two brothers and I moved to Big Oak Ranch. I was confused when we were dropped off and thought we were staying briefly.

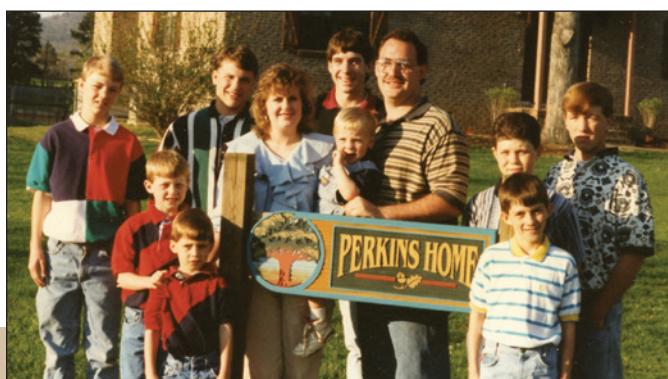
I was met with love and compassion from my first set of house parents, Danny and Liz Gilbert. Despite their willingness to love me, I wanted nothing to do with them. With their constant love and grace, I started to learn to accept love. I am thankful they did not give up on me, because God knows I was (and sometimes still am) as stubborn as they come.

Later, I moved in with Art and Mary Ebert. Despite my efforts to drive them away, again, I was met with love and compassion and their home is where I learned how to love, show compassion, and give and accept grace.

I remember many times Mom Ebert saying "know that you know that you know" when talking to me about Jesus. Years later, those talks would help me understand my relationship with God.

During my time at the Ranch, I was blessed to attend Westbrook and I had no idea how much it would impact my life. This is where I would learn a life lesson that I carry with me to this day.

My junior year, I had Mr. Finlayson for Bible class, and he taught a series on boundaries. As a self-centered teenager this meant nothing to me, but later would become the foundation that I would use to become the man I am today.



Also, at WCS, I met a wonderful lady by the name of Jamie Hamby (now my wife). She was wonderful and I was a jerk, but she agreed to a date. We dated on and off through school and I continued to be a jerk. Many

Jeff with his Ranch family



Jeff in the Army, 2008



Jeff and Jamie on their wedding day



Jeff with his Big Oak Ranch Resource Family

years later, despite my best efforts, I tried to date her again and she said no. Despite her best efforts to get rid of me, God had a plan.

I served in the Army from 2004-09. The discipline I learned at the Ranch helped me and I was promoted to sergeant quickly. I had two deployments overseas - to Afghanistan and Iraq. The truck I was in was hit with a roadside bomb, and shortly after that I lost a mentor to a bomb.

I began to lose faith and became bitter. On May 30, 2019, I lost one of my soldiers to suicide, and again, on May 6, 2022, I lost a peer from the Army to suicide. The unit that I served in from 2004-09 has lost about 15 to suicide, and, because of these events and more, I began to struggle with suicidal ideation. I decided to start testing everything I knew and believed. I decided to seek help, and that is when I realized that my faith was stronger than I had ever known. To "know that you know that you know" is a freedom that is unexplainable unless you have been there.

Through the struggles in my life, I have become very secure as a person. I have learned to grow and become better, I had to confront my past, because I had let it become bigger than who I wanted to become. Learning to voluntarily confront my issues is where I learned to become comfortable with the uncomfortable. I had spent so much time and energy trying to convince myself that I was good, that I grew weary. Becoming comfortable with who I am and the things that I have been through has been extremely uncomfortable, but with micro improvements and brutal honesty, I know that I know.

I married Jamie and our two girls – born in 2010 and 2012, respectively - attend Westbrook and I hope and pray that it will have the same impact on them.

Even though I have failed miserably as a man, dad, and husband at times, I strive to be the best in all aspects of my life. It is only by the grace of my Savior that I have been married to the most wonderful woman for 17 years and have two brilliant daughters. Each day I strive to "break the cycle" and instill in our children the lessons I have carried from the Ranch.

Thank you to everyone who has been there – from staff, houseparents, Westbrook, my wonderful resource family (my family) and my wife. I thank you for not giving up on me.

Jeff

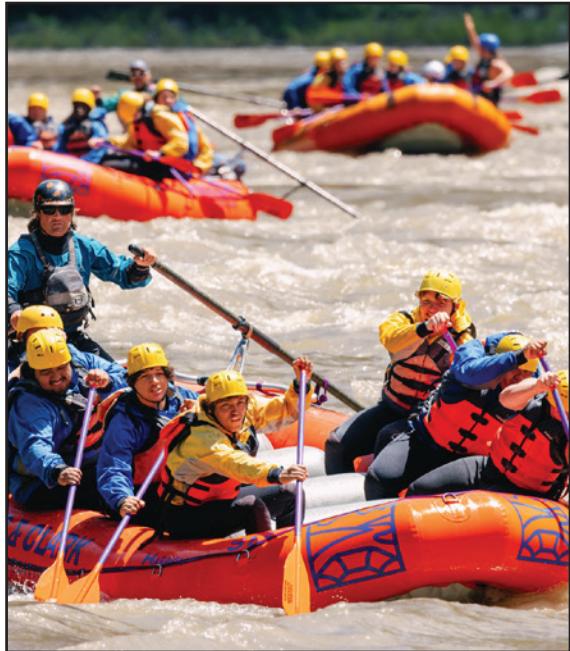


Jeff with his wife and daughters



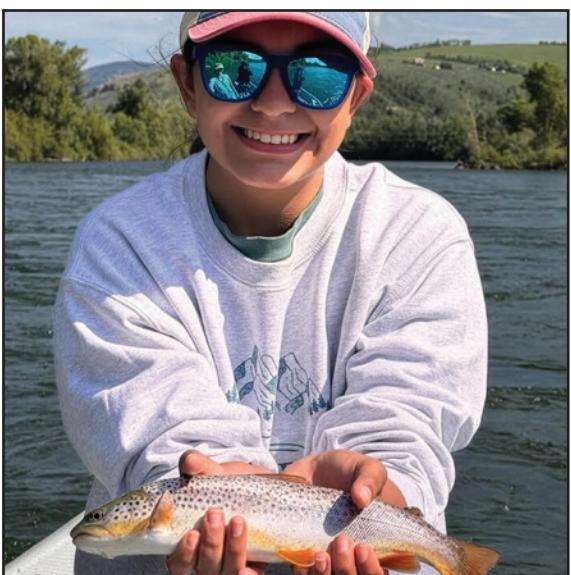
This year, our ASCENDants and Children had the incredible opportunity to participate in both **On River Time** Camp and SOAR through our partnership with On River Time, a ministry dedicated to providing hope and healing for children of abuse and neglect.

Throughout their time on the river, our kids learned to face fears, find rest, and experience the beauty of God's creation in new and powerful ways. Through adventures, reflection, and connection, they built confidence and discovered that healing and growth can happen even during challenges.



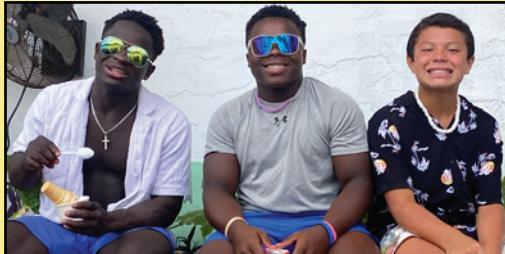
“On River Time was an amazing trip. I learned so much about myself and about my Heavenly Father. I am so thankful I had the privilege to experience it and I know I will always remember the healing love and joy that came from it.”

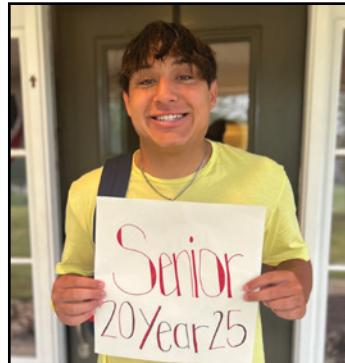
- Nevaeh



Walkin' on SUNSHINE

Big Oak Ranch Family Beach Trip 2025





School **FUN**



GET TO KNOW

Mike Donohue

Communications Director

My journey to Big Oak Ranch is something I could never have pieced together. From band directing to websites, nothing seems to have a common thread. What I have come to find every day is that God has always had a specific plan for my life from the beginning.

As a Marine officer's child born in Maryland, I lived in Virginia, Kansas, and Colorado before settling in California, where my dad retired. I spent my school years traveling between my mom's and dad's homes, focused on the medical field because it felt like what I was supposed to do.

Midway through my senior year, I suddenly questioned whether I was making the right decisions and faced a fork in the road: my personal life plan or what God was preparing me for. Met with the harsh reality of abandoning my planned degree after sending out college applications, I had to trust that a paved path lay before me that I could not yet see. Upon giving up control, within two months, I had received a scholarship to a university with one of the best music education programs in the state. The moment I stopped trying to control my life, I found myself traveling in the direction God had laid before me.

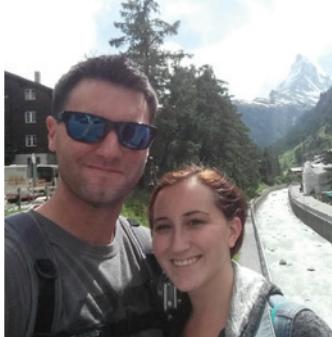
My degree took me through my first career as a high school music program director. While serving at Temescal Canyon High School (2012 - 2022), I had the honor of working with over 700 students, their parents, music staff, and many others performing throughout the West Coast and Hawaii. Additionally, I had the opportunity to work with Broken City Percussion, an independent indoor percussion program, for the majority of my tenure as director.

After about eight years, I began to feel a familiar unease. The path I was on began to fork again, and I found myself looking up for direction. Not long after, the answer dropped right in front of me, like someone handing me twenty boxes of pizza. I stumbled on a Facebook post that read, "If I didn't want to direct bands anymore, what could I do?" Among the comments, one stood out: "Be a project manager." After a bit of research, I discovered the PMP certification. I immediately began working toward it while applying for jobs, trusting God to lead my family and me to the next step.

Unlike my previous transition, which lasted 2 months, this one lasted 2 years. I had



Mike and his family



many conversations that fell flat until my cousin called and told me about a job opportunity in Birmingham. Upon setting up the interview, the company assumed I was a local to Birmingham. Instead of

GET TO KNOW

correcting them, my father-in-law helped me book a red-eye flight for the next day to make the in-person interview, which earned me the job.

After my relocation during the busy Christmas season (which I can't say I recommend), I spent 2.5 years managing website, video, and branding projects. Right when I thought my transition was complete, I discovered I was still in God's planned transition towards Big Oak Ranch. A website project evolved into fulfilling a prayer I hadn't dared to voice. What I initially saw as a two-year transition turned out to be a five-year journey to prepare me for my current role.

Every day, I look forward to seeing what God has planned next and am honored to be part of Big Oak's story. Outside of the office, my second-grade sweetheart Erin and I have been married for over 12 years and have two children, Melody and Evan. We are kept busy with baseball, theater, and other everyday adventures.

Mike

Note from the Business Office

YEAR END GIFTS

To receive a receipt dated in 2025, your gift must be in the mail and post-marked (US Post Office Postmark) by December 31, 2025.

If you wish to make an **honorarium or memorial gift for Christmas** and would like for the acknowledgement letter to arrive prior to Christmas Day, the donation and list of individuals you are paying tribute to must be received by our Business Office by December 8, 2025.

If you are sending an **endowment contribution** for 2025, please make your gift by December 8, 2025.

If you are planning a gift of **marketable securities**, please email Mary Hutto at mhutto@bigoak.org for transfer instructions, and provide your name, address, quantity and description of securities you are contributing. Please make your gifts of securities by December 15, 2025.

If you are planning a **non-cash gift**, please email our business office at accounting@bigoak.org for IRS Rules. All non-cash gifts must be in our possession by December 15, 2025.





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

HELP US BE GOOD STEWARDS OF GOD'S MONEY.

The Timbers mailing list is confidential and not shared with any other individual or organization. Please notify us at communications@bigoak.org if you would like to be removed from our mailing list, have had a change of address, or if you have any questions, comments or corrections.



**"...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.