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Wrangling a Good Time at the C Lazy U

With 200 horses and 125 miles of scenic terrain, guest ranch rounds up those who love to ride

By **Charlie Brown**



The C Lazy U Ranch in Grand County is celebrating its centennial

THE DETAILS

C Lazy U Ranch

3640 Colorado Hwy 125
PO Box 379
Granby, CO 80446
970-887-3344
clazyu.com

The ranch is open year-round and has 40 well-appointed cabins. Call for information on special packages and activities including Julie Goodnight's Horse Master Academy, the children's program and Orvis-endorsed fly fishing.

AMI CULLEN GOES TO WORK EACH day in an iconic 1922 barn that is the centerpiece of the C Lazy U Ranch located just outside Granby, a scenic two-hour drive from Denver. Cullen oversees a diversified group of "co-workers," including 200 horses and two dozen wranglers. "We are all on the payroll, including the horses," she insists.

Her "office" comes with tack rooms filled with 130 saddles, bridles, saddle pads, cinches and ropes. There's also a lower barn, corrals, outdoor arena, a 12,000-square-foot heated indoor riding arena, shoeing pit,

veterinarian care room and covered storage for some of the 900,000 tons of hay the horses consume each year. About half of the hay is grown on the ranch's 8,500 acres at 8,300 feet elevation.

The C Lazy U wranglers are mostly young women who share Ami's love of horses, the outdoor life and working with the thousands of guests who flock year-round to this premier guest ranch, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary.

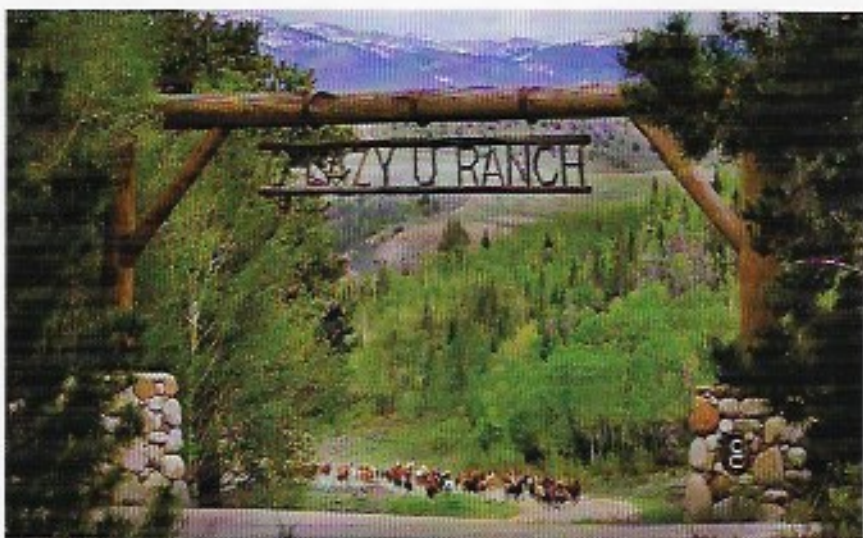
Cullen's job entails more than being the "barn boss." She is Director of Equestrian Operations and in

addition to managing the horses, she directs the ranch's boarding program, guest equine operations and the respected children's riding program. In the busy summer season, she has a full-time staff of 40, many of whom visited the ranch as youngsters.

Cullen grew up crazy about horses outside of Philadelphia, where she showed horses and was a hunter-jumper. She first came to the C Lazy U for a week's vacation in 2006 and was hooked. "By the end of the week, I didn't want to leave and all I could talk about was coming back every summer, which I did," she said.

After college, she went to law school and landed a job with a prestigious East Coast law firm. Cullen was a successful attorney with a good salary but after several years on the job she was unfulfilled. "The horses kept calling me back," she said.

In 2012 Cullen hit the trail to Colorado, preferring wrangling to lawyering. She started at the C Lazy U as a wrangler and in 2018 replaced popular retiring head wrangler Bill



The C Lazy U Ranch is home to 200 horses



Tack room in the 1922 barn

Fisher, who had held the position for 26 years. She knew it would be a challenging transition.

"There were times I had to cowgirl up and prove myself, especially when some city slicker wanna-be cowboy would question my riding skills. I would take them out for a little ride and that would settle things down," she said.



The ranch's wranglers are mostly young women who share a love of horses and teaching



Cowboy coffee is served each morning to guests

Riding is the main activity at the ranch. After reviewing a guest's riding abilities, each is assigned a horse and saddle for a week and given ongoing riding instructions. Guests may choose to ride on more than 125 miles of scenic adjacent trails or practice their equestrian skills with an expert.

The ranch prides itself on its children's riding program. Cowpokes aged 3 to 5 ride ponies and can ride in the donkey cart. Mustangs aged 6 to 12 and teens get their own horse.

Rollins Wallace, who grew up with horses in North Carolina and studied early childhood education, is the ranch's children's program manager. She loves her job, especially Monday mornings when the 6- to-12-year-olds are assigned their horse.

"When we pair them up with their own horse they are so excited. In our orientation we carefully go over the basics and the best way to ride and communicate with their horse," Wallace says. The kids get more than a horse, as they're also assigned a confidence-boosting counselor before they hit the trail.

The tears flow on Saturday afternoons when the program ends. "It's a week they will never forget. Some of them make their parents promise they will be back next summer so they can ride their favorite horse even before the family car hits the surface road out of ranch property," Wallace says.

No doubt this child-horse bonding plays an important role in the ranch's high return rate. A New York family holds the record at more than 50 years, while other families have made 20 or 30 consecutive annual visits.

The terms "western values, wholesome family activities," and "honoring the traditions of the American West" are central in conversations with David Craig, C Lazy U's general manager.

Craig believes it's important that parents and children "disconnect" in an effort to bring families back



A firepit outside the Patio House, which has an outdoor pool and seating for meals



A vintage Model T in front of the barn, which was built in 1922

together. In the early 2000s the ranch received two coveted honors: the AAA Five-Diamond and Mobil Five Star awards. "The evaluating criteria changed and guest ranches were placed in the hotel category. They wanted us to add phones, TVs and air conditioning to guest rooms," Craig said, noting that didn't fit with their philosophy (rooms are equipped with WiFi and there are TVs in public spaces at the ranch).

He proudly shared that the ranch continues to rack up awards, including the 2019 Travel + Leisure's Top Resorts in the USA (No. 3) and Top Resorts in the West (No. 2); and in USA Today's Reader's Choice Awards, Best Destination Resort (No. 1).

The best things about the old West can be part of the new West. "We will continue to use and expand creative land use programs such as conservation easements, sustaining Willow Creek, restoring pine bark beetle-killed lands and protecting retiring horses from auctions and slaughter," Craig said. "These strategies sustain our economic interest, as well as protect and conserve the land, open spaces and our horses."

Like a fine red wine or an old friendship, the C Lazy U has become fuller and richer for the aging.

Charlie Brown is a former Colorado state representative and served more than 14 years on the Denver City Council. He is a big fan of guest ranches and always strives to ride tall in the saddle.



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