

By Charles Johnson

Happy Trails

A trail-riding business puts a gallop in Jack Hanes' so-called retirement



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Reins lightly in hand, Jack Hanes stands by his horse and eyes the early morning light slanting through the trees onto a leaf-spattered trail. He shifts his lean frame around the animal, tightening a cinch, patting its rump, talking softly.

"I'd never even been on a horse until age 50. Boy, things have really changed," he says.

Changed, and how. A former middle school principal, Hanes retired relatively early, at 52. For the past five years he's operated Long C Trails, a trail-riding and camping business straddling the Tennessee/ Kentucky border an 80-minute drive northeast of Nashville.

Not bad for an equine novice just a few years back. Now his life revolves around horses and horse people. That quiet, calm lifestyle is how he likes things these days.

Most weekends during spring, summer, and fall, the campground stays full and riders stay busy enjoying the 2,000 acres of trails Hanes carefully established in the rolling hills. He grew up here, on a 400-acre farm, and arranged the winding network of trails with neighboring landowners.

Keeping the land. The farm had been in his family about 200 years. His father farmed it full-time. It would be tough to keep it intact as a unit, however, considering modern farming economics. Then he discovered horses.

"The farm had to have a way to support itself and generate income. We researched several things, like greenhouses. Then a friend told me the big need in this area was for a horse trail-riding business. I didn't know much about horses, but here we are," he says.

Above: Jack Hanes (right) leads Angie Nash-Boulden and Karen Horton along a scenic pastoral ride.

Hanes was a fast learner, however. Plus, he partnered with Mike and Margaret Likens, a pair of horse experts nearby.

"This is a good lifestyle. It's nice to be right here, on the farm where I grew up, rather than having to rush somewhere to work in the morning. I know where I'm going to be all day long. I can help the neighbors if they need it. We don't have an elaborate, fancy life. We drive old vehicles. We don't go out to eat much. But we really don't want to," he says.

"When we started this business, I didn't really know what direction it would go. I had a couple of goals. It had to be something God approved of, and people had to be in better shape leaving than when they came here."

Hanes' 27-year-old son, B.J., works on the farm. So does Hanes' mother, Opal, called "Granny" by just about everyone she knows. She recalls the hard years of full-time farming her husband, Bill, put into the place.

"We used to do corn, hay, cattle, and vegetables. My husband did a little carpentry work on the side. I worked in a factory, too, sewing, and made extra money to help Jack go to college," she says.

Granny does a lot of the mowing as well as just about all the cleaning on the farm. "She doesn't stay in one place very long. She notices all the things we don't," Hanes says.

B.J. loves the opportunity to work on the family farm, after majoring in dairy science at Western Kentucky University. "I've loved this farm since I was a little kid. If there was any way I could, I wanted to be here. I was never concerned about getting rich. I'm really proud of being able to live and work here," he says.

Trail treats. The Hanes family built the network of trails and painstakingly maintains them. Superb views give riders a visual treat and a chance for a little horseback meditation. A two-mile hiking trail takes visitors through stands of spring wildflowers like bloodroot, iris, hepatica, and trout lilies, and along ravines and hills to a small waterfall.

"It took a year and a half before we opened for business to clear the trails. Before that, I had to sign agreements with the landowners so we could put trails on their land," he says.

"We wanted to make this a special place, the kind of place where families could come and then go home with memories they'll have for the rest of their lives." ▶

Top: Stables are modernized tobacco barns, rebuilt for horse comfort. **Above:** Though you find horses on the farm, trail riders must provide their own mounts and tack.



Above: It's all horses all the time at Long C Trails, evidenced by this wind chime at the office. **Left:** The rural landscape includes scenic dirt roads as well as rolling hills, creeks, and ravines.



Top: Trails wind among mature hardwoods on the Kentucky/Tennessee border. **Above:** B.J. Hanes lives out his dream by making a life on the family's land.

Long C Trails, located in the middle of a triangle between Westmoreland and Lafayette, Tenn., and Scottsville, Ky., offers several ways to make memories. There are both RV and tent camping sites, a group cabin that sleeps 12, and a smaller cabin that handles four. Riders must provide their own horses, and trail rides are unguided.

The entire place is alcohol-free, adding to the family atmosphere, and on Sunday mornings above the main stable, there's a cowboy church led by Morris Skipworth's Circle J Ministries, which also provides food service as well as several youth camps on-site.

Identifying assets. Landowners hoping to get into the agritourism business, like the Hanes family, need to carefully tally up their assets. "They need to determine what makes it a unique place to visit. What story can they tell about the farm? What makes it different, something other people are willing to pay to experience?" says Lori Garkovich, University of Kentucky rural sociologist.

"Is there a scenic place on it where people can get one of those 'Wow!' visual experiences? How about historical stories, maybe a place where Native Americans traveled through, or an interesting geological formation? Maybe there's interesting farming history that shows how the people lived. Remember that now people want an opportunity to rest and relax, and also to have adventure and escape city life," Garkovich says.

Trail rides won't work for every landowner. Neither will corn mazes, bed-and-breakfast places, or U-pick vegetables. Owners have to carefully think through their personal interests and local markets.

"Think about what people will spend money on, because, after all, you're in business to make money. Think about spinoffs you can do to make extra cash, too. If you have a corn maze, maybe you could consider selling corn-husk dolls or other things so people will have a memory of the farm. Consider all of your options," Garkovich says.

Right: The Long C Trails office is in this over 100-year-old, plantation-style home located on the farm.

The Hanes family found their niche and stick to it. They may have known little about horses several years ago, but around Long C Trails now, it's all horses all the time.

They sell horse memorabilia, caps, and tee-shirts. Their bulletin boards list horses for sale as well as tack, trailers, and other goods. Each Saturday a farrier and a tack dealer come to the farm. Horse owners can have their animals shod on the spot while they're buying new bridles and saddles. Morris Skipworth will even perform a western-style horseback wedding for equine-loving lovers.

"We see it all as being in the recreation business. We're here to help people enjoy themselves and their horses, and to have a good time. There are people who keep coming back here time after time, so they must be enjoying their experience," Hanes says.

Visitors come from across the mid-South and Midwest, and as far as California.



"We love having them here. Everyone we meet adds something to what we're doing and to the good time we get to have," Hanes says. Best of all, the Hanes family gets to do it on the land that's nurtured them for two centuries. There's something about making a living off a place where your great-great-grandfather also worked that'll give a fellow the proper perspective of life.

"This life we're living makes sense to me. What could anybody ask but to enjoy making a living with their son?" Hanes says. **H**

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