NorthFloridaSchool
Of Special Education

Enhance. Empower. Enlighten.

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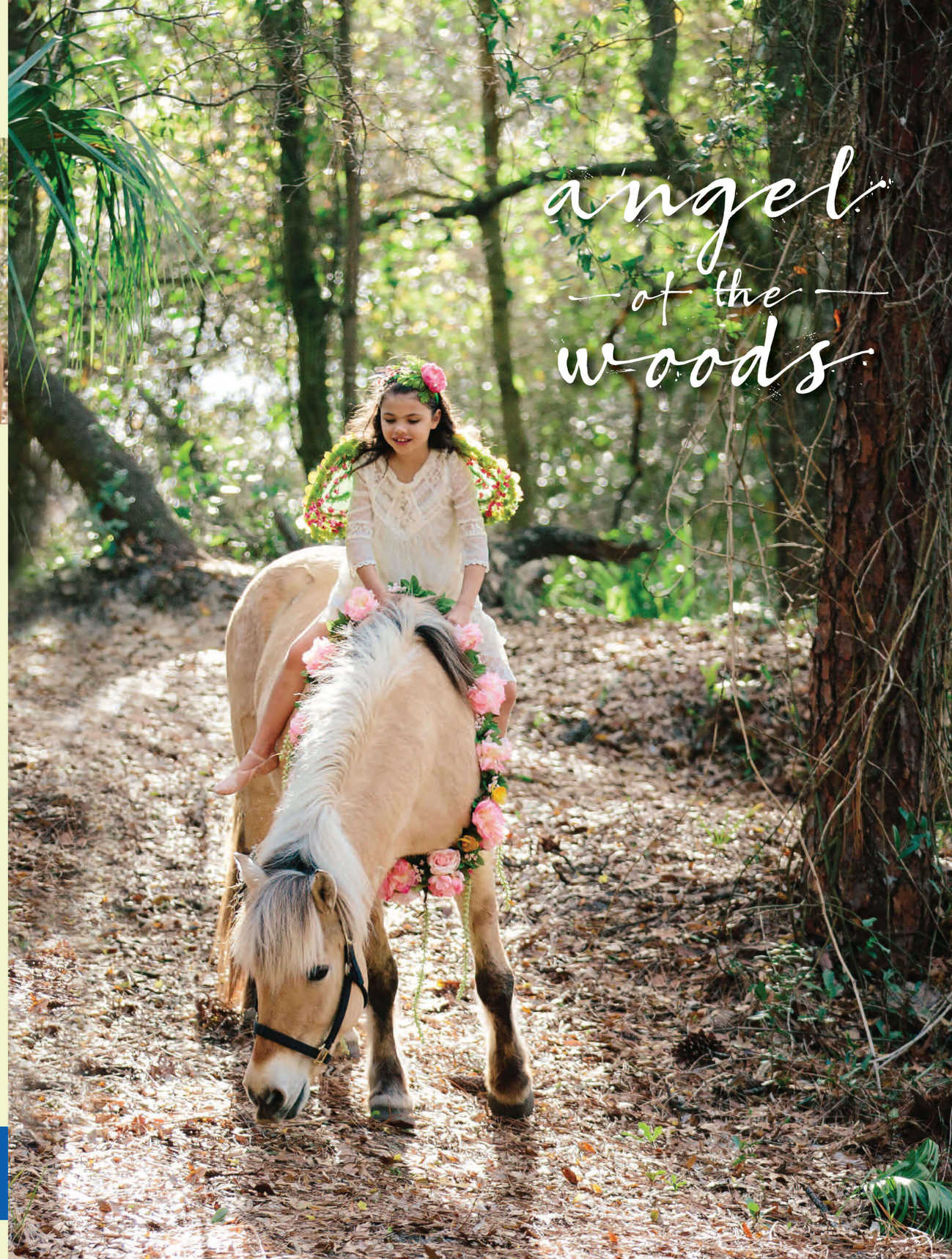


wonder

At the age of three, Katherine—who has autism—had never spoken a word despite receiving intensive speech therapy. Crying or sitting in silence were her only forms of communication. Her mother, Lena, found information about equine therapy increasing the communication skills of children with autism. At great expense, time and effort, Lena found a ranch allowing Katherine to experience the magical connection between horse and human.

With her mother by her side and a cowgirl named Pickles leading the way, Katherine took the reins on the back of a horse and sauntered into the rich multi-sensory wonderland of the woods. She traveled through uneven terrain and over undefined paths while ducking under low hanging branches. Her mother spoke to her about singing birds, the bright sun and leaves of green. The rhythmic cantor of the horse—her hooved wonder—spoke to her in a different language. After a few short weeks on the trail, while traveling under the familiar low hanging branches, Katherine leaned up in the saddle, touched the leaves and spoke her first word, "gree."

For Katherine and others, a ride into the woods on the back of a horse is profound life-changing therapy, taking them far beyond lessons taught in the classroom. Intuitive horses deliver awe-filled sensory experiences—true horsepower—stimulating growth in children with disabilities.

Our Cover Girl—Katherine Winslow, 10

A ride into the woods on the back of a horse takes a child far beyond lessons taught in the classroom. Intuitive horses deliver awe-filled sensory experiences.

Angels are known to be heavenly messengers directing us toward divine plans that elude ordinary mortals.

On the edge of the Anderson Smith Campus of the North Florida School of Special Education sits a five-acre tract of magical woods. The Ida Mae Stevens Foundation became an Angel of the Woods in October 2014, gifting the land to the school.

The Woods are known as a storied place where metamorphosis occurs and transformation takes place. Knights become worthy, and maidens find strength. In these woods, the Board of Directors of the North Florida School of Special Education cast a grand vision for a $6 million capital campaign filled with inspired plans for a new lower-school campus and Therapeutic Equestrian Center, promising enduring growth for the school, the students and our community.

In 1992, four families gathered to create a school for their children who traveled different developmental paths. Today, the North Florida School of Special Education is accredited through the Florida Council of Independent Schools, is a 501(c)(3) organization and has a waiting list of hopeful families banking on a classroom seat for their child. The school, tucked into the Arlington neighborhood, serves 120 students enrolled in 1st through 12th grade, and has a Transition Program serving students 18-22, as well as 40 students in the Post-graduate Program.

The mission of North Florida School of Special Education (NFSSE) is to improve the lives of students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities through the achievement of academic, vocational, and social skills.

Students attending the school have a variety of intellectual disabilities including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Traumatic Brain Injury. Many also face physical challenges such as hearing and visual impairments, motor difficulties, heart and brain conditions, and sensory processing deficiencies.

The North Florida School of Special Education enrolls students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. It provides more than $150,000 in scholarships and financial aid to families who would otherwise not be able to attend the school. The John McKay Scholarship and the Andy Gardiner Scholarship provide 95% of the tuition funding for the majority of the students.

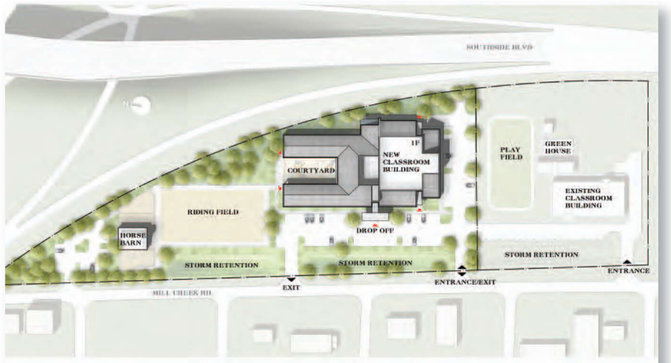
An integrated team of passionate teachers leads students along their unique path on a quest to encounter the best version of themselves.

Current curriculum includes academics, art and music, horticulture, culinary arts and adaptive physical education. Students receive independent living and social skills, job coaching, hands-on experience and job placement training. Speech, language, physical and occupational therapies are also offered. After school activities include a myriad of experiences from running, swimming, yoga and social clubs to training for the Special Olympics.

North Florida School of Special Education offers continuing education following graduation for 18-22 year old students in the Transition Program and students 22 years of age and older in the Post-graduate Program. Each student receives individualized curriculum in horticulture, culinary arts and art enrichment courses, as well as volunteer outreach projects.

Publix Super Markets, Chick-fil-A, Pet Paradise, Burlington Coat Factory, BEAM Thrift Store, Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens and Barkin' Biscuits—the school's all-natural dog biscuit production program provide hands-on vocational training. Students receive a sense of contribution to community, significance, maturity and a strong work ethic.

Berry Good Farms—the school's on-site self-sustaining farm—links together land and table with learning and entrepreneurship. State-of-the art organic growing methods combined with a greenhouse and aquaculture/aquaponics program offer year-round production of produce. Local chefs, restaurants, schools and consumers purchase fresh seasonal vegetables from the school funding enterprise. Berry Good Farms and **Berry Good Farms On the Go food truck** work hand-in-hand with the culinary arts program offering training to post-graduate students while providing a valuable service to the community.



SITE PLAN

The culinary arts program will help dish up life skills, healthy eating values and environmental awareness. A commercial teaching kitchen, serving school-wide lunches daily, will teach economics and entrepreneurship as well as offer meaningful employment to post-graduate students.

The capital campaign will provide for an infirmary, boardroom, teachers' lounge, principal's office and essential administrative offices. The plans also include a covered patio adjacent to the café and lounge offering al fresco dining with a second covered patio offering shaded play.

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center and Physical Education Complex will be open for afternoon and weekend use for all people in Northeast Florida living with disabilities.

The Woods–a treasured gift of land–is the staging ground for an innovative culture of learning. A portion of the woods will remain with flora, fauna and trails where students can get lost in wildlife and discover their authentic self.

The North Florida School of Special Education Expansion Plan

Meeting the cognitive and physical needs of students attending North Florida School of Special Education in a memorable way was paramount in the design of the new campus, created by Ricardo Quiñones AIA, architect with PQH Group Design, Inc. The new campus will solidify North Florida School of Special Education's place as the leading educational institution for those with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities in Northeast Florida.

The 32,000 square foot state-of-the-art campus will house eight new classrooms for 1st through 8th grade, enabling the school to double enrollment. The main entrance to the school will feature additional parking, a welcoming foyer and spacious lobby. A large open-air courtyard set between two wings of the new classrooms will allow for outdoor play. Currently, one portable classroom serves all therapies. The new building will offer individual treatment rooms for sensory, physical, speech and occupational therapy as well as a quiet room.

The plans include a fine arts center, performance stage, art classroom, art studio and music room allowing students to celebrate individuality and creativity while captivating and benefiting heart and soul. The current common-area library will have its own distinct room.

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center, led by a certified equine therapist will feature a riding arena, viewing deck, horse barn with four stables, tack room and equestrian office.

The Physical Education Complex complete with a full-size gymnasium, basketball court, weight and locker rooms for boys and girls will provide much-needed space for exercise, movement and play. The school will partner with Special Olympics and open the gym for training and sporting events.

Through the years, the North Florida School of Special Education has carved out distinctive fundraising events tethering generous individuals and corporate sponsors to the school. This valuable patronage brings smiles of joy to the many different faces of our students.

The Woods is the backdrop and muse for **Dinner on the Farm** and **The Walking Tree Walk/Run in the Woods**. Community leaders open their hearts and homes for our **RiverHops** beer pairing dinner on the St. Johns River as well as our our **Red, White and Blues** food and wine tasting. Girls in the school take to the couture catwalk in **The Heart of the Runway** fashion show. **The Spring Fling & Fish Fry** serves up the school's own farm-raised fish and makes unforgettable memories. These marvelous events spark big dreams for the school.

Annual Fundraising Events

Dinner on the Farm

Red, White & Blues

The Heart of the Runway

The Walking Tree Walk/ Run in the Woods

Spring Fling & Fish Fry

RiverHops

The Woods – a treasured gift of land – is the staging ground for an innovative culture of learning. A portion of the woods will remain with flora, fauna and trails where students can get lost in wildlife and discover their authentic self.

Would you unearth the magic of the woods and partake in sculpting a flourishing path for children in Northeast Florida living with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities by investing in our $6 million Angel of the Woods capital campaign?

Select a naming opportunity that touches your heart. Your gift falls on fertile soil in a known land. For 25 years, North Florida School of Special Education's deep-rooted commitment to serve children who travel a different developmental path has been our highest mission. Your investment in the capital campaign is an expression of your trust and faith in us.

Come into the woods and shake the earth with us as we bring magic to the forest floor and create life among the trees.

Angels of the Woods: A.J. Anderson, Cody Bennett, JB DeLuna, Kaci Himmelreich, Kristina Lu, Madeline Mottas, Janiyah Peterson, Gram VanCleve-Miller, Jacob Mauro, Wyatt Burditt and Katherine Winslow

Credits: Ingrid Damiani – Photography; Patti Hendrix Joyce – Copywriting; Jill Hiser Morrow – Costume Design; Katie Jopling, Judy Mckinney – Creative Assistants; Suzanne Hendrix – Art Direction/Graphic Design; Horse provided by Sis VanCleve Miller

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Kit Thomas
Capital Campaign Manager

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