SMART HOME ON THE RANGE
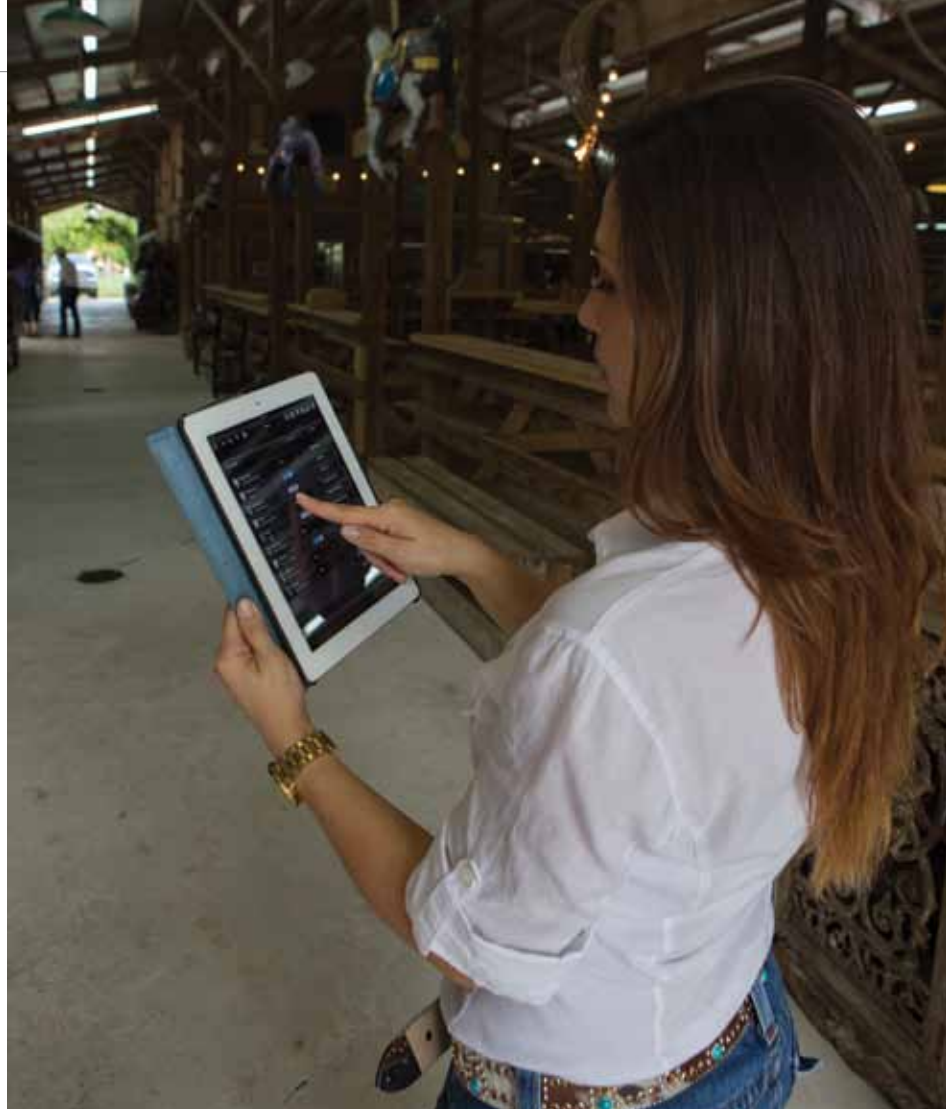
A cancer survivor switches life gears to build his dream ranch

W ant to know what's really important in your life? Come face to face with the possible end of it. Just ask Edwin Melendez, whose world turned upside-down when he learned he had cancer. "Having a life-changing experience, it modifies your perspective and your point of view, and it helps put things into perspective," says Edwin, who beat the disease and is standing today stronger than ever. "Afterwards, I realized the things that were truly important to me and that's what I focused on, and this is what's come out."

"THIS" is Davie Ranch, a peaceful and sprawling 10-acre equestrian facility about 20 miles north of Miami, Florida. There's a big barn full of horses, pigs, and chickens. Next to the barn, people ride horses in a large arena. On the other side, there's a petting zoo with more furry friends: rabbits, goats, guinea pigs. The middle of the barn is a large, adorned event space complete with a stage, party lights, and vintage carousel horses around its perimeter, all collected from antique auctions. The ranch offers riding lessons, day camps, summer camps, after-school programs and just

Owners Edwin and Paola Melendez used their expertise in home automation to modernize Davie Ranch—everything from feeding the animals to lighting the riding arena is on the Control4 system.

Ranch staffers can transform the 6,000 square foot stable from barn to ballroom with a few keystrokes on their iPad, *above*. Rugged luxury in the ranch den, complete with televisions, an audio system, and a old-time stagecoach canvas roof, *below*.

a place for friends and family to relax and enjoy the company of like-minded equestrians. It's a slice of country life for city folk, who come here to celebrate birthday parties, ride horses, and get in touch with nature. "This is like paradise for them," Edwin beams.

This is a true working ranch, one that gets up to 3,000 visitors a month. "We're pretty busy seven days a week," sighs Edwin. There's plenty to do. As a home theater installer, Edwin knew he could make life easier for his ranch staff by using automation technology. "This is a production," he explains. "There's a lot of moving parts, so the more things we're able to automate, the smoother things run. The same practices we utilize for our home theater business, we apply here at the ranch."

So, what exactly is life on the ranch's Control4® system like? Well, as they say around here: Hold on to your hats.

"Automation plays a huge role in everything we're doing," notes Edwin. All of the property's lights, music, and televisions are automated. Situated in the tropics, climate control is key. Sensors can detect a rise in temperature and trigger the fans. Security lights turn on at night. Lights in the riding arena are synced, as is a timed and automated sprinkler system that keeps the arena area watered down so the dust stays out of eyes.

Edwin also takes advantage of the remote-access capabilities. "We have so many people that are coming through here," he notes. "If somebody needs access, I can just push a button on my phone and I can open up the door, and that's all done through Control4 and the systems we have in place."

It's a pretty impressive system, and it's not just the two-legged

The high tech is hidden, so visitors can enjoy parties, petting zoos, and a piece of the country. Square dance, anyone?

Each of the ranch's 15 horses receives fresh water via an automated system, as do the pigs, goats, and guinea pigs (oh my)!

Young city slickers learn to walk, trot, and canter their four-legged friends in the horse arena. Automated sprinklers keep the dust down.

creatures that benefit. The watering and feeding mechanics for the animals are also automated. That's great news for Rose, Crystal, Desperado, and the rest of the non-human residents on the ranch. Seems you can bring a horse to water, and make him drink—if it's on the Control4 system, anyway.

Automation really steps in as an extra ranch hand when there's an event, and there's no shortage of those at Davie. "We entertain 24-7," Edwin explains. "We need to be ready when people come over— the music, the lighting—so by the time the visitor's car comes in from

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As a home theater installer, Edwin is a seasoned user of automation systems. But his ranch

staff isn't always as tech-savvy. So, it was essential that whatever system Edwin installed here had to be very intuitive and easy to use. "This is what I do for a living," notes Edwin. "It's very easy for me to use, but I have volunteers and children that are here. Control4 has been a godsend. The staff embraces it. It's very easy for them to use the system, to get the lights ready, to put the happy birthday song on when it's time to do that."

That peace of mind, knowing the system works, makes everyone's job at the ranch easier. Especially Edwin. "There's so many moving

parts, feeling sure that you have something that's reliable, that's going to work, so that when you push the button the song is going to play, the lights are going to turn on, that everything is working, Control4 really has simplified what we're trying to accomplish here."

And, as widespread as the automation system is here at Davie Ranch, the average visitor would scarcely notice it. "All the electronics, they just complement the whole thing, it's not the primary focus," explains Edwin. And, as the ranch expands (they're currently adding some 23,000

square feet of construction, including a main house and guest house), so will the system. Edwin quotes a piece of ancient cowboy wisdom: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

As frightening as Edwin's battle with cancer must have been, it was also a gift, allowing him to focus on what was really important: spending time with his family, and turning his vision of a kid-friendly working ranch into a reality. "This is where I dreamed of always being," he notes. "It's almost surreal to find myself in this situation." ∎