

Second Story Foundation Launches Public Phase of Capital Campaign to Build Second Story Ranch Lodge and Residences

Campaign supports construction of a 7,000-square-foot lodge and recovery residence on a 68-acre ranch in south suburban Crete

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, December 2, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The Second Story Foundation today announced the launch](#) of the public phase of its capital campaign to build the Second Story Ranch Lodge and Residences, a transformative recovery campus for men rebuilding their lives after severe substance use disorder. The campaign follows a successful quiet phase that secured early gifts and pledges and set the stage for broad community participation.



A rendering of the future 2nd Story Ranch Lodge in Crete, Illinois, designed as a residential and community space for men in long-term recovery. (Credit: Aspen Group)

The project will create a 7,000-square-foot lodge and a dedicated residential building on the foundation's 68-acre ranch in unincorporated south suburban Crete, Illinois. The ranch was purchased in partnership with IFF, supported by private donations and early program funding. It currently operates as a working horse farm and community service hub while preparing for the construction of the long-term residential program.

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“The Second Story Ranch will give men entering early recovery a safe home, a community to belong to, and the time they need to heal,” said [Jim O'Connor, executive director of the Second Story Foundation](#). “This campaign supports a place where recovery becomes durable and

where men can build lives filled with purpose, responsibility, and connection. Our quiet phase

showed what is possible when people believe in this work. We are grateful for the early support and excited to open the door for wider participation.”

With a total project budget of \$4.25 million, the foundation has already secured nearly \$500,000 in private donations and pledges and received \$250,000 from the Will County Opioid Program, which qualified the ranch as an approved abatement use for Illinois Opioid Settlement capital dollars. The project will deliver the 7,000-square-foot lodge, the men’s residence, and two 1,800-square-foot single-family homes designed to anchor the ranch’s leadership presence on the property. The campaign now seeks to raise the remaining funds needed for construction, furnishings, and required site work.

The ranch property was purchased in partnership with IFF, the Chicago-based Illinois Facilities Fund, which supports community development projects across the state. Detailed construction budgets for the lodge and residence were completed in partnership with The Aspen Group of Frankfort, the project’s design-build partner.

“We are honored to support the Second Story Foundation in bringing this project to life,” said Derek DeGroot, Aspen Group President. “The lodge and residence were designed to give men in recovery a safe home, strong community spaces, and the practical resources they need to rebuild their lives. Our role is to deliver a clear, responsible construction plan that reflects the mission of the ranch and helps the foundation reach its next stage.”

The lodge will include a large fellowship hall, a commercial kitchen, group meeting areas, and flexible space for educational programming, community events, peer support, and equine-assisted therapy. The residence will house up to 14 program participants, with shared rooms in



Jim O’Connor, executive director of the Second Story Foundation, left, and Eric “Cowboy” Christensen, operations manager of the Second Story Ranch, stand inside the hay barn in Crete, Illinois. (Credit: Catrina Rawson, Illinois Farm Bureau)



A horse pulls a training sulky across open pasture during morning work at the Second Story Ranch in Crete, Illinois. (Credit: Catrina Rawson, Illinois Farm Bureau)

the early phase of recovery and single rooms available once residents begin external employment. Both buildings will serve as the core of an intensive support recovery home, paired with the foundation's Ranch Hands jobs program, medical and behavioral health partnerships, and long-term community integration services.

"The ranch has already shown what becomes possible when people are given time, stability, and community," said Bruce Bere, board chair of the Second Story Foundation. "The lodge and residence will strengthen that work and allow more men to rebuild their lives with dignity. As we enter this next phase, we hope those who believe in recovery, service, and second chances will stand with us to help finish this project."

The Second Story Foundation has already secured bipartisan support in Will County, including local officials, community partners, and the Will County Mental Health Board. The ranch has hosted service events, volunteer days, and early programming that demonstrate the long-term vision for the site. In April 2025, the foundation received \$88,000 from the Will County Community Mental Health Board for a community service partnership with the Recovery Community Center of Joliet, allowing participants in Problem Solving Courts to complete service hours at the ranch.

Construction timelines will be driven by fundraising progress. The foundation is pursuing county, state, and federal block grants while inviting support from individuals, companies, and charitable foundations. The organization is certified with SAM.gov and GATA and is working with multiple agencies to secure additional appropriations.

The Board Chair and community partners will be invited to join a series of site tours, briefings, and campaign events throughout 2026.

To support the development of long-term recovery housing at the Second Story Ranch Lodge and Residences, visit 2ndStoryFoundation.org.

Ryan Arnold

DeSoto & State Communications, Inc.

+1 773-789-9782

ryan@desotostate.com

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