



Institute for Senior Professionals  
Northwest Florida State College

## ISP Study Report

Prepared for

GRACE Rides, Inc.

(30 June, 2017)

Therapeutic Horsemanship Center

Business Plan Development

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# GRACE Rides

## *Equine-Assisted Therapy for Special Needs Individuals*

### Introduction

On November 7, 2017, the Chairman of the Board of Directors for GRACE Rides, Mr. Richard Comer, requested ISP assistance to develop a business plan that would help the executive team at GRACE Rides better understand what they must do in order to make GRACE Rides a sustainable business operation. (See Appendix A) In further discussions with the GRACE Rides board, it was discovered that GRACE Rides had recently received a significant grant from Impact100 and that they are moving their current operation in Niceville to DeFuniak Springs where they are planning to build a new Therapeutic Horsemanship Center. Because of the many changes in Grace Rides' property, location, assets, obligations, and service objectives, ISP could not obtain information for a concrete business plan. Mr. Comer modified his request to obtain a "business planning template" which could be used by Grace Rides' board and management going forward as key circumstances stabilize. Mr Comer felt that the process of developing a business plan would help focus the board's efforts during this critical time while encouraging them to set reasonable goals and understand their funding needs. The plan, once developed, could also be used to encourage future donors.

GRACE Rides is a charity founded for the purpose of improving the lives of children and youth with special needs (physical, cognitive and/or emotional disability) using horses and therapeutic techniques. GRACE Rides is an accredited member of the Professional Association for Therapeutic Horsemanship International ("PATH"), which provides standards for the provision of our services, and testing and certification of our instructors. Since 2009, GRACE Rides has provided equine-assisted activities and therapies at no charge to riders 2 years old and up, with a wide range of disability diagnoses including: autism, cerebral palsy, depression, Down syndrome, intellectual and cognitive impairment, hearing impairment, speech impairment, pervasive developmental delay, and traumatic brain injury.

## The Project at GRACE Rides

Due to an expanding need for the therapy sessions offered, GRACE Rides decided that they needed to move to a larger facility and over the past four years they have been making plans for the move. In 2016 they were awarded a significant grant from Impact100, which enabled them to proceed with the new construction.

GRACE Rides has grown from a pilot program of 4 riders per week in 2009 to an average of 25 riders per week (with more on a waiting list). Each year, at least 5,000 volunteer hours are invested, which enable GRACE Rides to provide some 900 therapy sessions each year. To date no payment has been required from participants. With the new facility, plans are to initially double the number of program participants served, and to continue increasing by at least 25% each year.

In order to improve and increase program services at GRACE Rides for children and youth with special needs, and for military warriors in the Okaloosa/Walton area, GRACE Rides is creating a unique, fully accessible equine therapy center for the disabled. The facility will be located between Crestview, Defuniak Springs and Niceville, in the center of our target service area. It will provide a 9000 square foot barn space, to house up to 14 therapy equines and their feed and supplies, on a 10-acre site to be deeded to GRACE Rides. GRACE Rides will also have a 20-year lease for use of an adjacent 20 acres of cleared, grassed and fenced land. This facility will provide six covered equine-work spaces for participants plus climate-controlled learning/activity space for therapy session activities to occur regardless of inclement weather, with attached handicap-accessible restrooms, tack rooms and program office space. (See appendix B)

The new facility will provide the only equine-assisted therapy center of its type in our area. Its completion will be a first step towards development of a premier campus for therapy, recreation, retreats and camps for disabled members of our community. The GRACE Rides vision expands beyond this accessible barn facility, to the addition in coming years of a covered arena, several miles of walking/riding nature trails, an amphitheater, cabin housing, and an auditorium/cafeteria, which can be shared with the community to help to cover program operating costs.

The facility will allow the program to increase the number of individuals served from the current 25 per week average to at least 75 per week average without the addition of a second instructor, and at least 150 per week average when a second instructor is added. GRACE Rides has a waiting list for participation, and they have also been approached to

provide services for clients of Sacred Heart's Early Steps Intervention Program, Emerald Coast Autism Center, Horizons, Children In Crisis, Rocky Bayou Christian School Special Education, Emerald Coast Wounded Warriors, and VA PTSD counseling centers near Eglin.

GRACE Rides' board of directors searched for nearly two years to find a real property parcel of at least 10 acres, within reasonable distance of everyone within the Okaloosa/Walton County area, and already suitably cleared, grassed and safely fenced for program needs, so that the expansion of the programs' services can become a reality. All of these prerequisites for a new location are met by the property at 2061 Corbin Gainey Road in Defuniak Springs. GRACE Rides' ability to make use of this property has been realized through the commitment of Steve and Sherry Hall, GRACE Rides' founding directors, who have purchased 30+ acres at this location. The Halls are providing GRACE Rides with deed to 10 acres of this parcel (separate from the Hall residence) where GRACE Rides can build its facilities. Through reduced mortgage payments, water and feed costs, etc GRACE Rides will realize a significant reduction in operating costs while expanding services.

The Halls will also provide GRACE Rides with use of an additional 20 acres of property under a lease contract. This dramatically increases GRACE Rides' available area for operations, and provides the program with property of its own, while decreasing the monthly facility expense. Other expense reductions are anticipated as a result of this relocation for items such as manure management (eliminating \$175 per month of current expense), water (eliminating about \$100 per month average expense, due to availability of an on-site well), and feed and hay costs, which should decrease by at least 30% due to availability of pasture grazing.

## List of People Contacted

Members of the ISP project team met multiple times with the GRACE Rides Board of Directors to discuss the business plan and the construction project. Luncheon meetings were supplemented with phone calls and periodic updates. ISP team members attended four of the GRACE Rides board meetings for updates to the progress at GRACE Rides and the ISP team was invited to lunch at the new facility in DeFuniak Springs where we viewed the facility and received an updated briefing on the construction of the new center. After each meeting changes/updates were added to the draft business plan.

### **GRACE Rides Board of Directors**

Chairman: Richard L. Comer, US Air Force (Retired), Niceville, FL.

Executive Director: Sherry Hall, DeFuniak Springs, FL.

Officer: Steven K. Hall, DeFuniak Springs, FL.

Member: Nancy Fox, Niceville, FL.

Member: Anne Jennette, Niceville, FL.

Member: Kristen Brooks, Shalimar, FL.

Member: Kim Wintner, US Air Force (Retired), Niceville, FL.

Administrative Assistant: Rachel Jordan

### **ISP Team Composition**

Rip Coleman, Chair

Bill Landsberg, member

Loyal Weaver, member

Mike Flint, member

Rudy Wright, member

Rich Comer, advisor (Chairman of Board at GRACE Rides)

## Business Plan Development

GRACE Rides shared extensive documentation for their business, including the Impact100 grant application, tax forms, budget sheets, facility plans, etc. There were also several marketing brochures and information on therapeutic horsemanship. There was, however, no documented business plan for this seven-year old business. The ISP Team felt it would be helpful if we consolidated much of the information provided into a "business plan template" for GRACE Rides to use as a starting point for developing their own business plan. After review by the ISP team, a business-planning template was provided to GRACE Rides, so that they could take ownership of the plan and revise/add to their new business plan as required. (see Appendix C)

## Observations Recommendations

A. After reviewing the operating budget for GRACE Rides, the ISP team recommended that GRACE Rides consider additional funding sources including charging a basic fee-for-service.

B. Senior Management must fully understand the liability issues that are associated with a therapeutic horsemanship center used by its own clients and clients from other groups.

C. Since the GRACE Rides Center will, primarily, be staffed by volunteers, an active recruiting program must be established and maintained for the long term.

D. A marketing study needs to be initiated ASAP to determine potential center users. The market study should consider the extent to which “potential center users” could properly include persons without developmental disabilities.

E. Security policies need to be developed and implemented to protect the assets of the center.

F. Barn and facility maintenance is critical and is a 24/7/365 requirement and procedures must be developed and implemented from the very beginning. Much of this can be done in-house.

G. There must be fund raising plans in place to raise a majority of the O&M funds required to sustain the Center, regardless of the additional usages from other organizations, which should be fee-for-service.

H. While providing a business plan template for GRACE Rides to use, we recommended that GRACE Rides treat their plan as a dynamic document to be referred to often and kept up to date for two reasons.

First, and foremost, it should be used to help run a company with a more cohesive vision, which should be shared by all employees/volunteers. A business plan is a roadmap. By periodically analyzing the plan for marketing, fund-raising needs, budgeting, goal-setting, etc., chances for success are greatly improved.

The second purpose of a business plan tends to be the reason most not-for-profit small business charities refer often to their plan and keep it continuously up to date. That is, individuals or other businesses/institutions will not donate to your company unless you can demonstrate that you have a roadmap to success.

## GRACE Rides Ground Breaking

As the ISP finalized this report, construction of the new barn for the GRACE Rides Therapeutic Horsemanship Center was underway. After nearly 2 years of searching for the right property, and nearly 2 years more of planning, surveys, topographic surveys, architectural work, site engineering work, structural engineering reviews, development order reviews, and building Dept reviews, GRACE Rides finally received its building permit approval began site work to RAISE A NEW BARN FACILITY for expanding its equine-assisted therapies and activities and equine-assisted learning programs.

*The photos at right shows an aerial view of the new center in DeFuniak Springs above and Mr Steve Hall at a fundraiser for the barn below.*



*The photo at right shows early construction in June, 2017 for the barn which is due to be completed in July.*





## **Attachments**

**Appendix A: Grace Rides Request Letter**

**Appendix B: Architect and Engineering Plans for Center**

**App B-1 GR Barn exterior**

**App B-2 GR Barn interior**

**Appendix C: Business Plan Template**

From: Grace Rides Therapeutic Riding Stables  
To: Northwest Florida State College Institute for Senior Professionals

7 November 2016

Dear Members of the ISP:

Grace Rides Therapeutic Riding has existed in a small area in Niceville for the past eight years. We recently applied for and won a grant from IMPACT 100 to help us build a new barn and move our operation to a place on the north side of Eglin's Range very near the border of Okaloosa and Walton Counties. We are also buying approximately 10 acres of land where we plan to build a cover for our riding arena which will make our riding schedule less dependent on good weather or moderate temperatures. These changes will make our small non-profit the owner of at least \$350K in properties, along with our dozen horses.

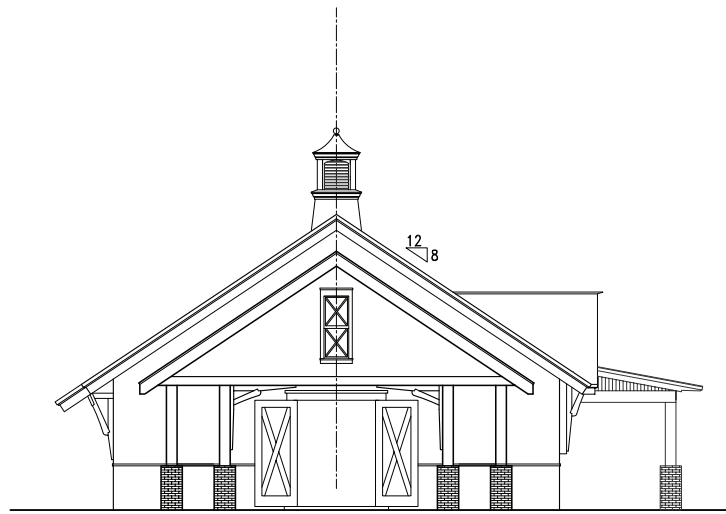
Our expanding operations and our plans are guided by our knowledge of need -- with over 100 people, mostly children, on our waiting list -- and our desire to meet that need. With our move to the new location, we intend to greatly expand our therapeutic riding to support a larger community of handicapped people in the two counties. As stated, our waiting list is long, and we have a long way to go to be able to meet the need. Our plans also include new clients, wounded warriors who respond well to working with horses. Your help can aid in making all these plans come to fruition.

We need your help in building a new business plan, detailing all that we must do in order to make Grace Rides sustainable. We can give you detail on our assets, our operations, and our sources of income. We depend on contributions, some regular and some occasional, one-time checks. We also depend on volunteers as, people who help us keep the barn cleaned up and who operate as side walkers, ensuring the safety of our handicapped riders. Volunteers and contributions have limits, but we don't really have a good handle on how much we must have of either. Detailing those requirements will allow us to challenge our fund-raising and volunteer numbers with accurate goals. Also, as we gain from your experience, we will learn from you how best we can support and grow our service to this community.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Kind regard,

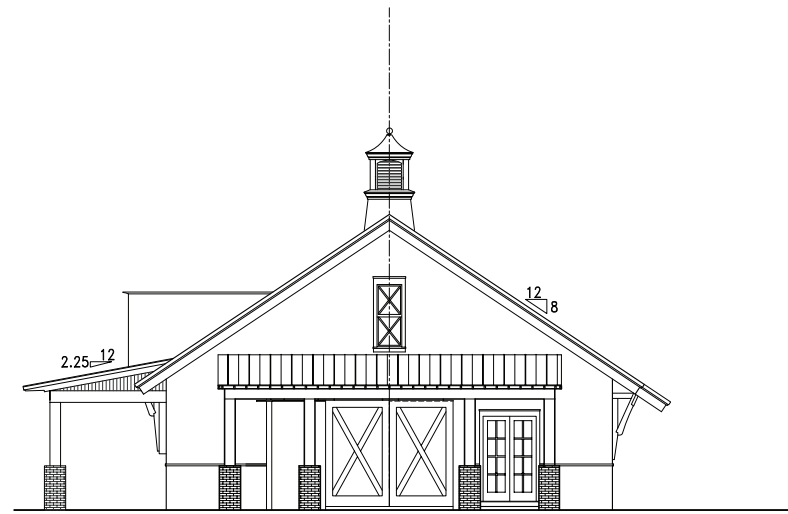
Richard Comer  
Chairman, Grace Rides Board of Directors



RIGHT SIDE ELEVATION

1/8"=1'-0"

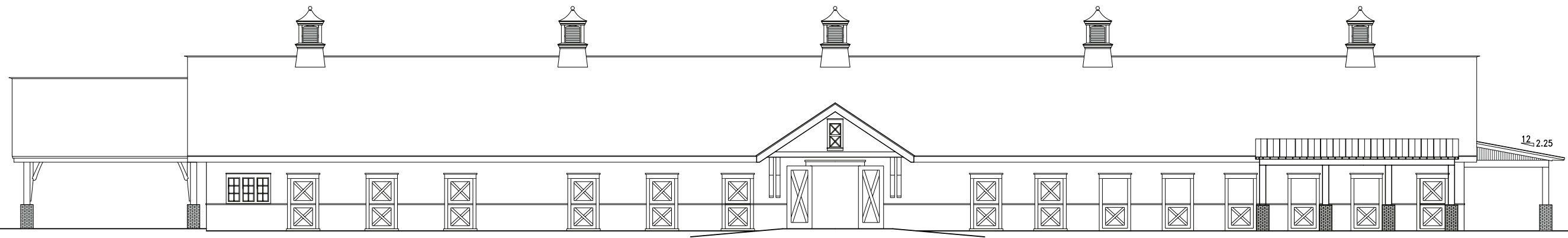
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LEFT SIDE ELEVATION

1/8"=1'-0"

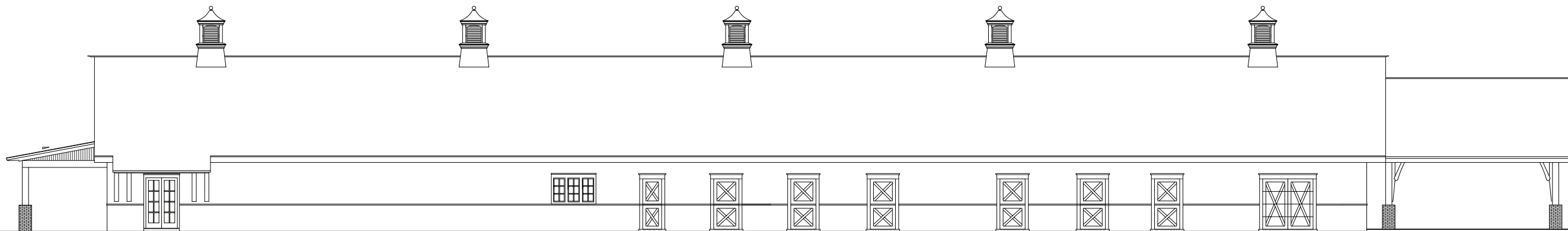
1  
A1.1



FACADE

1/8"=1'-0"

1  
A1.1



REAR ELEVATION

1/8"=1'-0"

1  
A1.1

1 2 3 4 5 6

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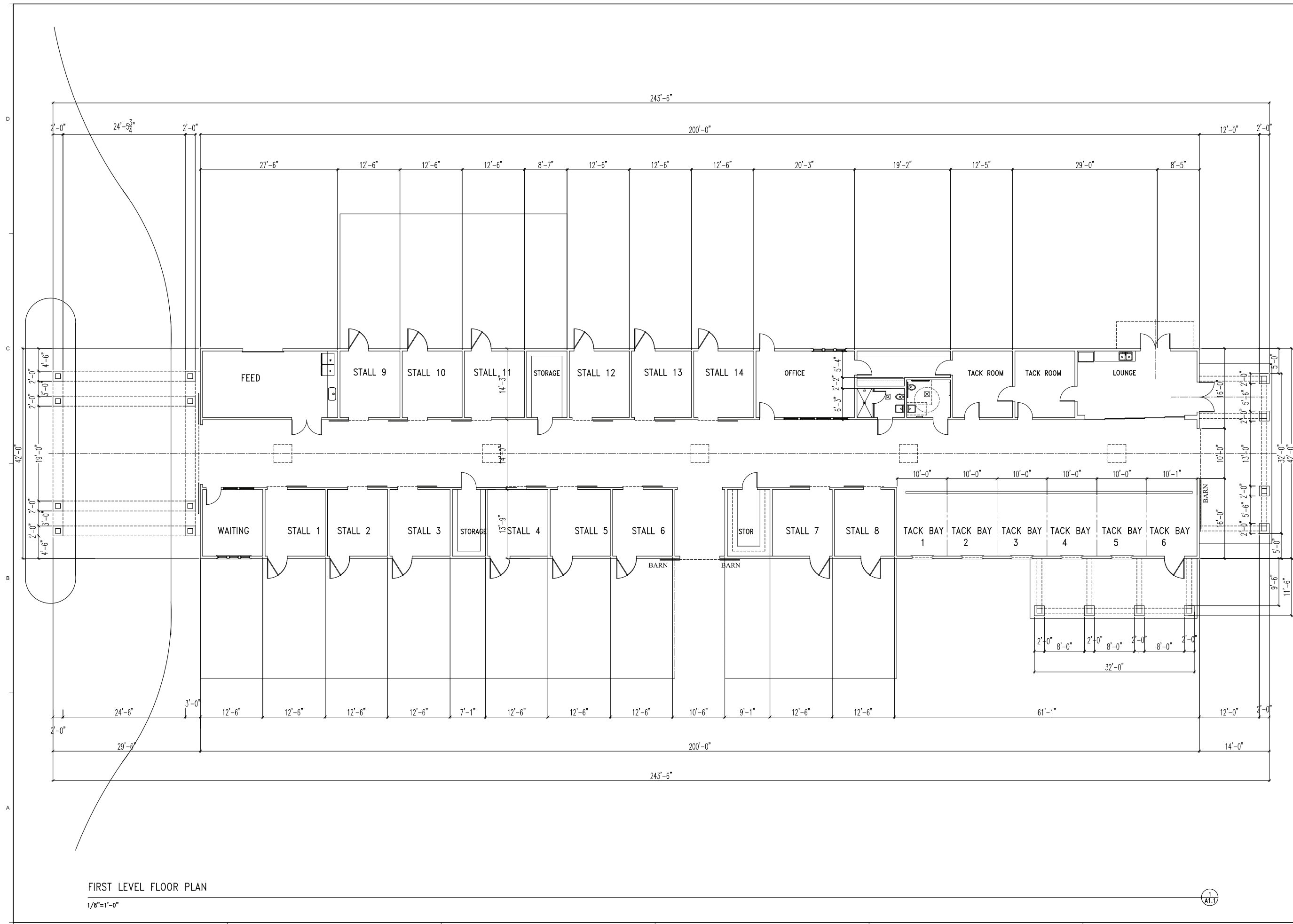
Structural Only

**GRACE RIDES**  
**2061 CORBIN GAINEY ROAD**  
**DEFUNIAK SPRINGS**  
**WALTON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

Revision:

Date:	No.:	Description:
10.16.15	1	DRB Submittal

Project No.: 1530  
 Date: October 17, 2016  
 Drawing Title:  
 ELEVATIONS  
 Drawn By: JS  
 Checked By: GC  
 Drawing No.: A1.2



FIRST LEVEL FLOOR PLAN

1/8"=1'-0"



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Structural Only

**GRACE RIDES**  
**2061 CORBIN GAINNEY ROAD**  
**DEFUNIAK SPRINGS**  
**WALTON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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Date	No.	Description
10.16.15	1	DRG Submittal

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Drawn By: JS  
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Drawing No.: A1.1



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*EA/EO*