



# West Virginia

## THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

February 2022

### **Common Denominator: Family**

I recently attended a gathering of horsemen and politicians concerned over the future of Thoroughbred racing in West Virginia, and how they could effect a positive solution for an industry that employees thousands.

To increase awareness, in the Halls of Charleston, the thought process of legislators in attendance leaned heavily on the progressive education of fellow lawmakers, particularly those with little to no exposure to the sport.

A second key issue addressed by policy-makers was for local horsemen, who reside and work in the Northern Panhandle, where horse racing is prominent, to communicate their situation to the inhabitants of the southern portion of West Virginia.

Obviously, the difficulty is to find a common denominator, since dramatic geographical, social and economic lines of diversity exist.

A method of unity came to me while sitting outside of church and watching the assemblage of parishioners file in for Sunday service. . . Family!

West Virginia's character is founded in the word family.

It is anchored in our Mountain heritage charm.

I believe horses inspire hope and each generation takes pride in their life's work, thus lets begin by charting just the surface of Charles Town's racing family heirloom.

This may provide a statewide link, justifying why racing's future is essential.

"My name is Paul Espinosa Jr and I am a 4th generation horsemen, presently the announcer at Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races and Slots. I graduated from West Virginia University, with a Degree in Journalism and horse racing is in my blood."

Paul's great-grandfather was Sam Gilman, a jockey's agent, and his grandfather is 83-year-old former jockey and multiple stakes-winning trainer Victor Espinosa.

His father is Paul Espinosa, who worked as Charles Town Races' Publicity Director in the 1980s and 90s, and is currently a Delegate for Jefferson County.

Paul's uncle Victor was employed by Equibase (official supplier of racing information and statistics), for over 20 years and aunts Mindy and Michelle have substantial experience working at the racetrack.

Betty and Hank Stehr made and shared a lifetime of memories at the racetrack before their ascension into heaven.

Originally from Durango, Colo., Betty was as comfortable on the back of a horse as the ground, while Hank born and raised in Pipestone, Minn., served in the Army during the Korean War and trained horses the better part of his life.

The couple are survived by some of the hardest-working and resilient individuals I've ever met.

Tony Stehr (son), an all-purpose horsemen, alongside his wife, Linda Dollinger-Stehr, have a farm on the outskirts of town, which is home to nearly every conceivable animal, while at the track, Linda ponies in the morning and their official trainer of record at night.

Joe Stehr (son) is a trainer-blacksmith-exercise rider, and his calloused hands tell a tale of sunup-to-sundown labors.

His wife Lyn manages a nearby grocery store and assists with the farm chores when needed.

Vicki Stehr (daughter), and her girl Tabitha help manage the farm, which includes multiple stallions and a variety of broodmares.

Like peas and carrots, these two live by the family credo, "If you try and lose, then it isn't your fault, but if you don't try and lose, then it is your fault."

In his meteoric rise, as one of the most influential Thoroughbred breeders in the state of West Virginia, James W. Casey, with his dearly departed wife, Eleanor, founded Taylor Mountain Farm, which remains the bellwether of excellence for the industry.

The success of their expansive operation is contingent upon his immediate family and dedicated crew in barn 11.

At 92 years old, Mr Casey is still actively involved in the stable's daily

routine, though generously assisted by son John and his partner Kristy Petty.

John and Kristy's son, Allen, is a fixture at their barn on Kabletown Road, and has become quite an athlete while attending Charles Town Middle School.

Dr. James M. Casey (eldest son) has trained and raced Thoroughbreds throughout the Mid-Atlantic and is a founding member of NAARV (North American Association of Racetrack Veterinarians), while sister Ann has taught school for over three decades.

◆  
Edwin "Punkie" Tobin is 63 years old and first stepped foot on the backstretch at the tender age of 6.

Along the way, many trials and tribulations have marked his path, but if you are fortunate to know this man, you'll realize every twist and turn in the road has been met with optimism and strength of purpose.

He is the embodiment of why the learning curve in this sport is so deep.

According to Punkie, you are either staying or straying.

Son, Josh Tobin (31), currently is on the starting gate crew and learned the horse business from the ground

up, having been a hot walker, groom and assistant trainer.

Punkie's daughters Rachel (37), his valued second in command for his modest stable, and Ashley (33), groom for trainer Lela Hanigan, are youthful in appearance, but old school in knowledge.

Punkie's brother Mike is a grizzled veteran of many turf wars, and due to his diminished physical capacity limited to holding horses for the blacksmith.

◆  
After holding numerous posts on the racetrack, Elizabeth Meehan struck-out on her own in 2000, and has not looked back as she continues to be a well-respected and hard-working trainer.

With mostly West Virginia-bred talent in her shedrow, Elizabeth, alongside her husband Jason, a supremely gifted blacksmith, have formed a strong bond of togetherness, as they raise their two children, Megan and Elias.

Elizabeth is a stout advocate for Aftercare Programs (finding homes for retired racehorses) and enjoys spending her spare time re-purposing those individuals.

Her love of horses has definitely been passed down to her shadow

and fellow horse enthusiast Megan, while son Elias is adept at anything mechanical.

Both parents assume he'll eventually master his father's profession.

◆  
By listing just five families, obviously this is only a microcosm of the myriad of households, whose past, present and future depend on horse racing, as their primary source of income.

Any disruption in this process will adversely affect the local/regional economy, outsource jobs to neighboring states and potentially destroy the fabric of a century old profession.

Political passivity could result in negative consequences.

If legislators could spend just one day on the backstretch, and familiarize themselves with this business, they would understand the unique nature of this industry and those who toil in service to it's heartbeat. . . the racehorse.

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams"  
- Eleanor Roosevelt.

## Benefits of Owning a WV-Bred and/or -Sired racehorse

### *Some of the best incentives in the nation!*

- A minimum of three accredited races are written every day at Charles Town exclusively for registered WV-bred and/or -sired horses.
- West Virginia has the only program in the country that permits horses to win state-bred races that do not count against the horse's lifetime open conditions.
- The WV Thoroughbred Development Fund distributes almost \$5 million to breeders, owners, and stallion owners of accredited WV-bred and/or -sired horses based the horse's annual earnings at Charles Town and Mountaineer Park racetracks.
- The West Virginia Breeders Classics pays out almost \$1 million in purses for WV-bred and/or -sired horses. It is held annually on the second Saturday in October.
- \$800,000 in purses are allocated for up to 16 WV accredited stakes races during the year.
- Supplemental Purse Awards of up to 10% of the winner's share of the purse to the owner, breeder, and/or sire owner of the accredited WV-bred and/or -sired winner.
- West Virginia offers year-round racing with approximately 300 race days per year.

### West Virginia Thoroughbred Breeders Association

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