



# Penn National Gaming backs out of deal to purchase Rosecroft

After assuring the Maryland Racing Commission of its intention to proceed with the purchase of Rosecroft Raceway with or without slots, Penn National Gaming, Inc. has backed out of the deal.

Announcement of the change in plans came on November 28—nine days after the slots legislation was approved.

Rosecroft is located in Prince Georges County, a jurisdiction specifically excluded from the slots program.

The Maryland Racing Commission

had voted on October 23, at its regular monthly meeting, to approve the transfer of Rosecroft Raceway to Penn Maryland LLC, a subsidiary of Penn National Gaming, Inc. The purchase price was reported to be \$20 million, and settlement was expected to take place in late November.

Since 1995, Rosecroft has been owned and operated by Cloverleaf Enterprises Inc. (CEI), a subsidiary of the track's horsemen's group, Cloverleaf Standardbred Owners Association.

The deal with Penn National marked the fourth time that CEI has entered into an agreement to sell Rosecroft.

Although each deal has been derailed (for various reasons), CEI has come away with a financial windfall—from a forfeited deposit—on each occasion.

Meanwhile, the failed bids have been costly to the state. The Maryland Racing Commission, which must give its approval in order for a race track to change hands, incurs substantial expense in analyzing agreements such as these.



**MTHA**  
6314 Windsor Mill Road  
Baltimore, Maryland 21207

**December 2007**

## Thoughts and comment

The Legislature has done its work. Now it's up to us.

In November 2008, voters throughout the state will decide yes or no on the slots program approved last month by the Maryland General Assembly.

This truly is a turning point for the industry.

We urge you—if you are not already registered to vote, do so immediately.

Do your best to make sure that your entire family and all of your friends and acquaintances are registered. And make sure they understand the consequences of this ballot question.

Citizens in this state have been given

the power to decide on something that will be of great benefit to their communities, not just the racing industry.

Schools will derive vitally needed funding.

Local services such as police forces will have better resources to do their jobs.

And many businesses, some of them owned by minorities and women, will find new opportunities to flourish.

Some people predict that this referendum will be an easy victory. But overconfidence on our part could lead to serious trouble.

See *Thoughts*, page 3



# The Horsemen's Newsletter

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## Jockeys' insurance fee drops to \$250 for 2008

The fee that each Maryland owner and trainer pays to provide jockeys' workers' compensation coverage has been set at \$250 for 2008. This is a \$125 decrease from 2007.

The fee is set on an annual basis, and determined by the number and types of claims and by the number of licensees among whom the cost is distributed.

The MTHA continues to advocate for a change in the fee structure that would establish a lower assessment for owners who participate exclusively in partnerships. However, that adjustment will require a change in state law.

Meanwhile, as always, the advantages of Maryland's workers' compensation

See *Insurance*, page 3



**Lou Raffetto** (far right) and his wife, **Fran**, are shown at the MTHA Christmas Party with MTHA President **Richard Hoffberger** (far left) and Maryland Horsemen's Assistance Fund (MHAF) President **Rich Meyer**. Mrs. Raffetto, who worked in the Racing Office and devoted personal time and energy to raising funds for benevolence on the race track, presented a parting gift to the MHAF.

## MTHA Christmas Party sparkles with outstanding achievers

Photographs courtesy of Jim McCue

**H**undreds of people, including horsemen, guests and state dignitaries, gathered for the MTHA's Annual Christmas Party and Awards Ceremony on December 2 at Laurel Park.

MTHA President Richard Hoffberger presented awards to:

### ZWP Stable Outstanding Owner

There were supposed to be 17 partners in their group when they bought their first horse back in 1992. But only three of them—Z, W and P—actually came through.

See *Annual Awards*, page 2



**FORD WILGS (left) and DAVID PICARELLO**

### MTHA Board of Directors

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### Synopsis of slots legislation posted on MTHA Web site

Visit the MTHA Web site at [www.mdhorsemen.com](http://www.mdhorsemen.com) to find key elements of the slots bills approved last month in the special session of the Maryland General Assembly.

The bills contain details of the slots program that will take effect if approved in a statewide referendum to take place in November 2008.

The synopsis posted on the Web site was prepared by Bruce C. Spizler, Senior Assistant Attorney General and Counsel to the Maryland Racing Commission.



## Annual awards, from page 1

Soon the partnership narrowed to two—the W and P, Foard Wilgis and David Picarello.

The other 15 individuals will never have a grander opportunity.

ZWP Stable's accomplishments rival that of any Maryland owner in history. And it all started with a \$5,500 auction yearling. That was the price they paid for Cherokee Wonder at the 1992 Fasig-Tipton Midlantic December Mixed sale.

Trained by Gary Capuano, who has conditioned all of the ZWP horses, Cherokee Wonder won two stakes and earned nearly \$300,000. Then she produced as her first foal Cherokee's Boy (by Citidancer), who carried the ZWP colors to victory in 14 stakes and earned nearly \$1.2 million.

Cherokee's Boy retired to stud at Maryland Stallion Station in Glyndon, and his first foals were born this year.

Avid horseplayers, Mr. Wilgis and Mr. Picarello used their winnings from a handicapping contest to bankroll their start in horse ownership. Every dollar their horses have earned has gone back into the business, said Mr. Wilgis. They currently have about a dozen horses, including two in training.

Mr. Wilgis works as a transportation coordinator on the sets for movies and TV shows in Baltimore; Mr. Picarello owns a health food store.

Soon, Mr. Wilgis intends to retire from his day job and spend most of his time overseeing their horse operation. His motivation is simple: "I just like being around horses," he said.

### Christopher W. Grove Outstanding Trainer

Chris Grove likes to joke that he's lived his life in the shadow of his father and his son.

This year, however, the spotlight was squarely on him. In his best season to date, Mr. Grove won eight stakes (as of December 2) with three different horses—to rank as Maryland's current leading stakes trainer.

Mr. Grove's work over the past few years with Silmaril and Lexi Star has

brought him national attention. Together those two mares—owned and bred by Steve and Sue Quick (with Christopher Feifarek as a partner in Silmaril)—have won 14 stakes races and earned over \$1.4 million.

Mr. Grove took out his trainer's license 10 years ago, and worked as an exercise rider for several years before that.

He has been a source of great pride for his father, Phil Grove, a former champion jockey who serves as a steward at Maryland tracks. Most important of all, he is a role model for his two sons, including 8-year-old Noah, a budding athlete whose successful battle with cancer inspired an unprecedented outpouring of support by the racing community at the "Night for Noah" in February 2005.

### Jose S. Ramos Outstanding Backstretch Employee—Bowie

Jose Ramos is "the best—and the nicest—person I've ever had working for me," said his boss, Nancy Heil.

Although she's had good help, "Jose goes way beyond that," Ms. Heil explained. "He's wonderful with horses, and people. Patient, skilled and considerate."

Mr. Ramos came to the U.S. from his native Honduras in 1993, and worked in Florida before settling in Maryland. He was employed by trainer Katy Voss at Bowie for about 10 years, and stayed on at Bowie after Ms. Voss left. For the past six months, he's worked for Ms. Heil.

Mr. Ramos learned English through the classes that the MTHA sponsors on the backstretch, and his excellent command of the language enhances his ability to do his job. He is also applying for U.S. citizenship.

Mr. Ramos could not accept his award in person because he'd gone back to Honduras to renew his immigration status.

### Molla Sletzinger Outstanding Backstretch Employee—Laurel

For nearly 18 years, James W. Murphy—one of Maryland's all-time top trainers—has banked on Molla Sletzinger's skills as an exercise rider.

"She's very steady, and conscientious. And she never misses a day," said Mr. Murphy.

The list of good horses that Mrs. Slet-



MOLLA SLETZINGER

zinger has helped develop for Mr. Murphy speaks volumes. It includes My Frenchman, Algar and Double Sixes.

Mrs. Sletzinger grew up in Sweden, near Stockholm, and began working at Sweden's only race track when she was 15. She rode her own horses as an amateur jockey before coming to this country 22 years ago.

She was a stay-at-home mom for a few years, and then found the job with Mr. Murphy. The hours have been ideal, said Mrs. Sletzinger, allowing her to finish her work early in the day and still have time with her family.

And she's been lucky to have a job she enjoys. "I absolutely love to ride," she said.

### Damon Gladden Outstanding Backstretch Employee—Pimlico

Damon Gladden is one of those fortunate people who mapped out their life's career in high school. He was born and raised in Baltimore City, and got a summer job as a hotwalker at Pimlico in 1986.

Except for a few years in California, he's worked as a groom on the Pimlico backstretch ever since.

He was with his first employer, Al Goodman, for five years. Then he worked for a number of different trainers.

Three and a half years ago, when Crystal Pickett started her own stable, Damon went with her.

Ms. Pickett considers Mr. Gladden more than an employee. "He's also my friend," she says. And she adds that "Damon is a very caring individual who is always pleasant to be around."

The fact that Mr. Gladden speaks Spanish, as well as English, makes him extra valuable. "It's a big help to all of us," said Ms. Pickett. "He communicates with the other employees, and the younger ones look up to him as their role model."

Chris Gladden



CHRIS GROVE

## Raffetto, from page 1

MTHA President Richard Hoffberger. "Lou's breadth of knowledge in regard to racing—and his passion for the business—were invaluable on those occasions when we searched for common ground. We had the same goal: to help Maryland racing make the best use of its limited resources during this time of unprecedented competition, and eventually to guide it back to prosperity."

Mr. Raffetto, 57, has made a lifelong career in racing. He grew up in New Jersey, near Monmouth Park, and worked at that track part-time throughout high school and college. A 1972 graduate of Georgetown University, he briefly trained a public stable in New Jersey and Pennsylvania in 1973 and '74, then went to work at Monmouth, where he rose through the ranks to become assistant

racing secretary in 1977. He was the racing secretary at Laurel from 1978 to '84, and also held that post at Hialeah in 1981 and '82. Mr. Raffetto left Laurel to become Monmouth's assistant general manager, a role he filled from 1985 to 1991. Before returning to Maryland, he spent 10 years as executive vice-president of Suffolk Downs.

The Maryland Jockey Club's new president and chief operating officer is Chris Dragone, who briefly served as Laurel/Pimlico general manager in 2006 and most recently was executive director of New York Thoroughbred Breeders, Inc.

"We harbor no ill-will toward Mr. Dragone," said Mr. Hoffberger. "While we consider Mr. Raffetto's departure to be a great loss, our feelings are not directed toward Mr. Dragone. Although with reluctance, the MTHA must turn its focus toward working with the new management at this critical juncture for the industry."

## IN MEMORIAM

**Merrall MacNeille**, who served as a steward in Maryland from 1956 until his retirement in 1978, died on November 19. He was 98.

Mr. MacNeille went to work at the tracks in 1948 and performed various roles in the racing office until being promoted to steward. With his wife of 57 years, the former Margie Fisher, he continued to maintain their 200-acre King's Eye Farm near Butler, Md., to the end of his life.

**Patsy Grant**, 86, a former trainer and longtime steward at Charles Town, died on November 8.

**Harold O. "Puppy" Douglas, Jr.**, a longtime valet at Maryland tracks, died on November 29 at the age of 59.

## Recreation report

From Dan Mangum,  
MTHA Recreation Director.

### Basketball

The winter basketball league will get underway by mid-January at Meade High School in Laurel. If you'd like to participate, call Dan at (410) 437-4405 as soon as possible.

### Poker

A mock Texas hold'em tournament is scheduled for January 14, starting at

## Horsemen's calendar

### RACING

**Laurel** ..... Now through April 12  
**Pimlico** ..... April 17 through date to be announced

### FASIG-TIPTON MIDLANTIC AUCTIONS AT TIMONIUM

(410) 392-5555

**Winter Mixed** ..... Feb. 4

(410) 265-6842; fax (410) 265-6841;

e-mail: mdhorsemen@erols.com

Web site: www.mdhorsemen.com

### OUT-OF-STATE AUCTIONS

**Keeneland January Horses of All Ages**

Lexington, Ky. (800) 456-3412. .... Jan. 7-14

**Ocala Breeders' Sales Company Mixed**

Ocala, Fla. (352) 237-2154. .... Jan. 16-19

**Fasig-Tipton Kentucky Winter Mixed**

Lexington, Ky. (859) 255-1555. .... Feb. 10, 11

## Thoughts, from page 4

There is considerable opposition, and our opponents have substantial means, both physical and financial.

This will be one of the most important votes any of us will ever cast.

So I urge you to begin thinking ahead to next November—and help turn the referendum into a resounding victory for Thoroughbred racing, as well as all of Maryland.

/Arnold A. Heft,  
MTHA Director,  
Legislative Committee Chairman

## Insurance, from page 1

program for jockeys far outweigh the fee.

Maryland was a pioneer in securing this vital coverage. It is provided through a nonprofit corporation known as the Maryland Jockey Injury Compensation Fund, Inc., established in 1986 and managed by members of the Maryland Racing Commission.

For more information, contact the Commission's executive director, Mike Hopkins, at (410) 853-1672.

noon, at Bowie. To reserve your spot call Dan at (410) 437-4405.

### Donations

The following generous people recently donated clothing, reading material and/or other items for distribution on the backstretch: J.D. Brown, Kay Christman, Robin Fulco, Gene Gilhooley, Sylvia and Arnold Heft, John and Cathy Heisler, Thomas Leeds, Buck Minderlein, Claire Minderlein, Butch Morgenstern and Dave Siuta.

### Ocala Breeders' Sales Company Selected Two-Year-Olds in Training

Ocala, Fla. (352) 237-2154. .... Feb. 12

### Fasig-Tipton Florida Selected Two-Year-Olds in Training

Calder Race Course, Miami, Fla.

(859) 255-1555. .... Feb. 26

### Ocala Breeders' Sales Company Adena Springs Two-Year-Olds in Training

Ocala, Fla. (352) 237-2154. .... March 17

### Ocala Breeders' Sales Company Selected Two-Year-Olds in Training

Ocala, Fla. (352) 237-2154. .... March 18, 19

### Ocala Breeders' Sales Company Spring Two-Year-Olds in Training

Ocala, Fla. (352) 237-2154. .... April 21-24