



The Horsemen's f Newsletter

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Participation In Pension Plan Grows

Participation in the Maryland Backstretch Pension Fund continued to increase this year, as 328 individuals signed up for Plan Year 2018.

Sign-up was available at Laurel Park for two weeks, followed by a week at Pimlico Race Course and, for the first time, one day at Fair Hill Training Center in late May. There were 236 sign-ups at Laurel, 64 at Pimlico and 28 at Fair Hill.

Since Plan Year 2015, the number of sign-ups has increased 12.3% and has grown each year over the four-year period.

The MTHA Board of Directors earlier this year approved an 87.5% increase in the organization's annual contribution to the fund—from

\$400,000, which it had been since Plan Year 2015, to \$750,000.

Contributions to the fund—available to Maryland-based trainers, grooms, exercise riders, hot walkers, pony persons and stable foremen—are allocated based on the ratio of a participant's points to total points of all participants. Each participant must hold a Maryland Racing Commission license.

Full vesting in the fund is reached after three years of participation.

The Maryland Backstretch Pension Plan is yet another perk of being a member of the Maryland racing community and a further example of how Thoroughbred racing supports its workforce in Maryland.



Scholarship Fund Deadline Fast Approaching

The MTHA, Maryland Jockey Club, Maryland Horse Breeders Association and Maryland Racing Media Association remind all industry stakeholders that the deadline for applications for scholarships is July 15, so get your applications in soon.

The program awards meaningful scholarships to students who work within Maryland's horse industry on the backstretches of Laurel Park or Pimlico or are employed on Thoroughbred farms in the state, and this year about \$60,000 – the most in the history of the program – is available to those who qualify.



The groups urge everyone to spread the word that this pool of money is available.

Scholarship recipients will be selected by a committee made up of representatives from each contributing organization.

Other sponsors of the program in 2019 include the Maryland State Fair as well as longtime supporters – The Higgins Foundation and Maryland Horsemen's Assistance Foundation.

The application process has shifted from a paper-based system through U.S. mail to online through a new Maryland Thoroughbred Indus-

try Scholarship Fund website: www.mdthoroughbredscholarship.com.

The website lists specific requirements of the program.

Organizers are planning to present the scholarships during a live racing ceremony, most likely Maryland Pride Day at Laurel Park on Aug. 17, the final weekend before racing shifts to the Maryland State Fair at Timonium.

The Backstretch Scholarship program has been on hiatus for the past few years after being administered by MRMA for many years.

The new program is an industry-wide collaborative effort modeled after the very successful Beyond The Wire Thoroughbred Aftercare program designed to facilitate safe and enriching placements for retired Maryland based racehorses.

MTHA and MJC Finalizes Rich Stakes Schedule for 2019

Starting June 16 and running through Dec. 28, there will be 42 stakes clustered on nine racing days. The other stakes days are July 14, Aug. 17, Sept. 21, Sept. 28, Nov. 16, Nov. 30 and Dec. 7. The Maryland Million program is scheduled for Oct. 19.

Several new stakes have been added including the Prince George's County and Big Dreyfus, both at 1 1/16 miles on the turf June 16; the Weather Vane, a dirt sprint for

3-year-old fillies, Sept. 21; and two 2-year-old turf sprints – the Howard County and Anne Arundel County – Sept. 28.

The MTHA Board of Directors at its most recent meeting agreed to raise the purse of the Selima Stakes, for 2-year-old fillies at 1 1/16 miles on the grass, from \$100,000 to \$200,000 to match the purse of the companion Laurel Futurity for males. Those race are part of an eight-stakes program Sept. 21.

Letter To Horsemen From Chris Merz:

Congratulations to everyone on an outstanding record-breaking Preakness weekend! It is something that everyone should be proud of! Let's keep the momentum going into the Laurel Summer Meet!

As we continue to improve Maryland racing into one of the premier jurisdictions in the country we also have to take note of things we must improve on and make better. With this ever changing landscape of racing we must do what we can to be ahead of the curve and be proactive instead of reactive.

Over the next few months MJC, the MTHA and other industry leaders will be coming up with best practice protocols for safety and in-



tegrity. Just recently at Santa Anita they escorted trainer Marcelo Polanco off the grounds for "Program Training". This is just one example of conduct will not be tolerated. I encourage anyone that may be training under another person's name or a trainer letting someone use their name to train to look at the incident at Santa Anita of something that could happen if caught.

We are at a very critical time in our industry and as stated before we must be proactive instead of reactive. Please take it upon yourself to do what you can to make not only Maryland Racing better, but the industry better as well.

- Chris Merz, MJC Racing Secretary

Maryland Trainers Fare Well In Pimlico Bonus

Maryland-based trainers were prominent in the standings of two bonus programs offered by the Maryland Jockey Club during Preakness weekend.

The \$100,000 challenge tied to starters in the 16 stakes over two days was led by invaders Brad Cox and Steve Asmussen, who won \$50,000 and \$25,000 respectively. Fair Hill-based Graham Motion was third (\$12,000), followed by Todd Pletcher (\$7,000), Fair Hill-based Arnaud Delacour (\$4,000) and Laurel Park- and Fair Hill-based Mike Trombetta.

Ron Moquett, who has had horses based at Laurel in the past, placed first (\$25,000) in the \$50,000 challenge based on non-stakes May 17-18. Motion was second (\$10,000), followed by Laurel-based Jeremiah O'Dwyer (\$7,500); Jeremiah Englehart (\$4,000), who has a string at Laurel; Pletcher (\$2,500); and Laurel-based Damon Dilodovico (\$1,000).

The bonuses are designed to encourage participation in the MJC's two biggest programs of the year. Large fields and favorable weather led to record pari-mutuel handle on Black-Eyed Susan Stakes Day (\$22.28 million) and Preakness Day (\$99.85 million).



Rec Report

Spring Golf Tournament

On May 28 we held the MTHA Golf Tournament at Walden Country Club.

Coming in first place in the tournament was Paul Plymire, Jay "Shug" Burris, Kenny Cox and Robbie Bailes.

Finishing in second place was Anthony Farrior, Denny Johnson and Ted Johnson.

Third place went to the team of JD Brown, Alphonso Griffin, Al Letle and Fred Whiteside.

Erik Fowble won the closest to the pin contest nailing a shot 9 inches from the hole and Jeremy McFarlane won the longest drive competition.

Look for the fall tournament details soon. Call Marty Leonard at (203) 733-1367 with any ideas or for more details.

Softball & Poker

Softball and Poker will both be coming back in the month of June. Poker will be on Tuesday, June 11 in the Laurel Park Rec room and Softball will be on Tuesday, June 18 at the driving range directly across the street from Laurel Park on Rt. 198.

Turf Starter Allowance Series Begins June 16



The MTHA Board in May approved a purse schedule for a new turf starter allowance series that begins June 16 at Laurel Park.

There will be four divisions – two each for males and females going short and long on the grass – in June, July and August. Purses will be as follows: \$30,000, \$35,000 and \$40,000 for rounds one, two and three, respectively. A \$50,000 turf marathon will be held in September.

All the starter series races are for horses that have started claiming price of \$16,000

or less since June 1, 2018. On June 16, the sprints will be run at five furlongs and the distance races at one mile.

The turf series is similar to a dirt series held during the winter at Laurel. MJC Racing Secretary Chris Merz said the series was a success, and that the 1 1/4-mile event, which drew a full field, generated more than \$400,000 in wagering.

"We'd like to have more series moving forward," Merz said.

Diagnostic Equipment Will Focus On Detecting Bone Injuries

Santa Anita Park will soon have a standing equine positron emission tomography scanner, a device that has been used in recent years at University of California-Davis School of Veterinary Medicine to detect bone injuries in horses.

Santa Anita is owned by The Stronach Group, which also owns the Maryland Jockey Club racetracks. The equipment is part of an overall program to improve the health and safety of racehorses as well as reduce the chances of catastrophic injury.

A release from UC-Davis said an imaging group has been looking for a solution to difficulties with early injury detection for several years, and the work has led to a real-world application of the most powerful system to detect

bone injuries in racehorses. Veterinarians and researchers will use a new PET scanner to identify patterns of stress remodeling in the fetlock and assess how they are affected by training and track conditions. The long-term goal is to use the technique as a screening tool to identify horses at risk of catastrophic breakdowns.

"We cannot overstate how significant an advancement this is in equine diagnostic imaging and it is a natural fit here at Santa Anita," said Dr. Rick Arthur, California Horse Racing Board Equine Medical Director. "This is one more example of how the horse racing industry and horses benefit from working closely with UC-Davis."

Positron emission tomography uses a small

dose of radioactivity to detect changes in bone or soft tissue at the microscopic level. Using a ring of detectors, it acquires data in three dimensions, allowing for precise detection of subtle changes, which can be early signs of compromised structures.

The modality can also distinguish between active and inactive lesions – ones that are currently causing clinical signs as opposed to ones that caused issues in the past, respectively – which can help pinpoint areas of concern, the release said.

The new machine is important in that it doesn't require a horse to be anesthetized. Dr. Mathieu Spriet worked with LONGMILE imaging, a division of Brain Biosciences Inc., to develop a scanner to image standing horses.

In January 2019, the first PET scan on a standing horse was performed at UC-Davis. Using an initial scanner prototype, research horses' feet were imaged without anesthesia. The new scanner will be validated at UC-Davis this summer with support from the Center for Equine Health before it is installed at Santa Anita for its fall race meet.

"The MILE-PET is a project that has been long in the work and is now going to be deployed where it fits the best, at the racetrack at Santa Anita," Spriet said in the release. "It is very exciting that the product of our research, with the support of the industry, will now be able to help the fascinating world of horse racing."

TSG earlier said it would make a "substantial investment" in diagnostic equipment to aid in early detection of pre-existing conditions in racehorses.

Wagering Records Set Preakness Weekend

Two strong programs put together by the Maryland Jockey Club racing office combined with favorable weather conditions to fuel pari-mutuel handle records for Preakness Day (May 18) and Black-Eyed Susan Day (May 17) at Pimlico Race Course.

The Saturday Preakness Stakes card of 14 races generated all-sources wagering of \$99,852,653, which topped the previous mark of \$97,168,658 in 2017. This year's handle was up 6.6% from the 2018 figure of \$93,655,128, according to track statistics.

The Friday Black-Eyed Susan Stakes program, also 14 races, produced total wagering of \$22,281,300. The previous

record of \$19,895,000 was established in 2017. This year's handle was up 19.8% from \$18,591,000 in 2018.

Last year the weather was less than ideal with rain, heavy at times, on both days, which led to scratches and several off-the-turf races.

Field size for May 18 averaged 9.71 horses, while the May 17 program averaged 9 horses per race. The two-day average was a solid 9.35.

Preakness Day attendance was reported at 131,256. The reported crowd at Pimlico for Black-Eyed Susan Day was a record 51,573.



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MTHA Pickup Softball Games

The MTHA Recreation Program will be hosting pickup softball games for horsemen on Tuesday afternoons at 12:30 p.m. starting June 18.

Played on the softball fields at the Laurel Golf Center and Recreation Center across from Laurel Park on Route 198, everyone is welcome to join the fun.

Call MTHA Recreation Program administrator Marty Leonard at (203) 733-1367 for more information.



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