



Volume 3
Newsletter



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A message from OHHA General Manager **Brian Tropea**

Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program: Bridging the Gap with Hands-On Experience

The Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program is currently looking for more stables to partner with us to address the need for more individuals to get involved in the equine industry. This program aims to provide aspiring horse lovers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and practical experience to pursue a rewarding career in the equine industry. In this article, we will delve into the importance of stables signing up to offer hands-on experience as a crucial component of this program.

The Need for Hands-On Experience:

1. Practical Application of Knowledge:

While theoretical knowledge is essential, hands-on experience is invaluable when it comes to working with horses. It enables students to apply their theoretical learning in real-life situations, honing their skills and deepening their understanding of equine care, handling, and management. By signing up to offer hands-on experience, stables play a vital role in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Employers may be eligible for wage subsidies when hiring someone from the Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program. To qualify for wage subsidies stables must be a registered business, with a payroll, liability insurance and provides WSIB or similar accident coverage for employees.

2. Skill Development:

The equine industry demands a diverse range of skills, including horse handling, grooming, feeding, basic veterinary care, and stable management. By providing hands-on experience, stables offer students a unique opportunity to acquire and refine these skills under the guidance of experienced professionals. This practical exposure helps develop confidence, competence, and a strong work ethic - all crucial attributes for a successful equine career.

3. Networking and Mentorship:

Stables that participate in the Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program not only offer hands-on experience but also serve as a platform for networking and mentorship. Students get the chance to interact with industry professionals, learn from their experiences, and build valuable connections that can open doors to future employment opportunities. This mentorship aspect fosters a sense of community within the equine industry and promotes lifelong learning.

4. Tailored Learning Opportunities:

Each stable brings its unique set of horses, facilities, and management strategies. By having stables sign up for the

program, students gain exposure to different equine environments and a variety of horse breeds, temperaments, and disciplines. This diversity enriches their learning experience, ensuring a well-rounded education that prepares them for the dynamic nature of the equine industry.

5. Real-Life Challenges:

Working with horses can be unpredictable, and there's no better way to prepare students for the realities of the industry than through hands-on experience. Stables that participate in the program expose students to the challenges and problem-solving scenarios they are likely to encounter in their future careers. This practical exposure fosters adaptability, critical thinking, and resilience - qualities that are highly sought after in the equine industry.



The Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program is a commendable initiative that aims to equip individuals with the skills and experience needed to thrive in the equine industry. By having stables sign up to offer hands-on experience, the program ensures that students receive a comprehensive education that combines theory with practical application. This invaluable opportunity not only enhances their skillset but also fosters a passion for horses and a lifelong commitment to the equine industry. So, let's encourage more stables to participate in this program, creating a brighter future for both aspiring equine professionals and the industry.

Remember, if you require more information or need assistance with anything else, feel free to contact the OHHA office.



President's Message

Jim Whelan

As we near the completion of our second year delivering the Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program, I want to take time to thank our partners, Equine Guelph, VIP Working Solutions, the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and Minister Monte McNaughton and of course, our Premier Doug Ford. A special acknowledgement to the dedicated OHHA staff, our participating employers and of course all of our fine graduates.

It's been a labour of love for all involved as we have seen our program grow from an idea into a conception and now a success story producing valuable skilled and dedicated workers in the equine agricultural industry. And as we grow, learn and adjust, we are confident that we have just begun to scratch the surface of professionalizing our business operations and spreading the good word that our multi-billion dollar industry is a valuable asset to the overall Ontario economy. Our industry produces thousands of directly related and spin-off jobs, vital to our rural economy and the promotion and sustenance of the people

who make their homes in smaller Ontario towns and communities. Taxes collected from payroll, sales and income taxes go towards essential services that the people of Ontario rely upon. Make no mistake, the equine agricultural industry punches above its weight when it comes to the government's return on investment. We are proud of that fact.

The next year will present the usual challenges but within that test exists opportunity for us to modernize the way we do business. Thanks to our government's belief in, and support for rural Ontario, our best days are ahead of us. So let's drive on. Together.

Slainte,
Jim

NOTICE OF ELECTION

Ontario Harness Horse Association Announces Upcoming Election for Tuesday December 12, 2023

Campbellville Ontario

The Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) is excited to announce the upcoming election for board positions, set to take place on the second Tuesday of December. This election presents a valuable opportunity for passionate individuals to contribute to the development and growth of the equine industry in Ontario.

If you are interested in running for a position on the OHHA board, we encourage you to contact our office for further information. Nominations are due at the OHHA office by the end of October. We invite all dedicated and enthusiastic individuals with a deep commitment to the equine industry to consider this opportunity to make a difference.

The OHHA board plays a crucial role in representing the interests of our members and ensuring the continued success of the equine industry in Ontario. By joining the board, you have the chance to actively contribute to the shaping of policies, fostering positive relationships, and promoting the equine industry throughout the Province.

We believe in the power of collaboration, and the OHHA board provides an excellent platform to connect with other passionate individuals who share the same love

for horses. By working together, we can create a vibrant and sustainable future for the industry, ensuring its continued success for generations to come.

For more information on the OHHA board election, nomination process, or any other inquiries, please contact the OHHA office at 905-854-6442

About Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA):

The Ontario Harness Horse Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to representing the interests of horse people in Ontario. We strive to promote and support the equine industry by advocating for fair and equitable policies, fostering positive relationships, and providing valuable resources to our members. OHHA currently administers and delivers the Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program, educating and finding employment for individuals looking to work in the equine industries.

OHHA also provides a life, health and dental insurance program as well as the standardbred industry, Ontario Harness Horse Association Registered Retirement Savings Plan, developed and administered by OHHA since 1998.

Contact OHHA at 905-854-6442 or email info@ohha.ca

OHHA RRSP Reminder

Horsepeople are reminded that the deadline for contributing to the Ontario Harness Horse Association's Group RRSP is December 1, 2023.

To ensure that contributions are received in the OHHA office on or before December 1, 2023, it is advised that members send them as soon as possible to ensure that they are delivered prior to the deadline. If you are mailing your forms, you may want to consider a guaranteed delivery service, such as Canada Post's Express Post, or by courier. Contributions received after December 1 will not be accepted and will be returned. Postmarks will not be considered.

RRSP new enrollment and annual contribution forms can be downloaded at OHHA.ca in the member centre under RRSP info and forms.

Members wishing to deliver their contributions in person may do so at the OHHA office at 35 Crawford

Crescent, Campbellville, Ont. During regular business hours. There is a mailbox outside the door for after hours drop-off.

Any Standardbred racing industry participant can join the plan. To qualify for the industry contribution to their retirement account, owners, trainers, and drivers must have participated in 10 races in 2022. Owners and breeders will be credited based on the percentage of the horse(s) they owned or bred. Breeders must be the registered breeder of the horse that competed on 10 starts in 2022 in Ontario. Assistant trainers and grooms must provide a T4, or letter from their employer verifying employment in 2022.

Further information and forms are available on the OHHA website at ohha.ca, or by calling the OHHA office at 905-854-6442 or 1-866-774-6442.

Slots At Racetrack Program (SARP) The Sequel?

The 2018 Mandate letter to Minister of Finance Shows The Doug Ford Government was on the right track.

In part it reads;

“Work with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to return the slots at racetrack program to Ontario’s racetracks and help Ontario’s horseracing industry thrive. Simultaneously review Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation’s modernization program to ensure these changes meet an acceptable ethical and financial standard.”

The above direction was included in a mandate letter provided by Premier Ford to then Minister of Finance, Vic Fedeli, upon the 2018 swearing in of the PC government. It clearly demonstrates that the premier was listening to concerns voiced by OHHA throughout and prior to the 2018 election campaign.

OHHA’s position has not changed. We strongly believe that the clearest path to a prosperous and sustainable racing industry is through the re-establishment of the Slots-at-Racetrack Program or a reasonable facsimile of SARP.

To be clear, OHHA is grateful for the unwavering support for horse racing, rural Ontario and the equine agricultural industry demonstrated by the Ford government. Without that level of support we would be mourning the loss of our multi-billion dollar industry. Yet, more can be done and with goodwill and collaboration we can achieve even better results.

As indicated in this newsletter issue, gaming companies would like to see horse racing disappear entirely, figuring that those gambling dollars would pour into slots and gaming revenues. Horse people have been relegated to second class citizens on the very grounds we operate. Race track owners have done little to nothing promote our industry; regulators are seemingly out of control with penalties and discipline, denying basic due process to justice and compulsory waiver agreements and the lack of bonafide horse people’s association have attempted to silence the voice of participants. And while we recognize and appreciate government subsidies to sustain operations, we submit that there is a better way and it starts with levelling the playing field.

There’s a saying that goes, “ you can’t put the tooth paste back in the tube.” Fair enough. But we can open a new tube. And that’s exactly what we recommend.

For starters, opportunity beckons in southwestern Ontario, specifically in the Windsor area to build and operate a not for profit racetrack run by horse people for horse people, with slots and gaming revenues redirected back into the racing industry. We have a proposal for a track placed in a zone not yet assigned to a specific gaming company. This model could be used as an example for future expansion into other geographic locations. This initiative would give horse people a say over their respective futures and reduce the need for government subsidies in the medium and long term. Its quite simply a win/win/win, for horse people, taxpayers and the government. Let’s get this back on track.



TIME To Fix The Regulator?

Request To Revisit AGCO Mandate

April 6, 2023

The Honourable Doug Downey Attorney General of Ontario
Ministry of the Attorney General
McMurtry-Scott Building
11th Floor
720 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 2S9

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you in your capacity as the Minister responsible for the Alcohol and Gaming Corporation of Ontario, specifically its horse racing file.

The Horse Racing Licensing Act, 2015, grants extraordinary and unreasonable measures related to search, seizure, allegations, and adjudication. These measures are inconsistent with the Canadian Charter Rights and Freedoms, Natural Justice, and the administration of justice. Given the nature and scope of the Ontario Equine Agricultural Industry, these uneven and inconsistent articles in the Act adversely impact rural Ontarians and our efforts to earn a living in our chosen industry. This discrimination must end now.

When this legislation was before Committee, your party, and the official opposition (NDP) raised serious concerns with articles related to search and seizure and the absence of warrants and due process. Moreover, the current structure designates AGCO as accuser, litigator, adjudicator, and appellant tribunal with no discernible evidence of the separation of responsibility or power. It sets up situations wherein the regulator can show up on private properties unannounced, conduct full property and personal searches, investigate without notice of right to counsel, gather evidence used for adjudication, then mete out harsh and unreasonable penalties, while offering slightly lesser penalties should licensees relinquish their rights to challenging allegations. Appeals to the Horse Racing Appeal Panel are almost entirely fruitless. It's an unreasonable power imbalance that puts hand-to-mouth industry participants up against a regulatory behemoth who, by virtue of licensing regulations has the immediate remedy of license suspension. Of course, given the limited financial and legal capacity to respond accordingly, these folks are forced to acquiesce to unreasonable penalties, all to the detriment of natural justice principles.

Minister, we are grateful to this government for the support you have given the horse racing industry. The Premier and cabinet have been trusted advocates of the rural, agricultural equine industry. When this legislation was proposed your party worked with us to strike down the offending articles. Given the Liberal majority, we were unsuccessful. Government has changed, and we are confident that your party's position remains consistent with the positions forwarded during committee hearings leading up to the ascension of this Act. During the committee hearings NDP MPP Ms. Catherine Fife commented "Just for clarity: I think it needs to be said that the horse racing sector and horse people do not think that dissolving the Ontario Racing Commission is in their best interests, and government knows this. What government could do, at least, is give them a voice throughout the process so that they can represent their needs. You have to remember; this is an industry that is still reeling from the short-sighted cancellation of the SARP program. Respecting the voices in that sector could contribute to moving forward with policy decisions that actually don't cause more harm. Basically, the philosophy should be do no more harm, and having at least a sector-specific person at the table would be helpful."

PC MPP Ms. Laurie Scott responded "I just want to support my colleague Ms. Fife's motion. There's no question they weren't consulted. It is quite frightening to them, the fact that there will not be anyone at the table who actually knows the industry. I don't know if we're going to have more amendments come forward. You're actually changing the whole regulatory way that horse racing has been done in the past. They feel it's quite harmful to the industry and I concur with them.

You were right then to support the principles of the Charter and the Doctrine of Natural Justice. You are now positioned to remedy the legislation.

We ask that a meeting be arranged at your earliest convenience so that we can further address the injustice that the previous government foisted upon the hard-working people of rural Ontario; people who make an honest living despite being treated as lesser citizens by the very legislation governing the commission charged with stewardship of our industry.

Sincerely,

Jim Whelan
President

Jeff Gural's Comments DISPLAYS Truth About What Gaming Companies Really Think



“I don’t think (participants) understand that the tracks-including me, if I’m just wearing my “track hat”- all want harness racing to disappear as quickly as possible. We lose millions of dollars. Everyone of us that have a racino lose millions of dollars on harness racing. They want to see harness racing disappear as quickly as possible, so they are going to do whatever they can do to make that happen and they are certainly not going to spend their money Marketing the product to delay the inevitable.

I’m done subsidizing the Meadowlands. This is the last year I’m going to do it”.

The above quote attributed to Meadowlands, Vernon Downs and Tioga Raceway owner Jeff Gural, appeared in a March 18, 2018 “Harness Racing Update” column written by Dave Briggs. It’s exactly what we’ve been saying ever since the Slots at Racetrack Program ended in 2012. Racetracks have no interest in marketing, promoting or even conducting horse racing. They have absolutely zero interest in attracting new fans or increasing handle. Want evidence? Look no further than the amenities or lack thereof at Flamboro Downs. No one under the age of 19 can enter the building. Check out the “city within the city” being promoted at Woodbine. It has literally nothing to do with horse racing except occupying the land that EP Taylor bequeathed to the sport.

Need further proof? Grab yourself, a beer approaching \$20 at Mohawk. Witness the tear down of back stretches, the lack of stabling, food services and decaying structural

and track conditions. Still not convinced? Well, how about the record race dates cancelled due to weather, track condition, utility failure or parimutuel malfunctions.

In the past decade horse people have been systematically relegated to second class tenants on what was once our centre stage. Woodbine Entertainment Group, Great Canadian Gaming, Gateway Casinos and Hard Rock International are each focused on gaming and real estate. Full stop. Horse racing is a nuisance; a necessary evil. Well, at least so far.

None of these gaming companies have the internal expertise, experience or hands on knowledge of the industry, nor have they demonstrated any desire to learn. And most sadly, some of our representative associations have been complicit in our eventual demise by their silence. Meanwhile, while gaming companies oversee our industry literally rotting on the vine, our regulating agency- the Alcohol and Gaming Commission (AGCO)- positioned as judge, jury and executioner, continues to mete out fines and suspensions at record pace. Together, these actions and inactions create a stench that the horse race industry is corrupt and not worthy of support.

Jeff Gural only said out loud what these race track owners appear to really think behind closed doors when they speak to each other. The ball is in their court to prove to government, the public and our industry that they are interested in a viable race horse industry. If not, it’s time for them to get out of the way and let the industry participants take over. People and families with skin in the game. If we are going to circle the drain, better we be the ones who pull the plug, rather than experience the slow drip of indifference. Those who came before and those young people trying to make their way in the industry deserve at least that.

Speaking Truth to Power

The recent announcement by Woodbine Entertainment group that Chief Executive Officer, Jim Lawson is stepping down is welcome news to the thoroughbred, standardbred, in fact the entire Ontario Agricultural Equine Industry. And now those who held their tongue for so long for fear of retribution can feel liberated to speak up and speak out. Speaking truth to power is and has been the only way to save the industry that we all love.

It's no secret that I've been a vocal critic of the Woodbine mob under Lawson's rule. They have meticulously, systematically and ruthlessly destroyed the livelihoods of thousands of lifelong, dedicated industry participants. They have presided over the transfer of millions of dollars from the pockets of horse people to the bank accounts of C suite executives, who lacked the knowledge, experience or even the desire to grow our business. And now that Mr. Lawson is on his way out of the Rexdale cash vault, victims of his boorish approach are feeling empowered to speak out.

The consortium at the helm of Fort Erie Racetrack recently filed a grievance with the Canadian Trade Commission over WEG's alleged bullying tactics. In a nutshell, Fort Erie quite rightfully asserts that WEG and Lawson created a procedural environment that basically starved Fort Erie of horses necessary to conduct a bonafide race meet. Anxious and desperate horse people were basically given the choice by WEG of either racing at Woodbine or racing nowhere else in the province.

Woodbine has a long history of using their financial sledgehammer to keep horse people in line. Their infamous access waiver is a prime example. Horse people either abide by WEG's rules or don't race. That's their rules, despite the industry having a provincial regulatory agency, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission (AGCO) charged with overseeing the mandated rules of racing. Could you imagine a NHL hockey player being barred from Scotia Bank arena, because Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment (MLSE) had an issue with them. That would take care of any superstar doing in the Leafs wouldn't it? Of course this would never happen, because the National Hockey League, as the regulatory body makes the rules. But with the WEG, it's a different story. If they don't like you, your access is terminated.

In 2018, WEG and Ontario Racing decided that funding to the Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) would be terminated and transferred to the newly formed management shadow organization called the Central Ontario Standardbred Association, (COSA). OHHA has

been representing horse people since 1962. It's no secret that I opposed the waiver agreements and refused to acquiesce to WEG's demands. It's also no secret that I am the president of the OHHA. It's more of a secret that WEG's access agreements prohibits horse people from opposing any decisions made by Woodbine. So, exactly what disputes can be brought to COSA by horse people. What representation is possible? If you guessed none, you would be correct.

In an April 18, 2023 Thoroughbred Daily News article written by T.D. Thornton, respected Ontario breeder and multi board member David Anderson is quoted as saying,

"...no one is willing to step up and speak up and speak out against Woodbine because of the bully tactics and the dictatorship that WEG chief executive officer Jim Lawson's been running. They're afraid he's going to take away stalls from them on the backside; he's going to exercise private-property and kick them off the grounds. I mean it's just a complete totalitarian regime over there. ...they can take one of our programs basically illegally and take those funds and redirect it into a program that want to do that bolsters their profits."

The author reports that Woodbine, when approached for comment, had no direct response to Anderson's truth to power statement. Telling. Chilling.

Under the WEG regime horse racing has been slowly but surely heading for oblivion. But it doesn't have to be that way. Engaged, experienced, thoughtful and selfless leadership working in concert with politicians and policy makers can turn this thing around. Lawson's exit is an opportunity. His cronies will, as they say, jump ship. More leaders will be empowered to speak out as I have throughout my entire career.

Now is the time to take a broom to the WEG C suites and insert folks who have both knowledge and the will to do the right thing. The venerable EP Taylor bequeathed that Rexdale property for horse racing and horse people. We will honour his memory and ensure our collective future by sticking together and insisting on ceasing this opportunity for positive change. Together, we are a force. Now, more than ever we must collectively and unreservedly raise our voices by speaking truth to power. Let's get this done. Together, for all of us.



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