

ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2024 ISSUE



A Message from the President

The Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program (OEEEP) is pleased to welcome Minister David Piccini, the Provincial Member of Parliament representing Northumberland-Peterborough to his new role as Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. Minister Piccini was appointed by Premier Ford in a cabinet shuffle after former Minister Monte McNaughton, joined the senior management team at Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG). We thank Monte for his support and leadership and wish him well in his new role. His continued presence in the Ontario equine agricultural industry is indeed value added.

The move to Minister Piccini has been seamless for OEEEP. The Minister and his staff have been professional and helpful during our briefings and updates. They are extremely supportive of the equine agricultural industry and OEEEP's contribution to its sustainability and viability. We look forward to continuing to build our positive relationship as we grow and diversify.

And speaking of positive relations, we are delighted with the recent appointment of Rob Flack, MPP for Elgin-Middlesex- London as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA). Minister Flack has a long history as an agricultural business person, having been appointed CEO of Master feeds in 1993. He has also served in multiple leadership roles with the Royal Winter Fair Board, the Canadian Hereford Association and is owner/operator of Flack Farms. Minister Flack's deep appreciation for rural Ontario, its people and our equine agricultural industry bodes well for building strong linkages to OMAFA.

As we continue to face significant labour challenges in our industry it is imperative that we work to together with all stakeholders to address and reduce barriers to employment. Every candidate trained and placed in the industry brings us one step closer to bridging the gap between supply and demand of skilled workers. Our government's unwavering support has been crucial to this progress, as we continue to chip away at long standing labour deficits. But there is plenty more to do. And together we will get it done.

As you read this newsletter don't forget to schedule a visit to our website at: **www.ohha.ca**.

The site contains several educational videos aimed at promoting professionalism and ease of operation. We are also to be offering webinars hosted by Equine Tax Specialist, Lawyer and Author Catherine E. Wilson, designed and presented to assist the industry with business and tax decisions. It's a must-see for anyone in the equine agricultural industry.

OHHA/OEEEP is singularly committed to the Ontario equine agricultural industry, its sustainability and growth. If you have any ideas or suggestions, feel free to drop me a line anytime. In the meantime, drive on.



James Whelan
President OHHA/OEEEP
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From the Desk of the General Manager

Making Connections; Changing Lives

Since the inception of the Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program, I have had the privilege of visiting equine barns and businesses across Ontario. These visits usually sparks conversation about the challenges and concerns of individuals who have decided to make working with horses their life work. From multi-generational families to individuals that are new to the equine world, many of the people that I speak with share common concerns. One common theme is “accreditation”, or the lack of it, in many equine vocations. While there is a formal process to progress in your career path in the racing industry, other sectors do not have similar requirements. This lack of standardized accreditation can result in some individuals misrepresenting themselves as professionals in their trade. Being involved in the equine industry requires a professional approach and standards to ensure participants are operating a safe business, compliant with Ontario laws. Additionally, equine business operators must be aware of potential liability issues and how to guard against unforeseen legal issues.

To assist educating equine business owners, the Ontario Harness Horse Association has partnered with one of Canada’s leading equine law practitioners, Catherine Willson to provide webinars that will address many of the legalities for anyone working in or around the equine industry. Our first legal webinar was an incredible success with over 600 individuals who signed up to participate. Ms. Willson tackled several interesting topics during the call. At call conclusion, listeners overwhelmingly wanted further and more focussed presentations. That’s a good sign for our industry because knowledge is power. Our next webinar will highlight stable owner/ occupier liability; how to avoid legal claims; waivers and releases; boarding agreements; employment advice and other necessary legal tips for running a well-managed and safe stable. If you wish to view our first webinar please check it out on the Ontario Harness Horse Association website at : www.ohha.ca.

The **Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program** has provided a unique opportunity to begin to break down the silos in the equine world. We are much more alike than we are different. It doesn’t matter which discipline you compete in, we all share the love of the horse and are impacted by the same issues that affect the equine industry. Working collectively, we can ensure that we have an educated, professional workforce making a positive contribution to the industry that we all love. We can attract individuals that have a passion and a desire to work with horses. We can recruit them, provide them online education and, with your assistance, offer them hands-on experience that will allow them to participate and become valued members of your team. If you are interested in partnering with us to help train the next generation of horse people, please reach out for more information. If you run a business that meets the program requirements you may, in fact, be eligible for wage subsidies while you are providing hands-on training. OHHA began the OEEEP by identifying a significant human resource issue. There are many- equine facilities struggling



with finding quality, educated employees to work with their horses. Partnering with Equine Guelph and VPI Employment, we developed a program to address this issue head on. Hundreds of individuals have participated, some describing the experience as life-changing and even one, that you will read about in this issue, that described the experience as lifesaving.

Many of us have had the privilege of working with horses and take for granted the positive influence horses provide. During my travels, I have visited many equine therapeutic facilities who have become important partners in the delivery of our program. I have had many opportunities to speak with parents about the value of equine assisted therapy and equine assisted learning programs. These families are now thriving from their participation in these programs. In fact, OHHA recently hosted a conference call with Government MPP Donna Skelly and several therapeutic facilities to initiate discussion about how we can better support some of these alternative equine therapy programs. It was gratifying to hear different operators sharing thoughts and ideas while discussing the many programs that are currently being offered in our local communities.

Those of us that have always had horses in our lives clearly understand the trials and tribulations associated with operating an equine agricultural business. Working together and supporting every sector will only make us stronger. There is no doubt that the economic impact of the Ontario equine agricultural industry is calculated and measured in the billions of dollars. As such, our industry is one of the largest agricultural contributors to the rural Ontario economy and is by far the most labor intensive. OHHA understands the commitment and the hours of long hard work it takes to run an equine operation. That’s why we are laser-focussed in our efforts to address the need for competent, well-educated and well compensated employees. Together, and with your support, a brighter, more stable future is on the horizon!

Brian Tropea
OHHA/OEEEP General Manager

She had a Dream



**“Anne Theriault’s
incredible journey
to working with horses,
overcoming personal trauma
and living her dream.”**

Have you ever dreamed of working with horses?

That was the opening question we asked potential applicants when the Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) launched the Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program (OEEEEP) two years ago. That simple introduction turned prophetic for OEEEEP graduate Anne Theriault.

At the time, Theriault was at a crossroads in her life. On the surface things appeared as they should. She had forged a blossoming career in the insurance industry as a successful account executive. Her personal life appeared stable and happy; nothing seemed out of the ordinary. But inside, Theriault was fighting the demons of childhood sexual abuse and the paralyzing anxiety associated with unresolved trauma.

Anne thought that she had dealt with years of childhood victimization. She had ventured out on her own from Sudbury, established a promising career and settled in with a kind, supportive and understanding life partner. Like most of us, she was coping and making her way through life.

But, PTSD has a way of sneaking up on you and exploding from within. Most times, there is no warning or even a subtle hint that life is about to change in a ways never contemplated. No signs, until the paralyzing anxiety attacks make the world increasingly smaller and threatening.

Human beings have the innate ability to anticipate the future. Based on experience and possibility, our minds tell us what may

happen and that's usually a good thing, except when the mind becomes obsessed with negativity and the world turns into a very scary place.

Anxiety is an extremely difficult mental health issue to treat. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and prescription medication, separate or jointly, is the usual course of treatment. Millions of people often suffer in silence for years before seeking help. Sadly, some never recover from the depths of despair and hopelessness. Unlike a broken limb or a wound, mental health isn't visible to the naked eye. It's not well understood and is exacerbated by people's lack of compassion and empathy. Anxiety disorders can lead to extreme darkness and social isolation. It can happen to anyone. Each of us may be just one unknown trigger away from its grips.

For Anne Theriault, that trigger was the brutal murder of her sister-in law. Theriault is beyond transparent when describing her experience. She can recall every small detail as though it were happening in real time. She verbally painted a picture, disturbing beyond description. That horrific scene lives within her mind and is with her every day. It's incredibly gruesome.

For our purposes, the account will be condensed. Anne's sister-in-law had fallen into the grips of human trafficking. Seeking affection, excitement but mostly love and approval, this young woman had joined in with the wrong crowd. Instead of love and acceptance, she was abused and beaten. When she finally tried to escape and move on with her life she was brutally murdered by her captors.

Story continues on page 4



Suddenly, a flood of childhood memories stormed Anne Theriault's mind. She was unable to cope or function. Work was out of the question. Just getting through a day was a monumental challenge. Getting out of bed was a major accomplishment.

Then it happened. The dream.

Theriault recalls the experience vividly, almost poetically. Struggling to sleep, longing for peace, refuge, a temporary escape from the demons tormenting her soul, she had a very vivid and life-altering dream. The expression on her face lit the room as she recalled that experience.

"I was in a barn. I'm not sure what barn because I had never been in one before. I could see, hear, taste, feel, smell and recall every aspect of the dream. The strange thing is that I had never been around horses. But it was so real. My senses were never so alive. It was like my mind was calling me to my proper place."

The next morning, Theriault literally bursting with new found energy and enthusiasm, fired up her computer and Googled "horse." Up popped OEEEEP.

She registered for the programme, enrolled in the on-line training and was assigned her experiential placement. The rest, as they say, is history.

She quickly arranged to share-board a saddle horse and fastidiously learned every step of horse stewardship, voraciously reading, consuming and embracing everything she could about

equine care, physiology and psychology.

Today, Anne Theriault is a proud graduate of OEEEEP. She has landed employment as a therapeutic riding instructor. She has her heart set on a bold and exciting future. Her goal is to establish a programme connecting horses to human mental health. Her ultimate objective is to run a program linking victims of human trafficking to equine therapy.

Anne Theriault had a dream. In her words, that dream saved her life. Horses saved her life. And now she is determined to do the same for others.

Anne's infectious enthusiasm is inextricably linked to her renewed zest for life. She wants to bring that optimism to others who struggle daily in their own deep, dark place. Those who suffer in silence. She wants to be their voice and let them know that a better, more complete life is possible.

Anne Theriault will positively change the world for people who have yet to encounter her grace and courage. She already has. When she tells her story her audience is mesmerized in support and solidarity. She is a natural communicator.

OEEEEP, OHHA and our partners in government are privileged to support Anne Theriault on every step of her beautiful journey, Day by day. One step at a time. From despair to hope, darkness to light, a beautiful equine companion faithfully by her side. Her dream has become reality.

“When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take it.”

- Quote by Yogi Berra beloved New York Yankee, Hall of Fame member and one of baseball's greatest heroes. -



Yogi Berra was a baseball superstar. He was also famous for his quick wit and offbeat quotes, known as Yogi-isms. He also knew a thing or two about winning, 10 World Series championships as a player and 3 more as a coach. He knew how to get where he needed to go. Signs be damned. So what does Yogi Berra's quote have to do with the current state of horse racing in Ontario? Plenty.

Horse people have arrived at that proverbial fork in the road. So how did they get there? And how does the horse racing industry get back on the proper course to sustainability?

The Players

Success or failure of an industry is inevitably linked to the people involved. Horse racing is no different. So let's have an adult conversation by shining a light on participants, our race track operators and the provincial regulator.

By and large, horse people participants are salt-of-the earth, honest, hard working people. Reflective of their rural roots, and the equine agricultural industry, most are in the business because they love horses and they love horse racing. A large number are generational horse people. They work long, labour intensive hours, 7 days a week, 12 months a year. The vast majority barely make ends meet and when they do succeed, they reinvest most of those earnings right back into the business they love. Sometimes it pays off and sometimes not but, inarguably those reinvestments create a lot of jobs and economic spin-off throughout the agricultural and rural community.

And, as we all know there are some wonderful horse racing success stories just waiting to be told. Ontario horse people are renowned and recognized world-wide as innovators, experts and leaders in the racing and equine agricultural industry.

That's the good news. Now for the bad.

Race track operators don't want horse racing. Full stop. Their business model focusses squarely on gaming, sports betting, slots, tables and real estate development. It wasn't always this way. In the late 90's the Ontario government green-lighted slots. In doing so, they rightly understood that gaming would draw money away from horse

racing's parimutuel betting model. A new program was developed that legalized slots but maintained the integrity and stability of the horse racing industry.

Since industry oversight was statutorily moved by the former Liberal Government from the Ontario Racing Commission to the AGCO in 2016, horse racing has spiralled downhill. No surprise since that was the same gang who ended SARP.

Sadly, the move to AGCO and its heavy-handed focus on enforcement rather than restoration has hastened our demise. It has bred a culture of fear, mistrust and intimidation. It's a culture that needs to change. The sooner the better.

Without getting into specifics, testimony presented by the Commission in Appeal hearings runs counterintuitive to promoting the industry. Talking points, repeated by leaders at AGCO consistently refer to racing's "social licence" - an imaginary "woke" societal green light for racing to continue. And the consistent message around government subsidies to the industry makes it sound like the racing industry is nothing more than a bloated pit of welfare recipients living off of the government dole. Truth is, horse racing like any other industry receives subsidies because it is a worthy and profitable investment in the Ontario economy, creating billions of dollars in spin-offs and economic activity.

Time for Change

So, yes the current model is in shambles. It's broken and needs to be fixed. The good news is, it can be fixed, by listening to the front line people who built it in the first place. It's time to put the industry back in the hands of those who understand it and love it. It's time for change.

And as a man who knew something about winning once said "when you get to the fork in road, take it."

It's time. We are there. Let's turn this thing around.

It's our only way home.

Accountability; Who Needs it? We do.

Quite rightfully, there's a lot of chatter out there on the future of horse racing in general and standardbred racing, specifically. So against my better judgement I decided to surf social media to see what the so-called "experts" were saying about what it takes to set things on the right path to sustainability and expansion.

As expected there's a lot of negative commentary about what's wrong with the industry, mostly spewed by wannabes and non-achievers. The same old rhetoric about cheaters and drugs blah blah blah. We've heard it all before, people who have never achieved anything positive in life and hate it when someone else has a little success. Those useless threads were swiftly skipped through.

There is a theme out there that deserves some attention and that's the one focused on accountability. If horse racing is to be truly considered "ready for prime time" and if industry sponsored handicapping shows are to have any real significance or merit, then quite reasonably, fans should be able to expect an analyst's honest perspective on performance. After all, drivers, trainers and horses can have a bad day or a bad performance just like any other performance athlete. Yet, our industry never holds a critical eye towards performance. Never will you hear the words, "that was a terrible drive" or "what was he thinking with that move" or the "horse didn't appear prepared." Instead patrons are lead to believe that it's all unicorns and lollipops out there and stuff just happens. Everyone knows that's not true...at least not most of the time.

So who's in charge of performance? Nameless, faceless, judges, stewards or race officials. What is their expertise or knowledge of the industry? And who holds them accountable for decision making?

I challenge you to name any other sport, especially one that is gambled upon, that shields their assigned adjudicators from the public view. In football, baseball, soccer, hockey, boxing, tennis, you name it, even pickle ball the officials are visible and identifiable and subject to questioning of their on-the-spot judgement calls. Nothing like 80,000 fans chanting "ref you suck" in unison. And you know what? The game goes on.

Horse racing Regulators employ racing officials, nestled away from public view and spectator scrutiny. They regulate the sport, assess penalties, determine outcomes, yet not one racing fan could probably name one racing official. Unlike the other sports mentioned, they are not booed, chided or held to account, despite the power they have to determine the outcome of races and the exchange of literally millions of dollars on a daily basis. Unlike major sports like hockey, baseball and football there is no central control team or "eye in the sky" assigned the task of ensuring the correct call was actually made. The only recourse option is for participants to appeal a judges' decision to the Horse Racing Appeal Panel and while that may, (as recently witnessed on numerous occasions) result in the correct decision

eventually being made, that reverse of decision does nothing to immediately ensure correctness for bettors on that race. Strange indeed, if in fact the mandate of our racing commissions is to protect the integrity of the sport.

Sadly, yet arguably, accountability and transparency have been reduced to a catch phrase and motherhood statements, freely tossed in to satisfy the public's need to feel things are as right and fair as possible. Meanwhile, social media horse racing sites are filling up with videos and photos of questionable steward's decisions. That hurts us, badly.

One of those questionable calls recently fueled a minor uprising at a thoroughbred track. To be clear, like anyone else, these officials are human. Their interpretation of events is subject to the way they see things- human bias. I suppose that's why there are three judges at every race track, but whenever like minded people gather it is possible that groupthink can over-ride sound decision making. It's a proven human response, especially when faced with real-time pressure to make the call.

Horse racing does have a future, but we need to get into the 21st century. Impacted by social media and its associated technology, we now live in a world of immediacy. Responses need to be on time and impactful. All of us in the industry; breeders, owners, drivers, trainers and yes even race officials need to come out from behind the shadows and be held to account. Jointly, our decisions impact millions of dollars in gambling transactions. Common sense calls for it. Integrity demands it.



Beware of False Prophets (Profits)



If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. We all know that. Right?

Who hasn't offered that cautionary advice at least one time to a starry-eyed friend or family member? Who hasn't received that caution from a concerned colleague or family member? It's the oldest con on the books.

Why? How? Well, because humans are hard-wired to want to believe the good in people and trust those with track record of success, especially when the successful are willing to mentor, lead and share their good fortune. After all, who doesn't want to be a millionaire?

Unfortunately, promises of fame and fortune seldom materialize. Especially in the horse racing industry. Sure, there are well told stories of rags to riches, but generally these Cinderella tales are very few and far between.

Steve Heimbecker. Remember him? Seems like just yesterday, he was the darling of the harness horse racing industry. A successful business man. Wealthy. Connected to the aristocracy of the North American harness racing industry, seemingly everywhere, all the time. Smooth talking, affable, photogenic and doling out millions of dollars for yearlings at every sale of consequence. He was the poster boy of optimism, but more than that he was willing to give young, relatively unknown trainers a chance at the big time.

In a gushing 2021 Trot magazine article, written by Dan Fisher, published by Standardbred Canada, Heimbecker was described as follows;

...Steve Heimbecker appreciates the importance, impact and influence of teamwork and collaboration. At the time he was spending money at yearling sales as though money were no object. Fisher wrote; "At the recently concluded Lexington Selected Yearling Sale, Heimbecker bought 19 colts outright, to the tune of \$2.3 million, and bought in as a partner on a handful of others as well. He's given them to a stable of different trainers that he believes in, and he's excited about his prospects to say the least." Pretty impressive stuff for an industry searching for a life line. A high flyer, who believed in standardbred racing and the little people in it. He was more than a good guy, he was an industry messiah; the kind that was willing to give a lesser known trainer their big break.

Stardom. Success. Opportunity. It was all there for the taking according to the Heimbecker article. All it took was honest, hard work.

"There's a saying that I like to use that goes, 'It's not what you have it's what you give.' I believe that I've aligned myself with some good people that are hard workers and have a lot to give, and I'm looking forward to seeing what they can each do with the opportunity I'm trying to give them."

Fast forward to 2023. Heimbecker is sued by one of harness racing industry's most well known and active owners to the tune of tens of millions of dollars. The claim was fraud against Heimbecker and his associated companies.

And sadly, caught in the middle of it all is one of those lesser known trainers who Heimbecker referred to as a good person, a family man and a hard worker. Someone, to whom he was allegedly giving a big chance. Someone who believed all the hype. Surely, Aaron Byron thought that lady luck had smiled upon him. Steve Heimbecker was his big break; his ticket to the big time. Over \$1 million dollars of well bred yearlings put under his care, some of which he signed for as agent for Heimbecker at the Lexington Sales. What could go wrong? Certainly, the Lexington Sales company had no problem with Heimbecker's credit. And certainly no problem with Byron signing on his behalf. Except for one thing. The horses were never paid for in full. Aaron Byron kept his end of the deal. He broke, trained and cared for the yearlings. He invoiced Heimbecker monthly. All seemed to be going to plan. Then, the lawsuit. Then, the invoices stopped being paid. Then, the request by the Sales company to return the horses, even though Byron was legitimately owed in excess of 6 figures for his training bill. Not only was he unpaid for his labour, but now he was personally out of pocket for expenses to care for and feed the animals.

Anyone could have been in Aaron Byron's shoes. How many trainers, especially young aspiring trainers take horses on "deals?" How many of those deals fall through when, less than scrupulous owners, move those horses on to the next eager and hungry trainer without ever paying up? Seems like it happens more often than we would like to acknowledge. Yet, those horses go on racing with little accountability on their owners for money owed. That has to change. The Steve Heimbecker saga presents a learning opportunity. No one can blame Standardbred Canada or Trot Magazine for tripping all over him in numerous articles. He seemed like just the right person coming along at exactly the right time. But sadly, Steve Heimbecker, millionaire, financier, horse enthusiast, turned out to be the epitome of the saying "if it sounds too good to be true, well it probably is." Unwittingly but prophetically, Trot Magazine nailed it when describing Steve Heimbecker; "He's one of Standardbred racing's most influential and successful owners, a horseman dedicated to making a difference in the sport." Steve Heimbecker certainly made a difference in the sport. Just ask Aaron Byron.

Testing, Testing

Horse racing is a clean sport. Statistics prove it. Of the tens of thousands of equine blood and urine samples sent each year to labs for post-race and out of competition analysis, nearly 100% of test results come back clean.

Despite this indisputable fact, a dark cloud narrative hovers over the industry and horse people, especially successful horse people. Somehow the narrative connecting success to cheating dominates analysis. It's nonsense.

Racehorses are equine athletes. And successful trainers treat them accordingly.

Peak performance depends upon a strict regimen of health care conditioning programs specific to each horse's individual needs. Testing. Imaging. Nutrition. It's always all about the horse.

Top stables rely heavily on science and health care. They routinely test horse's blood for appropriate levels, add required supplements, conduct x-rays, MRI's, ultrasounds and scopes. They design a quality feed program prepared for each horse. If only people had access to that kind of care!

Established trainers don't cut corners. They don't "push the envelope." Their livelihoods depend on being duly licensed to race, and their ability to race relies on keeping their horses in the best shape possible. Industry longevity is contingent on following the rules. Full stop.

In most racing jurisdictions trainers are assigned "absolute liability" for post-race and out of competition test results. It doesn't matter if the trainer is across the country, on another continent or laid up in hospital bed. If they are listed as trainer, they are 100% accountable for all test results.

Secondly, the sensitivity of the testing has increased dramatically in recent years. Results are recorded in picograms. What exactly is a picogram? It's a thousandth of a nanogram. To demonstrate the impact of such a finding and for mathematical clarity, let's start with the fact that 1 gram, as most of us know, is pretty darn small. It is the equivalent of 1 million nanograms. A picogram is 1,000 times smaller than a nanogram. For a visual comparison, a single grain of salt is 58,500 nanograms or 58,500,000 picograms.

Testing sensitivity is getting more precise and sensitive every day. One thousandth of picogram is femtogram. Another thousand times smaller is the atto-gram and yet another thousand times smaller is a zeptogram. A thousand times smaller still is yoctogram.

Clearly, testing at these levels indicating a "positive" have no pharmacological significance, never mind performance enhancing impact. Experts have testified in numerous jurisdictions that those sort of results are likely attributable to environmental contamination, probably connected to the medications being ingested by their human handlers. Horses do not live in a bubble. They move about in barns, stalls and fields.

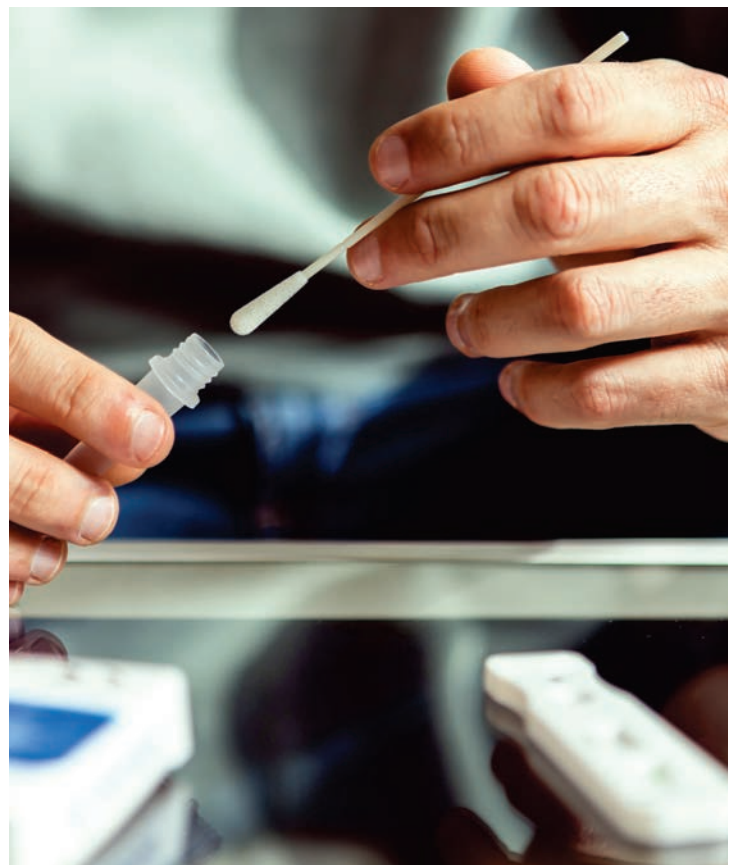
They are in contact with other horses and human beings, outside of their daily routine, real people, who may be taking either, or both, prescription or non-prescribed medication. They are transported to race tracks in trailers, placed in receiving and test stalls and touched by people not directly associated with the animal. And throughout all of this, the trainer is held to account for any test result indicating 1billionth of a gram of any prohibited substance, even though that level has no pharmacological, therapeutic or performance enhancing impact.

As testing becomes more sensitive, it is quite likely that reputable horse people may be penalized and be forced out of the industry. It's quite simply a numbers game. The more you win, the more your horses are tested. The more tests, the better chance to fall outside the scope of acceptable. The industry needs a common sense solution, and we need it now.

Today its a picogram. Tomorrow a femtogram and one day an attogram and a zeptogram. Testing should be tailored to catch the real cheats and once caught, they should be banned.

But let's not forget that our testing regime proves that horse racing is a very clean sport. Some trainers, through quality of stock, hard work, skill and knowledge are simply more successful than others. That's just the way it is. It's the way it always will be.

Anything else...take it with a picogram of salt..



OHHA Representation Testimonials

What a difference a year and the OHHA made!

"My horses, owners, family and staff have had a dream year. Together we have won multiple stakes races including the Meadowlands Pace, The North American Cup and the OSS Gold Super Final. None of this would have been possible without the help and support of Jim Whelan and his team at OHHA. JM Mackenzie was brilliant in his preparation and presentation of the case. OHHA was there with us during every step of a difficult and trying time. One year ago we were mired in unbelievable darkness. What a difference a year and OHHA made!"

-Anthony Beaton

"I was at my whits ends. I was responsible for feeding and caring for almost a dozen horses with no financial support. The primary owner had declared bankruptcy and was being sued for incredible sums of money. I was over my head with lawyers, threats and facing the real risk of financial ruin. Jim Whelan and OHHA saved the day, resolved all the issues, and got me and my family back on our feet. I had a successful summer in New York and the future is looking bright. A few months back, I couldn't have hoped for a better outcome."

-Aaron Byron

"The two trotters were nose to nose at the wire, tough to separate but within less than a minute we were placed second in the final decision. A lot of people said things didn't look right in the photos posted. OHHA took the case to appeal and got a satisfactory resolve. It meant thousands of dollars in our owner's pockets."

-Anthony Haughan

"I was taken down from 2nd and placed out of the money at Mohawk. I was sure I didn't do anything wrong. OHHA took the appeal on and after a detailed hearing with Brian Tropea leading the way, my horse was re-placed to its original position. It was nice to have someone take my case on and make such a convincing argument at the Appeal Panel. Its an intimidating process."

-Travis Cullen

"I've been the Rideau Carleton track man for the last 20 years or more. I also train and drive. One evening I, along with the racetrack manager was summonsed to the judges to "discuss track conditions." Without warning or representation, I was advised that as result of a judges' ruling I was immediately suspended from training or driving at Rideau Carleton. This was all related to an anonymous complaint claiming that I was preparing the track surface to give my own horse an unfair advantage. (He finished last.) I immediately requested a stay which was granted. I reached out to Jim Whelan at OHHA after others had refused to help me. Jim put me in touch with Bob Eaton, who scheduled and prepared for a hearing. After Bob laid out my case in the Book of Documents, the AGCO in an "unprecedented" move rescinded their ruling. I'm so thankful that OHHA stepped up and got the job done when no else would."

-Jeff Taylor

"My trotting colt raced unbelievably well in the Gold at Grand River Raceway. He finished 4th and picked up a good piece of an almost \$100k purse. Suddenly, there was an inquiry and my colt got taken down and my driver was penalized for interference. When no one else would help I turned to OHHA. Brian Tropea was amazing. He brought his decades of experience to the hearing and got the job done. The colt was re-placed and we picked up the money he earned. My driver's 3 day suspension was also withdrawn. Thank goodness for OHHA."

-Gaetan Hebert



OHHA/OEEEP; Advocating for Ontario's Equine Agricultural Industry



(Left to Right)
Brian Tropea
James Whelan
Ontario Premier Doug Ford
Rob Flack - Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness



(Left to Right)
David Piccini -
Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training
and Skills Development
James Whelan



(Left to Right)
James Whelan
Stan Cho - Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.



(Left to Right)
Bloyce Thompson - PEI, Deputy Premier
Lisa Thompson - Ontario Minister of Rural Affairs
Brian Tropea
James Whelan



WATCH FOR THE WINTER 2024 ISSUE OF

ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

