

ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2025 ISSUE



A Message from the President

Another year over. A new one begun. We have a lot to be grateful for, and one of the best ways to show thanks is to help others. Pass it on, as they say. At OHHA/OEEEP, we are attempting to do exactly that. That's why we have worked so hard to convince our provincial government that the Ontario equine agricultural industry is a bona fide job creator and a sector worth supporting and promoting. Thankfully, our government is doing more than listening—they are acting.

Many thanks go to Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, Rob Flack, and his dedicated staff. His ministerial appointment signaled renewed optimism that our government remains interested in establishing a positive framework to support the equine industry as an Ontario agribusiness. The Minister recently announced full support for resourcing an economic impact study of Ontario's equine agricultural industry.

This inclusive study will encompass all equine disciplines, not just the racing sector. It will lay the groundwork for future investment and innovation in one of the most vital sectors of the Ontario economy—specifically, our rural economy. We urge all participants and organizations to fully participate in the study and, if asked, make a monetary contribution to help support it. Our collective future depends on it.

In this winter edition, we are introducing you to two more amazing graduates of the OHHA/OEEEP program: Victoria Rollins and Kevin Mootooveeren. Their success illustrates how passion fuels a dream.

Kevin comes from the island nation of Mauritius, a country where thoroughbred horse racing routinely attracts almost 10% of its 1.4-million-person population to a single racing card. That's right—over 100,000 people at the races on a single day!

Educated as a civil engineer, Kevin is a living testament to the importance of pursuing your own dream. He came to Canada with a specific goal and is pursuing it with dedication and vigor. This OHHA/OEEEP graduate isn't shy about his aspirations: he wants to be a leading owner, trainer, and breeder in the thoroughbred industry. From all reports, he is driving forward.

Victoria has always wanted to work with horses, especially after enrolling her eldest daughter in a riding program last year, just on the outskirts of London, Ontario. This energetic mother of three is learning the trade under the guidance of one of Ontario's most respected standardbred trainers—and learning it well. Somehow, she still finds time to volunteer with retired horses on weekends while working as the track photographer at Western Fair Raceway, blending her passion for horses with a keen eye behind the camera.

OHHA/OEEEP is incredibly proud of the progress we have made in just a few short years. But we couldn't have done it without the Ontario government's support for our industry's two best and most important commodities: our people and our horses. We've accomplished a lot, but together, the best is yet to come!



James Whelan
President OHHA/OEEEP
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Health Insurance Update for Members



The Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) has announced an important change in its health care provider, transitioning from **Canada Life** to **Group Health**. This decision is part of OHHA's ongoing commitment to enhancing the benefits and services available to its members.

The switch to Group Health is expected to offer a more comprehensive suite of health care options, tailored to meet the diverse needs of the harness racing community. Members can anticipate improved coverage, access to a wider range of health services, and enhanced support systems.

This transition also aims to streamline the claims process, making it easier for members to access the care they need. OHHA is dedicated to ensuring that all members feel supported and well-informed during this change. Further communication will be provided, detailing the specific benefits and services available under Group Health.

Overall, this decision reflects OHHA's commitment to prioritizing the health and well-being of its members, ensuring they have access to quality health care resources and ensuring that members are receiving value for money.

Further information is available under the member center tab on the OHHA website or by contacting the office.

Brian Tropea
General Manager
OHHA

From the Desk of the General Manager



Changing Seasons Means Challenging Times

Training Standardbred horses in Ontario during winter poses significant challenges for members of the Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA). The region's harsh and unpredictable weather—marked by cold temperatures, snow, ice, and fluctuating conditions—disrupts training routines and racing schedules. These disruptions create logistical hurdles and financial strain for horse people, compounded by frequent race cancellations.

Ontario's severe winter weather often renders racetracks and training facilities unusable. With temperatures dropping below freezing and snowstorms blanketing the province, tracks can remain covered in snow or ice for days. Trainers must either pause workouts or incur extra costs by shipping horses to accessible racetracks to maintain conditioning. For those in rural areas, where most Standardbred farms are located, unplowed roads and limited facility maintenance add further complications to daily operations.

Cancelled race dates amplify these difficulties. Overseen by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) and Ontario Racing (OR), the Standardbred racing season frequently faces interruptions due to unsafe track conditions from snow, ice, or thawing surfaces. While cancellations are sometimes unavoidable, they trigger a ripple effect for OHHA members. Financially, lost race opportunities reduce purse money—crucial for covering the high costs of horse care, feed, and staff wages. A single cancellation can cost thousands in earnings, and repeated disruptions over the winter strain already tight budgets.

Beyond finances, cancellations disrupt the conditioning and competitive readiness of Standardbred horses. These animals rely on consistent routines, and gaps in racing can lead to a loss of fitness or sharpness. Trainers must adapt plans, potentially delaying peak performance. For young or developing horses, missed races hinder experience and long-term progress. Logistically, cancellations create chaos—travel plans are scrapped, and rescheduling races or qualifiers often conflicts with other commitments.

For OHHA members—many of whom are small-scale or family-run operations—these winter challenges underscore the fragility of Ontario's harness racing industry. The association has long advocated for better support, including improved track maintenance and enhanced financial relief during the lean winter months. OHHA argues that purse money from cancelled race dates should be fully redistributed to owners, trainers, and drivers who lose racing opportunities. Currently, unallocated purses from cancelled cards are often rolled into future races—where rescheduling is rare—rather than compensating those directly affected. The existing cancellation fee falls short of offsetting these losses, and OHHA insists this must change.

Training Standardbreds in Ontario's winter tests resilience. Cancelled races deepen the struggle, threatening the livelihoods of those committed to the sport. Even as winter ends, thawing racetracks in spring promise further disruptions, prolonging the challenges for horse people.

Brian Tropea
OHHA/OEEEP General Manager

Winter Edition -Horse Movies

Horses & Hollywood

Horses and Hollywood have a long history together. From spaghetti westerns to John Wayne's Tall in the Saddle and True Grit, to Kevin Costner's recent smash hit Yellowstone, the storied relationship between horses and humans has been told and retold for generations.

And why not? Horses have been integral to civilization, nation-building, and even wars between nations. Our equine friends have stood by our side.

Whether it's been agriculture, transportation, heavy lifting, or just plain pleasure, horses are arguably civilization's best friend and a treasured asset.

So, with that in mind, what are some of your favorite equine movies?

By no means definitive, here's a sample list of heartwarming films celebrating the connection between horses and humans:



1. **National Velvet**

This timeless treasure follows a young woman, Velvet Brown, and her rogue horse, The Pie, whom she trains, soothes, and bonds with to win England's Grand National Steeplechase—only to be disqualified when officials discover Velvet is a woman.

Starring a very young Elizabeth Taylor, the movie highlights the relationship between rider and horse, emphasizing the power of belief and trust in one another.

2. **Phar Lap**

This is the story of the great Australian champion who overcame seemingly insurmountable handicaps to become a legend. He was the people's horse, rising from humble beginnings to take on the bluebloods of the day and win.

3. **Hidalgo**

An American stallion and his cowboy best friend head to Arabia to compete in a gruelling cross-desert race in the 1800s. The connection between horse and human showcases the inseparable bond often found between horses and the people who love and care for them.

4. **Secretariat**

This movie centres on the intricate relationships amongst the great thoroughbred champion and Triple Crown winner Secretariat and his beloved owner Penny Chenery, as well as Canadian-born trainer Lucien Laurin, and fellow Canadian jockey Ron Turcotte. It's a heartwarming look at trust, faith, and how a horse became an international sports superstar, setting race-time records that have stood for over 50 years. Race caller Chic Anderson's famous Belmont Stakes line, "Secretariat is moving like a tremendous machine," still sends shivers down your spine five decades later.

5. **Seabiscuit**

A must-see film you'll want to watch more than once. This story chronicles the true people's horse, Seabiscuit, from beaten claimer to 1938 match-race winner over the impeccably bred champion War Admiral.

Set against the backdrop of the Depression in the "Dirty Thirties," this heartwarming tale shows how a racehorse brought a nation together to cheer for the little horse that wouldn't quit. Seabiscuit embodied the can-do spirit of the American Dream. An unforgettable line, attributed to Canadian jockey Red Pollard, is, "A lot of people think we fixed him, when really he fixed us." Truer words could never be spoken about our relationship with horses.

So, what's your favorite horse movie? If you could pick a horse to centre a production on, which would it be? There are plenty of equine heroes to choose from. You make the call.

From Mauritius to Canada: Just Like a Tremendous Machine

“Eyes on the Stars; Feet on the Ground”

– Theodore Roosevelt

Kevin Mootooveeren is a national treasure. True to his favorite Theodore Roosevelt quotation, “he dares to dream while remaining firmly grounded.”

Incredibly positive, extremely driven, impeccably educated, determined, and eloquent, Kevin is exactly what the Ontario equine agricultural industry needs today.

Born and raised on the tropical island of Mauritius, Kevin, now 29 years old, arrived in Canada as a permanent resident seven months ago.

“I am educated and trained as a civil engineer. With over four years of experience as a Bilingual Project Coordinator and a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the University of Mauritius, I am more than well-prepared for the Canadian workforce. My last role was with a top-tier general contractor, where I successfully managed the construction of a \$30 million commercial building, covering 240,000 square feet, in just 13 months.”

Impressive credentials indeed. But what's even more remarkable is Kevin's love and passion for the thoroughbred racehorse industry. It's in his DNA.

“My love for horses began in my youth, attending horse races in my home of Mauritius. Witnessing these majestic animals—each weighing half a ton and galloping at full speed—coupled with the vibrant atmosphere surrounding the races, ignited my love for both the creatures and the sport. For over two decades, I've been actively involved in the local horse racing scene, and my enthusiasm has only intensified,” explained Mootooveeren.

Kevin's unique roots account for his deep connection to horse racing.

Mauritius is a tropical paradise nestled in the Indian Ocean—white sand, clear water, and an island home to approximately 1.4 million people. The number one sport is, without a doubt, thoroughbred horse racing.

On any given day at the Champ de Mars Racecourse, more than 100,000 spectators flock to the track to lay down their money and cheer on their favorite horses and jockeys.

The racecourse, founded in 1812 by the Mauritius Turf Club, is the oldest turf club in the Southern Hemisphere. Racing is so central to the island's culture that when Mauritius gained independence after centuries of French and British colonization, the independence ceremonies and flag-raising were held at the racecourse.



The Turf Club's meet runs annually from March to early December. As Kevin proudly explains, it hosts top-notch stables from both Mauritius and abroad. “Some of the best stables, jockeys, and trainers from South Africa and around the world come to Mauritius to compete,” he said.

“In Mauritius, horse racing is the number one sport—way more popular than even soccer,” Mootooveeren chimed in. “It's our passion. It's how we connect as a nation.”

A lifelong fan of the sport, Kevin draws inspiration from the movie *Secretariat*.

“My ultimate ambition is to own a stable, train thoroughbred horses, and perhaps one day replicate Penny Chenery's experience with the legendary Secretariat. I love the part in the movie where the horse, in the final turn of the Belmont Stakes, is described by legendary track announcer Chic Anderson as 'moving like a tremendous machine.' Those words are truly inspirational.”

Story continues on page 6

Kevin has enjoyed every moment of his journey since enrolling in the program at OHHA/OEEEP. Throughout his training, he has successfully combined his unbridled equine passion with down-to-earth common sense. Originally placed at Top Rails Equestrian in Milton, Ontario, overseeing show jumping horses, Kevin recently joined Rob Fellows' standardbred operation. Through both opportunities, he has been impressed with the structure of the program.

"The ease of the online program, combined with the collaboration provided by the Equine Guelph online manual, has made my learning opportunity seamless and meaningful. That online manual is an incredible resource. I highly recommend every industry participant have a copy and refer to it daily," offered Mootooveeren—high praise indeed from a man with his impressive educational credentials.



Kevin also enjoys the physical aspect of his work. As an engineer, physical labor isn't typically a top required skill, but adherence to safety is paramount. *"Safety first, safety always—that's what we are taught, and that's what I've learned here. That message resonated with me from the start."*

Employment in the equine agricultural industry is tough, intensive labor, but the man from Mauritius loves every second of it—well, except sometimes the bitter cold. Despite the need to triple-layer his clothing, he can't see himself altering course anytime soon.

"My favorite horse at Top Rails was a big, beautiful girl named Celodie. She loves me as much as I love her." What could be better?

Kevin's long journey has set him on a path to realizing his equine dream.

We are lucky to have him here. His passion and enthusiasm are exactly what we need. His success will be our success.

Now, just seven months after arriving in Canada, Kevin Mootooveeren is indeed himself moving like a tremendous machine.

Firmly planted with "eyes to the stars," following his passion and his heart, Kevin is on his way. Don't bet against him.



Kevin alongside driver Brett Macdonald at Woodbine/Mohawk paddock.

This Game Just Ain't the Same

Legends.

A comforting term for those of us who long for days gone by—days that are never coming back. But on one sunny afternoon in southern Florida, in a remote, nondescript strip-mall Italian restaurant, I sat and listened to harness racing greatness and understood the story of legends.

I had made the February trip to Florida to decompress and sort some things out—deal with the here and now, get my mind right, as they say.

I've been in or on the periphery of the harness horse industry my entire life. As a boy, I idolized my hometown heroes: Greg Wright, Shelly Goudreau, Ray Remmen. Those fellas had made it—and made it big. Then there were industry royalty like Billy Haughton and Stanley Dancer. They'd race their stables all spring, summer, and fall, then winter in Florida, training promising two-year-olds at Pompano Park. But a lack of opportunity and a deficit of talent soon sent me in a different direction, so off to school I went to get my degree and join the real world.

Eight-hour days. Forty-hour weeks. A regular paycheque with a pension and benefits. Maybe do some good for people along the way. Raise a family and provide for their needs. Predictable.

Reliable. Steady. That was the life—or at least, that was my life—far removed from the realities of struggling horse people. But life takes its twists and turns. And God has been good to me and my family, so here I was at age 66, heading down I-95 with my buddy and partner Jimmy Whelan to the Harness Horse International meeting in Deerfield Beach, Florida.

Jim and I made the obligatory appearance, shook a few hands, listened to the same old talk about the state of the industry and the silly ideas about what could save it from itself, and then, just as quickly as we'd arrived, we hit the road again.

Then the phone call came. It was industry hall of famer, Wally Hennessey offering to meet us for lunch at “the best Italian restaurant ever.” So, we punched the address into the GPS and off we went. What the hell—at our age, a little conversation with one of harness racing's most successful drivers, a member of five different Halls of Fame, over a glass of wine and some pasta didn't sound like a bad way to spend a Tuesday afternoon.

When Jim and I walked in, Wally was fully engaged, storytelling with two couples at his table. They hung on to his every word. Turns out both couples had been Hennessey's business partners for nearly 40 years. Remarkable on the face—yet it was obvious their relationship was still thriving. Their mutual respect and admiration were palpable.

We went through the usual intros, handshakes, and name exchanges. Then Wally started, *“I'm blessed, you know—really blessed, always have been—and I'm going to tell you a story nobody's ever heard.”*



If there's one thing horse people are good at, it's storytelling. Sometimes, through all the malarkey, there's a useful message or some words of wisdom. But this was different. The sincerity of Wally's recount gave him the stage for an hour-long soliloquy.

“I'm 68 years old, and even though you can lose a lot of confidence in yourself and your abilities as you age, the one place I'm 100% confident is in a race bike sitting behind a horse.” With those words, Hennessey had me hooked. I could identify with the first part of his opening. Aging can do something to a man's soul—his self-worth and self-perception. I was happy for him that he still had that one thing to hold on to. Even at his age he was still one of the industry's best drivers and horsemen. And he knew it. We all knew it. He was truly blessed.

He transitioned smoothly, as they say, to the rest of the story—a story I'd never heard, despite my 15-year friendship with Jim Whelan.

Hennessey leaned forward toward Jim Whelan, index finger fully extended, eyes fixed intently. *“I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for this man and his brother Walter. They took me in when I had nothing. Absolutely nothing. No money. No job. No place to live. Nothing.”*

Wally was referring to a simpler time. He was leaving “the Island,” as folks from Prince Edward Island call it, eventually making his way to New Brunswick. Walter and Jim Whelan were trucking a herd of racehorses up to Fredericton to race for \$100 and \$200 purses when they met a young Wally along the road. *“Walter yelled out the truck window to me, 'What the hell are you doing here?'"* recalled Hennessey. *“I'm looking for work. I ain't got nothing or nowhere to stay. I need a job. 'Hop in the truck,' growled Walter, as only Walter could. 'You're coming with us and staying with us. Now get in.'”*

Sometimes the Lord works in mysterious ways. Some call it a matter of timing, but I don't buy that explanation. There's something deeper—a deeper meaning, a deeper purpose.

There just has to be. At least that's what I believe.

Story continues on page 8

Anyway, as the story goes, it seems Jimmy had gotten into a little trouble with the judges and ended up suspended from driving for a few days. Walter stared down Hennessey.

“Well, you’re up, kid. You’re driving those horses.” And so it began.

Hennessey went on to win a slew of races over the next few days. In between, he and Jim drove up and down the highway, trucking horses back and forth to race, spending nights sleeping on straw, covered in horse blankets in the hayloft.

Wally broke into a grin as he recounted one of his early driving lessons.

“I had won a bunch of races and was feeling pretty good about myself. It was about the eighth race that afternoon, and our barn—the Whelan barn—was on the turn heading for home. I was leading by about 20 lengths, and I glanced over and saw the Whelans and our boys cheering me on, so I lifted my arms to salute them in celebration. Well, Walter wasn’t impressed. He gave me that stare. ‘Son, don’t ever showboat on one of my horses again.’”

Wally was a quick learner. He never did.

From humble beginnings to renowned champion, Wally Hennessey has had quite a journey. Even now, as he approaches 70, he remains one of the best and most sought-after catch drivers in a business full of young bearcats—a true legend. But even more impressive, he hasn’t forgotten how he got to be the best or what matters most in this industry.

When I asked his opinion on the state of our industry and its future, Wally was point-blank. *“This game just ain’t the same. It was always about the horses and the people—people who cared about horses and each other. People who’d help you when you were down, who were glad to see you do well, who you trusted and who trusted you. That’s what made standardbred horse racing great. We need to remember that and get back to it.”*

With that, Jim and I quietly made our way back to the truck and up I-95 northbound. Strangely, my wandering mind had been eased. I felt a sense of clarity, even a little relief. The unplanned afternoon visit made complete sense. It happened for a reason. And all it took was a little recollection of the good days, as told by an industry legend. Everything had been put into perspective over an impromptu afternoon luncheon.

Yes, sometimes bad things happen to good people, but so do good things. It just depends on how we look at it. And after all, isn’t that life in a nutshell?

And just by chance, for a few short hours in a strip mall in south Florida, I was surrounded by good things—real good things. Good people. Good stories. Good food. And a good reason to keep moving forward. Drive on, Wally Hennessey.

I know I will.

Bob Eaton
2nd VP OHHA



OHHA RRSP News



The Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) administers a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) program designed to promote financial security for our members. This initiative highlights our organization's Commitment to supporting the members of the harness racing community who often grapple with economic uncertainty.

OHHA is pleased to report that its annual financial contribution to members' accounts remained steady at \$900.00 for the past year. This contribution is calculated each year based on a percentage of the total amount wagered on harness racing in the Province of Ontario. Despite a decline in wagering, sufficient funds were available to sustain this level of support.

For members who have opted into the plan's default investment options, the annual rate of return as of February 15, 2025, was a robust 14.5%. Additionally, the OHHA plan features low investment management fees of just 1.5%, making it a very cost-efficient way to save for your future.

The OHHA RRSP program enables members to build savings while leveraging tax benefits. Participants can make annual contributions, which are tax-deductible, thereby reducing their

taxable income. These funds grow tax-deferred until withdrawal—typically during retirement, when individuals may fall into a lower tax bracket—enhancing their long-term savings potential.

Accessibility is a cornerstone of the program. OHHA strives to ensure that all members, regardless of their financial circumstances, can participate in this retirement savings plan. This inclusivity is critical in an industry where income can be unpredictable, and many lack access to traditional retirement benefits.

To further empower our members, OHHA offers educational resources and support, including workshops and informational sessions. These initiatives help participants understand the value of retirement planning and maximize the benefits of the RRSP program through informed investment strategies and financial management.

The OHHA RRSP program reflects our proactive commitment to the long-term financial viability of our individual members and the overall harness racing community.

Ontario Decides

Ontario voters have spoken loudly and clearly.

After 28 days of campaigning, promises, ads, and debate, the people of Ontario overwhelmingly returned Premier Doug Ford and his Progressive Conservative party to Queen's Park as a majority government for another four years.

Now the hard work continues.

As many of you know, OHHA/OEEEP has been extremely politically active, advocating continuously and strenuously for government support to sustain and promote the entire Ontario equine agricultural industry. This election result gives us confidence that our message will continue to be heard.

More importantly, we know the Doug Ford government will not only listen but take action to maintain and expand our industry.

As we've pointed out many times, the Ontario equine agricultural industry is a tremendous generator of rural wealth and employment opportunities. But, like nearly every other industry in this province, we require support, guidance, and understanding from our government.

That's why we remain fully committed to working cooperatively with our government, opposition members, key industry partners, and active stakeholders to solidify our rightful place as a bona fide and expanding wealth creator.



(Left to Right)
OHHA/OEEEP President James Whelan
Ontario Premier Doug Ford
General Manager Brian Tropea

Ontario's Equine Agricultural Industry: Value for Money



The Ontario equine agricultural industry is undoubtedly worth billions to the province's economy. But exactly how much?

That's tough to say.

That's why the Ontario Harness Horse Association/Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program (OHHA/OEEEEP), with financial backing from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, has engaged industry partners to sponsor a definitive economic impact study of the entire sector. We thank Minister Rob Flack for his unwavering support in making this happen.

Why now?

The equine agricultural industry is at a crossroads. Costs are rising, and revenue is falling. People are struggling. Hired help is scarce. Some participants are juggling feeding their horses with feeding their families. We deserve better—much better.

We all know that buying a horse sparks a flurry of economic activity. Every equine discipline generates spending on feed, hay, straw, farriers, veterinarians, equipment, transportation, care, and training. The list is long—it's the cost of doing business.

Each of these activities creates spin-off jobs and benefits in local rural communities. The equine agricultural industry is integral to Ontario's communities, especially rural ones. We matter. But we need facts and numbers.

Ontario hosts a multitude of equine disciplines: pleasure horses, eventing, equestrian, racing, show, rodeo, and therapeutic, to name a few. Each is incredibly expensive and labor-intensive. Our contribution to the Ontario economy, particularly the rural economy, deserves careful analysis.

Over the next several months, OHHA/OEEEEP will collaborate with a qualified vendor to gather the answers and data we need to work cooperatively with the government to secure the support required to sustain and grow our industry.

But we need your help to make this happen. If you or your organization are asked to contribute time, expertise, or money, please say yes. Don't hesitate. Don't put it off.

Penalized Under the Rules of Standardbred Racing? Now What?

Standardbred horse racing has rules—plenty of them.

In fact, there are thirty-seven (37) chapters of rules, all established by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission (AGCO) under Subsection 5(1) of the Horse Racing License Act, 2015.

If that's not enough, the AGCO Registrar can also issue directives at any time, intended to “support understanding and provide updates.” A word to the wise: do your best to stay updated on rules and rule changes. It can save you a lot of trouble down the road.

Penalties can stem from numerous sources, including observations by judges or stewards, complaints from other drivers, reports from racing officials, AGCO employees, the racetrack, or other licensees, and even reports from police or racing officials in another jurisdiction. If that's not enough, anonymous complaints can also trigger investigations.

Appeals of judges' rulings are heard by the Horse Racing Appeal Panel (HRAP), a tribunal appointed by the AGCO to confirm, reverse, or amend the original sanction.

Appellants facing penalties can apply to the HRAP for a stay of proceedings. If granted, a stay suspends the penalty until the appeal is heard and decided by the HRAP.

During HRAP hearings, licensees can represent themselves but are also entitled to representation by a lawyer, paralegal, friend, support person, or industry association representative.

What if the AGCO refuses you a license? In that case, your matter goes before a different tribunal, the License Appeal Tribunal (LAT). There, participants can self-represent or hire a lawyer or paralegal. For reasons unclear, friends or industry representatives are not allowed to assist at LAT hearings.

Without legal knowledge or the funds to hire counsel, appellants face a stable of AGCO lawyers alone. You can imagine the odds of a successful appeal.

The tribunal system, as it pertains to horse racing, is a genuine challenge for horse people.

Any horse person who has tried self-representing at the HRAP quickly realizes it's an uphill climb. Confronted by rules of procedure, legal terminology, and AGCO lawyers, everyday horse people are easily intimidated and often unprepared. The results are rarely favorable.

How many horse people are well-versed in terms like book of documents, disclosure, motions, cross-examination, evidence-in-chief, redirect, closing statements, objections, or reserved decisions?

How many know the difference between an investigation and an inspection?

How many understand the distinction between an oath and an affirmation? How many can afford a lawyer?

Feeling overwhelmed? Maybe a little intimidated? Have you read the rules? Do you check the AGCO website for updates?

You're not alone.

It's time the adjudication system did better. It's time it became more user-friendly. It's time for change.

Our collective future as an industry depends on it.



Victoria Rollins; Making the Connection

Timing is everything.

Especially when it comes to making connections.

And the timing for Victoria Rollins couldn't have been better.

High school educated, this energetic mother of three children, ages 2, 5 and 7 years of age had always dreamed of working with horses. She just didn't know when or how. But she knew that when opportunity knocked, she was ready to answer. All it took was running across an OHHA/OEEEP Face Book post. Right away, Victoria was all in.

"I love making connections. I love the horses and most importantly, I love my family."

At the time of discovering the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development sponsored equine program, Victoria was self-employed as a photographer, running a home daycare and home schooling her children.

"I was looking to sink my teeth into something I'd love, something I looked forward to doing each and every day. And something that provided flexibility for me to care for my children."

One year earlier, Victoria had enrolled her eldest daughter in horseback riding classes in the east end of London, Ontario. That experience set the stage for what was to follow.

Victoria had strong words of praise for the ease and convenience of the application and on-line training of OHHA/OEEEP.

"The initial process of applying and the introduction to learning provided by Equine Guelph effectively laid the ground work for my first placement at White Willow Equestrian Centre, working with quarter horses. And that experience convinced me that a career in the equine industry was definitely in the cards," explained Rollins.

Following her initial hands-on training, Victoria was hired by veteran standardbred trainer John Pentland. That experience has been life changing.

"John is a great mentor. He is patient and kind. The absolute best teacher a student could ask for. His dedication to the care of his horses is incredibly inspiring," said Victoria.

She is now totally committed to a career in the equine agricultural business.

"I've learned about the true meaning of team work and how important common sense is to the process. I know I want to be a horse trainer. I'm just not sure yet of which discipline I want to pursue. But I know horses are my future."



Victoria has successfully combined her love of horses with her skills behind a camera. She is now employed at Western Fair Raceway as the track photographer, capturing finish line images and winner circle memories.

On spare weekends, she volunteers at Belvoir Estate Farm and Equestrian Centre in Delaware, Ontario. That operation, a sanctuary for retired horses, is focusses on the horse as the centre of all human development. The governing philosophy at Belvoir connects the dots on how our equine friends positively affect human behaviour. According to the Belvoir website, "the horse shows us the joy that comes from living the bare truth of ourselves and what a gift that is."

Yes, horses do connect us; to nature, to each other and most importantly to our inner-selves. Thanks to her efforts, mentors like John Pentland and the opportunity provided by OHHA/OEEEP, Victoria is now truly connected to her career path, her passion and her family in ways unimaginable just a short while ago.

Guided by unbridled enthusiasm and boundless determination, Victoria Rollins couldn't be more proud of where she came from and the connections she has made. More importantly, she knows exactly where she is going and how she is going to get there. We are proud to have been part of her journey.

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



(Left to Right)
Brian Tropea
MPP Rob Flack -
MPP Elgin-Middlesex-London



(Left to Right)
James Whelan
Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston



(Left to Right)
Mark Williams -
OHHA Director
MPP Anthony Leardi -
MPP Essex
Lakeshores Tom Bain



(Left to Right)
James Whelan
MPP Stan Cho



WATCH FOR THE SPRING 2025 ISSUE OF

ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

