

ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

SPRING / SUMMER 2025 ISSUE



A Message from the President

The King Charles III Coronation Medal: A Heartfelt Thank You

For decades, I've devoted my life to the equine agricultural industry, following in the footsteps of my father and grandfather. This preordained yet chosen path has provided my family—five generations of Whelans—with a fulfilling life, a roof over our heads, and food on our tables. My passion for promoting this industry is rooted in my DNA, driving me to give back to the community that has given me so much.

In 2013, I was humbled to have been presented the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal by Lisa Raitt, a former federal Minister who served in the portfolios of Labour, Transport and Natural Resources. It was a once in a lifetime honour, or so I thought.

Now, in recognition of the accession of King Charles, to be named a recipient of the King Charles III Coronation Medal for my contributions to the equine agricultural industry is an incredibly exciting privilege. To have Ontario's first female Speaker of the Legislature, MPP Donna Skelly, nominate and present this honour was the icing on the cake. A trailblazer and tireless advocate, Donna's recognition—after decades of mutual respect—made this moment unforgettable.

No one succeeds alone. I owe this award to countless colleagues, friends, and my loving family, whose unwavering support fuels my drive to preserve and grow our industry. Mentors taught me to stay focused, ignore naysayers, and stick to a plan. Colleagues trusted my judgment, challenged my ideas when needed, and stood by me through tough times. Above all, I'm grateful for the countless hours spent with the horses we cherish on the land we love, preserving and protecting our rural way of life, along with our values and traditions.

To everyone who has joined me on this journey to sustain and expand Ontario's equine agricultural industry: thank you. We are a vital economic and cultural force in this province and country. Together, with hard work and shared vision, we will continue to drive progress. As always, we will get it done.

Sláinte,

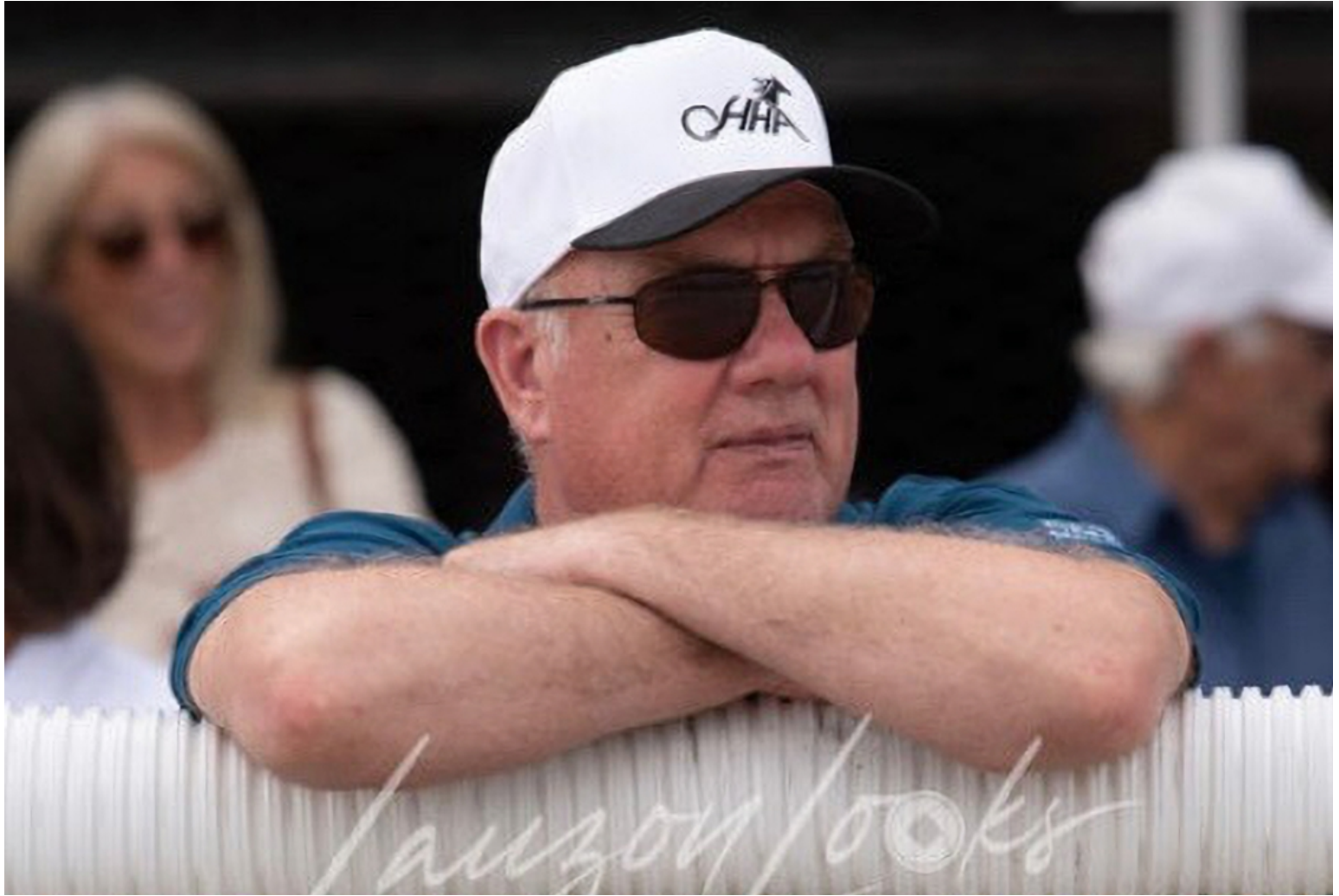
Jim Whelan
President, OHHA/OEEEP



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



Embracing a Broader Vision: OHHA's Mandate Expansion to Include OEEEEP

Since its founding in 1961, the Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) has been a vital advocate for horse people, securing fair purse agreements, racing conditions, and ensuring high quality equine agricultural industry standards. Our recent decision to re-shape and expand our mandate to include and embrace the Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program (OEEEEP) reflects a bold, forward-thinking commitment to the sustainability of Ontario's entire equine agricultural industry. This evolution is not just strategic—it's essential for addressing workforce challenges and fostering a vibrant, inclusive equine agricultural community.

OHHA's original focus on Standardbred racing advocacy, negotiating with tracks, Standardbred Canada, and government bodies, was crucial for racing. However, the equine agricultural sector and its economic impact extends far beyond racing, encompassing equestrian sports, breeding, therapeutic riding, and more. Launched in 2022 with funding and support from the Ontario

Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, OEEEEP is designed to address a critical industry-wide issue: the shortage of skilled labour. By integrating OEEEEP, OHHA recognizes that the health of racing depends on the vitality of the broader equine ecosystem and all of our partners within it.

OEEEEP is truly transformative. This free, six-week virtual training program, delivered in partnership with Equine Guelph and VPI Working Solutions, equips participants with foundational horse care, welfare, and management skills, culminating in hands-on job placements. Since its launch, OEEEEP has trained hundreds of eager participants, connecting them with employers across diverse equine fields, from racing stables to therapeutic riding centres. With wage subsidies—up to 50% of salaries, capped at \$5,000 for 12–18 weeks—the program eases the financial burden of hiring, addressing the labour shortages evident in platforms like [EquineJobTrack.ca](https://equinejobtrack.ca).

From the Desk of the General Manager



By embracing OEEEEP principles, OHHA has shifted from a narrow focus on racing to a holistic vision prioritizing workforce development and industry resilience. This is especially critical in rural communities, where equine activities drive tourism, local business, and thousands of jobs. A skilled workforce strengthens not only racing but the entire equine agricultural sector, ensuring its resilience against urbanization and creating billions of dollars of economic activity in rural Ontario.

Some may argue that expanding OHHA's mandate risks diluting its core mission. This overlooks the interconnected nature of the equine agricultural industry. Labour shortages affect all sectors of the industry, including all stables reliant upon grooms, trainers, and support staff. OHHA/OEEEEP is a more inclusive approach—open to Ontario residents who are unemployed, underemployed or just looking for a career change. No prior horse experience is necessary and fresh perspectives, emphasizing diversity and new blood are welcome. Success stories like Susan Walker, now at a therapeutic riding centre, and Colleen Clarke, thriving in horse breeding, highlight OEEEEP's transformative impact.

OHHA/OEEEEP is a pragmatic and necessary response to an ever-changing and demanding equine agricultural landscape. With racing industry funding currently redirected to the Central Ontario Standardbred Association (COSA), OHHA's pivot ensures continued service to its members while addressing broader industry needs. As Ontario's equine sector faces pressures from land development, economic shifts, and an aging workforce, programs like OHHA/OEEEEP are vital for fostering long-term growth and inspiring a new generation of equine agricultural professionals.

OHHA's leadership is squarely focussed on setting a precedent for industry organizations to think beyond immediate interests and invest in collective prosperity. By championing OEEEEP, OHHA not only safeguards racing but also strengthens Ontario's equine agricultural sector as a vibrant economic and cultural force—a win for employers, job seekers, and the horses at the heart of it all.

Please Join and Support our Equine Agricultural Economic Impact Study

Our newest initiative funded with matching dollars by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, is a province-wide Equine Agricultural Economic Impact Study commissioned to quantify the equine agricultural industry's financial contributions to Ontario's economy. This study will highlight the sector's economic value and influence strategies to protect and grow our industry. Visit **equineimpactstudy.com** to complete the survey. Please encourage others to participate. Your input is crucial to telling our industry's story and shaping our collective equine agricultural future in the province of Ontario!

Brian Tropea
OHHA/OEEEEP General Manager

Elbows Up! Save Canadian Horse Racing

“Buy Canadian. Support Canadian Workers.”

Driven by US President Donald Trump's tariffs, these calls for economic patriotism are flooding our airwaves. Canadians are uniting like never before to champion homegrown industries—except, it seems, horse racing and our multi-billion-dollar equine agricultural sector. So why is our 250-year-old industry absent from this national conversation? Where is our leadership? Now is the time to act and be part of the conversation.

Horses and their caretakers are vital to Canada's rural economy, supporting thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in economic activity. Yet, predatory U.S. gaming companies have systematically dismantled our industry, and in the process moved billions of Canadian dollars south of the border while displacing precarious Canadian workers.

These companies, openly hostile to racing, have no interest in its survival. As racetracks close, purses shrink, and opportunities vanish, the alarm bells are ringing. Is it too late? Absolutely not—but we need a new model, and we need it now.

Gaming companies, after years of sustained efforts to convince governments to end revenue-sharing with racing, are now pushing to decouple the two entirely. Sadly, Ontario's privatization scheme initiated by the previous Ontario Liberal government was their blueprint. Gaming companies arrived promising racetrack upgrades, marketing, and support. Instead, they sidelined racing, prioritizing profits over partnership.

The Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) warned from the start: competitors won't prop up their rivals. A recent Vancouver Province article on Hastings Park in B.C. supports this conclusion: *“Economic value and decision-making have shifted across the border, neglecting B.C.'s horse racing industry. We must prioritize jobs, agriculture, and heritage—not Wall Street.”* Ditto Ontario.

The solution is clear and timely, and it aligns perfectly with Canada's emerging economic nationalism. Send U.S. gaming companies packing and grant horse people self-determination to secure our own future.

In Ontario, the Progressive Conservative government pledged in 2018 to restore the Slots at Racetracks Program. It's time to deliver on that promise. Horse people don't seek handouts—just a level playing field. An exclusive gaming license granted to horse people and operated as a true not-for-profit, would keep Canadian money right here in Ontario, supporting our workers, our communities, and our industry.

**Over 250 years of
Harness Horse Racing**



Made in Canada

The timing couldn't be better for this policy shift. Ontario Premier Doug Ford has been staunchly defending Ontario interests in the wake of the Trump trade war calling for a “Protect Ontario” strategy. Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, David Piccini has been setting the ground work establishing timely and targeted investments in skills development and training, OHHA/OEEEP is a proud partner in that strategy.

This new paradigm requires hard work and a bold shift in thinking, but our industry is worth it. Horse racing can and will thrive again sparking investment in jobs, infrastructure, and promotion.

Elbows up, Canada!

Act or time's up for our equine agricultural industry.

On the Road with Kathy Medeiros



Not long ago, Kathy Medeiros was searching for her calling. She knew that a 9-to-5 office or retail job, where a single rude customer could ruin her day, wasn't for her. An introvert by nature, who loves the outdoors and animals, Kathy was drawn to horses ever since childhood visits to her grandfather's farm. No matter where she ventured, a quiet voice always pulled her back to the horses.

When a friend spotted an ad for the Ontario Harness Horse Association's (OHHA) Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program (OEEEP), it seemed tailor-made for Kathy. She applied, breezed through the online course, and was placed at Whelan Farms in Troy, Ontario.

"The process was transparent and supportive," Kathy said. *"The guidance I received was key to my success."* OHHA/OEEEP General Manager Brian Tropea saw her potential and chose the Whelan Farms in Troy, Ontario for her job training placement. It turned out to be the perfect fit. *"If she can make it there, she will make it anywhere,"* beamed a proud Tropea.

Kathy was initially intimidated by Jim Whelan's larger-than-life reputation in the equine agricultural world. But Jim and his family welcomed her like kin. *"Family is everything to me,"* Kathy shared. *"Jim's high standards were daunting, but once I earned his trust, he became an incredible mentor, teaching me about horses, farm equipment, racing history, the rural economy and the equine agricultural business."*

Two years later, Kathy is a full-time star at Whelan Farms. *"She's an unbelievable worker—fearless yet respectful of her limits,"* Jim said. *"Kathy's a natural; the horses respond to her. She's family, essential to our daily routine."*

Kathy's progress has been remarkable. A fully licensed groom, she recently trained a sub-2:10 mile with her beloved Standardbred, Off Road Hanover. She breaks yearlings, hauls horses to Flamboro Downs, and paddocks them on race nights. A highlight came in April when Off Road Hanover won his first race in over a year. Kathy beamed in the winner's circle, proud of their shared triumph with "Roadie."

From retail to racing, from learning to drive a car to handling tractors and racehorses, Kathy has transformed into a consummate horse person in just two years. OHHA/OEEEP's support turned her first step into a leap toward a bright future.

Kathy's story proves that with opportunity and the right support, finding your calling in life comes down to passion and effort.

No doubt there will plenty of winning in Kathy Medeiros' future. And Roadie will be with her every step of the way.

North America Cup 2025: A Night of Promise and Missed Opportunities



Louprint (*outside*) noses out Madden Oaks in the 42nd North American Cup in 1:47.1

The 2025 North America Cup, Canada's richest Standardbred race, delivered a night to remember at Woodbine Mohawk Park. Thousands of fans lined the tarmac, with scores more in the grandstand and clubhouse, proving Ontario's harness racing fanbase endures despite minimal marketing. Young fans jostled for railbird spots to catch the thunderous action up close. It was a heartening sight, signalling a new generation's passion for our sport.

Despite a chilly mid-June evening, the horses blazed on a lightning-fast track. The best from the US, and Canada, indeed the world, competed for \$2.3 million in purses across the night's marquee events, with \$1 million for the Cup itself. Total wagering topped \$5 million on the race card—a testament to the event's draw.

Yet, the night fell short of its potential. A glaring lack of marketing dimmed the event's shine. The mid-week post-position draw, once a big event went unnoticed by the media. It makes one wonder what Ontario Racing's well-paid staff prioritize when it comes to promotion. The evening itself dragged on, with over four hours between the first race post time and the Cup, driving families—and potential lifelong fans away early.

Dining options were at best, uninspiring: an overpriced buffet was available though no effort to apply a Canadian stamp made one wonder about branding shortfalls. There were few festivities or events to entertain families between races. A single kiosk sold beer and coolers at inflated prices, accepting only credit or bank card payments—oddly excluding cash.

Most disappointingly, over 80% of the \$2.3 million awarded in racing purses left Ontario, with American owners, trainers, and drivers claiming the lion's share. That exodus of money, perhaps indicative of years of neglect by industry leaders, clearly has the potential to undermine Ontario racing's future growth.

Still, the race itself was a thrill. Congratulations to drivers Ronnie Wrenn and Braxton Boyd, both Michigan natives from storied racing families, who finished one-two, noses apart in record time. Ironically, their success, honed in a state now ravaged by predatory gaming and regulatory failures, serves as a bittersweet reminder of Ontario's past dominance in our sport.

The North America Cup if, done right, can be an example of harness racing's potential to captivate and attract legions of fans, old and new alike. But to thrive, Ontario Racing must act quickly, cooperatively and decisively: invest in robust marketing, speed up the product presentation, enhance family-friendly experiences, and positively promote the industry so that Ontario horses and horse people can compete against the world on our own soil. Our sport deserves leadership that champions our future.

Let's make the next Cup a true celebration of Ontario's racing legacy. Let's lead the herd—the Canadian way.

Just like we always have.

World Equestrian Center: A Vision for Ontario's Equine Future

Quality. Class. Distinction.

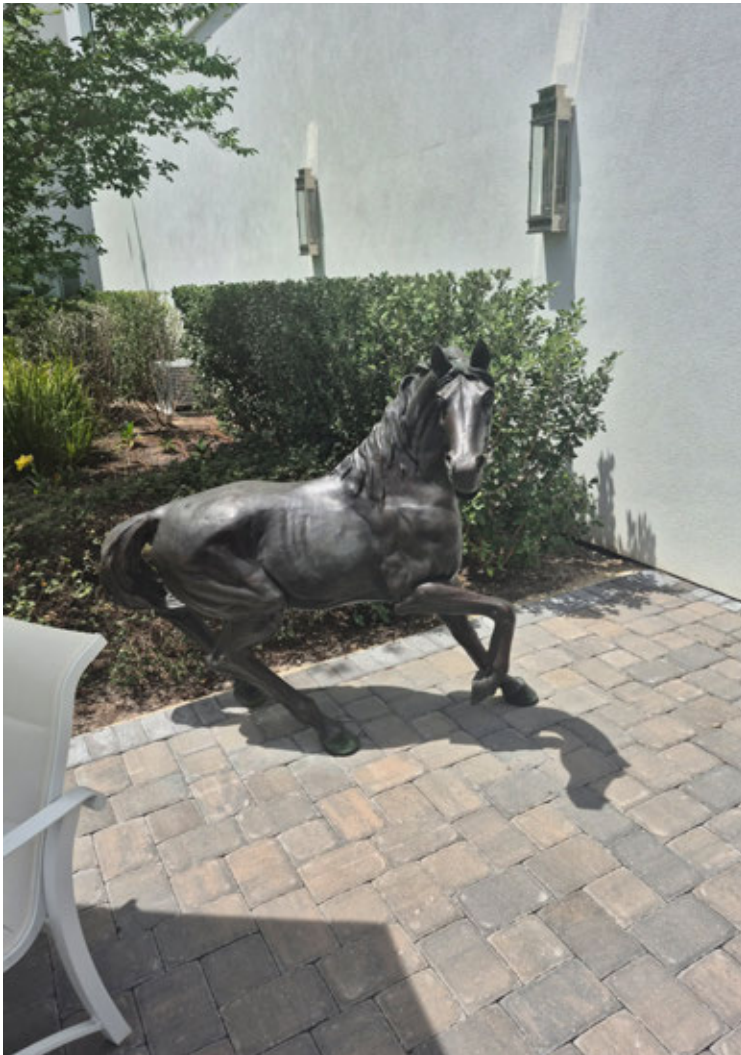
These words capture the essence of the World Equestrian Centre in Ocala, Florida. Named one of TIME Magazine's World's Greatest Places in 2024, it is a stunning testament to what vision, hard work, and targeted investment can achieve in the equine agricultural industry.

Nestled in Florida's multi-billion-dollar equine heartland, the World Equestrian Centre is North America's horse country epicentre. Spanning nearly 400 acres amid 1,000 pristine horse farms, it boasts two of the world's largest climate-controlled indoor equestrian arenas. The grounds are immaculate, with manicured walking paths connecting 20 competition rings, exercise arenas, and climate-controlled barns housing up to 3,000 horses in spacious 12x12 or 12x14 stalls. Wide barn aisles with rubber matting, top-of-the-line grated sliding stall doors, wash racks, and tack rooms create a horse person's paradise.

The World Equestrian Centre is more than a venue—it's a showplace destination. And horse enthusiasts flock to it.

Visitors can stay at two world-class hotels (a third is under construction). Hundreds of horse trailers, RVs, and campers fill the site. Golf carts only rules ensure safe, family-friendly travel. Scores of young children, our industry's future, add to the vibrant atmosphere. Despite heavy traffic, the grounds remain spotless, not a blade of grass out of place.

Beyond equestrian events like hunter/jumper competitions, dressage, and quarter horse shows, the World Equestrian Centre hosts soccer tournaments, making it a multi-purpose hub. A full competition calendar is accessible, with most events free to attend. On-site equine retail is expanding, with a dedicated storefront under construction. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested, with more planned for growth. Every dollar invested bolsters the local economy in terms of tourism and local employment opportunities.



World Equestrian Center: A Vision for Ontario's Equine Future

The World Equestrian Centre is aspirational. Ontario can follow its lead. We have the expertise, passion, and resources to build a multi-breed, multi-purpose equine centre celebrating rural Ontario's heritage. The Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) and Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program (OEEEP) have a business plan ready, shared with the government, awaiting approval to move forward. With public and private investment, we can create a Canadian counterpart—unique, world-class, and rooted in our horse people and our horses.

Imagine the economic boom; the people, the horses, the workers the equipment and all of the jobs that would come with building an equine agricultural event centre right here, in Ontario. Every weekend across rural Ontario literally hundreds of equine enthusiasts attend shows and competitions.

Horses, trailers, campers, families celebrating and competing. Families spending money in rural communities. Build it and they will come. All they need is the venue.

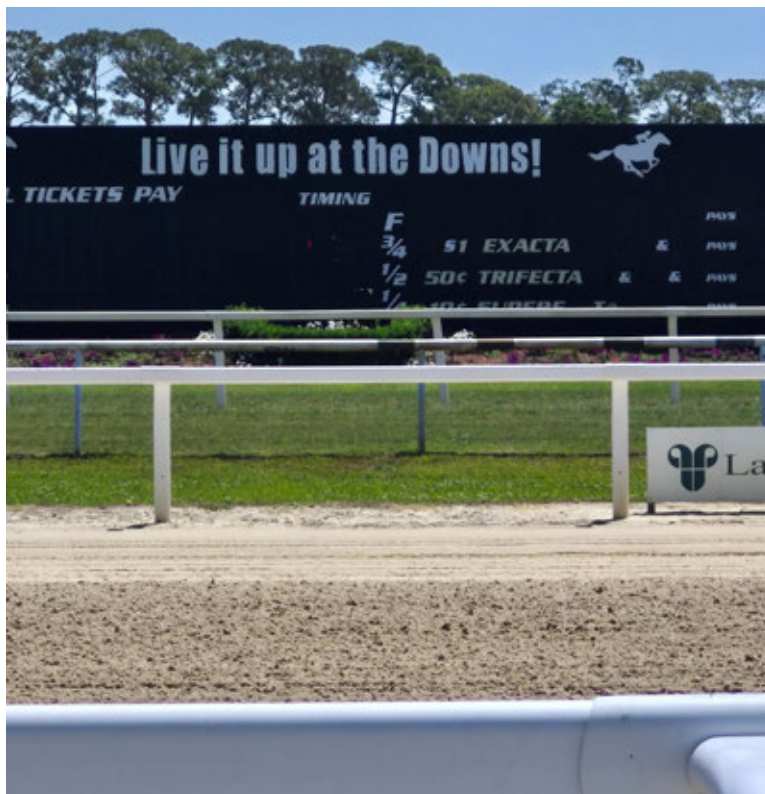
The World Equestrian Centre is indeed an aspirational beacon.

Quality. Class. Distinction. Ontario will not only meet those lofty standards, we can exceed them.

Let's get started.



Live It Up at Tampa Bay Downs



Florida's equine industry, particularly horse racing, has faced added scrutiny and uncertainty amid the Stronach Group's push to decouple gaming and Thoroughbred racing in the sunshine state

While a recent legislative decision denied the the request to decouple, the reprieve may only be temporary pending an appeal launched by the track ownership. All eyes will now be on these legal proceedings as gaming companies await to see just how quickly they can shed horse racing from their bottom line operating costs.

While this action meanders through the courts, a brighter story unfolds along the Gulf Coast at Tampa Bay Downs—a true success in Thoroughbred racing.

Founded in 1926, Tampa Bay Downs is gearing up for its 100th anniversary, thriving where many racetracks falter. What sets it apart? I visited “The Downs” on a non-racing day to find out. A young employee, a horse enthusiast herself, greeted me warmly at the entrance, offering programs for off-track wagering. When I mentioned I was passing through and would appreciate a tour, she eagerly showcased the facility with palpable pride.

Running approximately 6 months from November to May, the annual meet aligns with Florida's snowbird season, drawing on average over 3,300 fans daily and a mutual handle of \$4 million per card, with \$1 million actually bet on-site. Privately owned by Stella Thayer and Howell Ferguson, Tampa Bay Downs features a one-mile dirt track and a seven-furlong turf course.

Unlike many venues, it has no slot machines, relying instead on a poker room, a small restaurant, and a bar to serve off-track betting patrons.

The grounds are pristine, reflecting pride of ownership. The grandstand gleams, with traditional box seats—some personalized for owners and trainers—available for daily or yearly purchase, evoking racing's golden era. Nominal parking and admission fees don't deter fans, who flock to the immaculate race surface and its showcase paddock area.

The second-floor Seabiscuit Room, a tribute to the legendary Thoroughbred, his owner, trainer, and Canadian jockey Red Pollard, displays memorabilia, photos, and news clippings—a unique celebration of racing's history. It is a great piece of history for fans to digest and celebrate.

My tour ended with an invitation to return for the 100th anniversary meet and heartfelt thanks from my guide. Tampa Bay Downs is a beacon of what horse racing can be when passionate people prioritize the sport and its fans. Clean, professional, and welcoming, it proves that racetracks can still thrive and attract fans.

As Tampa Bay Downs celebrates a century of success, it offers a model for the industry: invest in the experience, honour the sport's legacy, provide stewardship and care and above all-live it up at the Downs.

Bob Eaton

Matteo's Come Home

“You want them to be ok without us.”

It's what every parent wants for their child.

For Rick and Janan Dinola, from Orton, Ontario that aspirational goal is now firmly in place.

Matteo Dinola came into the world in the usual way twenty-one years ago. His parents noted social milestone issues early and by the age of three, Matteo was diagnosed with autism.

Therapy waiting lists for children diagnosed with autism are long, meandering and above all, frustrating. Kids like Matteo often linger for years awaiting the appropriate interventions and therapy.

In the face of that challenge, without a doubt, a child's best advocate in a complicated service system is their parents. And clearly, Matteo has parents who are absolutely committed to their son and his well-being.

“We have done every therapy possible, commented Janan but I can't believe what the horses and the Ontario Equine Education and Employment Program has done for our son. It's been truly a life-altering experience for all of us. He is now fully engulfed with the horses and his work with them. He truly loves everything about it. He can't wait to get to the barn”

Matteo came into the program through a referral from his therapeutic riding instructor and advocate, Lisa Sutherland at “Ears to You.” The stable, located on the border of Fergus and Elora, Ontario is home to a number of horses and riders dedicated to providing a safe, therapeutic space for horse people with autism. Matteo was attending the program every Friday where he fell in love with horses.

Janan's voice is filled with pride describing how Matteo completed the on-line portion of the training with absolutely no issues or assistance from his mother. *“He did it all on his own and without any error.”* Matteo now saddles, grooms, rides and of course cleans stalls. *“He absolutely loves every bit of his job, especially the stall cleaning,”* said Janan.



On August 4th, OHHA/OEEEEP General Manager, Brian Tropea invited Matteo and his family to the Industry Day horse racing card at Grand River Raceway in Elora, Ontario. The family had never seen horse racing before, never mind attend live races. Matteo was in heaven. Brian escorted him throughout the grounds and the paddock, introducing the young enthusiast to scores of obliging and welcoming trainers and drivers.

He even got him into a winner's circle photograph. That picture is framed and proudly displayed on Mateo's bedroom wall. Needless to say, Brian and Matteo are now best buddies.

“This experience with OHHA/OEEEEP has forever changed Matteo's life. Brian has been amazing. He has helped change my son's whole world. He has found his space in a very safe and welcoming place. The horses instinctively respond and connect with him. It's unbelievable how gentle and nurturing these huge beasts are. We are forever in your debt,” concluded Janan.

Actually, it is we who are in your debt, Matteo and Janan, because, like you, we want Matteo to be ok without us too.

And thanks to horses and the amazing people who make up this industry, we know, deep in our hearts, that Matteo is safely anchored in a place that we all now share together- the equine agricultural world.



Horse Racing Needs a Voice: A Call for Self-Determination



(Left to Right) Tom Bain, Lakeshore Horseman's Association, OHHA Director, Mark Williams, Ontario Premier, Doug Ford, OHHA President, James Whelan, OHHA GM, Brian Tropea, OHHA 2nd VP, Bob Eaton

The Case for Change

In an August 18, 2025, a Paulick Report article titled "Horse Racing Needs War Rooms," award-winning reporter Andrew Cohen echoes a truth the Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) has championed since 1998: the horse racing industry urgently needs a strong, independent, industry-funded voice. This voice must advocate freely and effectively for horse people and the broader equine agricultural industry, unencumbered by reprisals from racetrack operators and casinos who prioritize land development and private profit over our industry's survival.

The Rise and Fall of SARP

In 1998, Ontario's Slots at Racetrack Program (SARP) was fully established to balance competing interests. It required the province of Ontario to operate the gaming business and share revenues with horse persons, municipalities and racetrack operators, ensuring racing's viability. Racetrack operators were mandated to re-invest in their core business of horse racing and pari-mutuel wagering.

The logic was clear: horse racing, a cornerstone of the equine agricultural industry, generates billions in economic activity and employs tens of thousands, particularly in rural Ontario. SARP's model succeeded initially, boosting purses, increasing wagering and inspiring similar programs across Canada and the U.S. Casinos or Racinos as they came to be known, gained access to gamblers, which in turn increased government revenues, while horse people raced for increased prize money. This partnership with the government flourished when in 2012, everything changed. The government of the day, without industry consultation, privatized the gaming industry, turning gaming revenues over to private gaming companies mostly based in the US. Racetrack owners were converted to landlords, with no obligation to invest revenues into the equine industry. This is now referred to as de-coupling.

The alliance was beyond tenuous. Profit-driven, often U.S.-based gaming companies saw racing as a competitor, siphoning wagering dollars from slot machines.

Horse Racing Needs a Voice: A Call for Self-Determination

Horse racing became a drag on their bottom line. The dismantling began with a calculated strategy: discredit advocates as complainers, then privatize gaming. In Ontario, SARP's end left horse people reliant on government subsidies alone. Purses plummeted, tracks closed, and facilities fell into disrepair. Backstretches emptied, grandstands sat barren, and the equine agricultural industry scrambled for their very livelihoods and existence. Other jurisdictions followed, decoupling gaming revenues from racing purses, further shrinking the industry.

A Broken Model

Twenty-five years later, OHHA's warnings have proven prophetic, but saying "we told you so" offers no progress. The model is broken. Gaming companies, driven by profit, were never going to sustain a rival industry competing for the same wagering dollars. Without enforceable conditions, their commitment to racing was always a facade.

Is Horse Racing Dead?

Far from it. With forward-thinking leadership, self-reliance, and government recognition of our right to self-determination, horse racing and the equine agricultural industry can thrive. The equine industry remains an economic powerhouse, supporting jobs and communities in ways casinos cannot match. As gaming shifts online, replacing workers with AI and algorithms, its economic impact will fade. Meanwhile, horse racing and the broader equine agricultural industry strives to rebuild, focusing on fan engagement, better service, and a compelling product. The two industries are diverging—and that's a good thing.

A New Vision: Horse People in Control

While Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG) claims to operate "like a not-for-profit" in its land development plans, a truly horse person-operated, gaming-equipped racetrack would embody that principle. Every wagered dollar would fund the industry's sustenance and promotion. As a not-for-profit, our books would be transparent, with public audits ensuring accountability. Run by horse people for horse people, this model would free casinos to pursue land development and online gaming while we reclaim and revitalize our racetracks. Fans would choose between soulless gambling or a dignified, engaging experience. That's the power of competition—a win for horse people, fans, and the industry.

A Call to Action

Andrew Cohen's article amplifies what insiders have long whispered: casinos never wanted racing. They sought only the billions in wagering dollars. This unnatural alliance has run its course. Now is the time for horse people to take the reins, restore our facilities, and secure our future. Together, we can bring horse racing and the entire equine agricultural industry home, beyond sustenance to where it rightfully belongs in our economy and our history.

The Blueprint

The equine agricultural industry is due proper respect and recognition. Full stop. We are an economic powerhouse and deserve to be treated as such. All it takes is a level playing field, a way to self-determine our destiny and to compete with multinational gaming companies, those corporations currently unfettered in access to Canadian gaming customers and their bank accounts. To get there, we require a direct partnership with our government; to be recognized as equal stakeholders focussed on sustaining and expanding our rural economy and the equine agricultural industry. It starts with granting the industry a gaming license and includes a commitment to the guiding principles of SARP. Indeed, the blueprint for success was established in 1998. All it takes is a shift back to those lofty goals and a deletion of the middleman- the casinos who want nothing to do with racing or the broader equine agricultural industry.

Time is indeed running out. Soon there will be little left to salvage. Let's get back to the future. Correct the mistakes of the last two decades and put the equine agricultural industry and the salt- of -the-earth people of rural Canada back on to the road to prosperity. Keep Canadian money in Canada, for our workers, our communities and most of all, our future.

Post time beckons.

Jim Whelan
President Ontario Harness Horse
Association/Ontario Equine Education and
Employment Program (OHHA/OEERP)

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



James Whelan
addressing opening day crowd at
Leamington Raceway



James Whelan
at the Calgary Stampede with the
Right Honourable **Stephen Harper**



James Whelan
at Calgary Stampede with
Alberta Premier **Danielle Smith.**



James Whelan
at the Calgary Stampede with
Ontario Minister of Rural Affairs, **Lisa Thompson**
and **Trish Rinneard** of Wellington Advocacy

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



James and Dr. Angela Whelan
with friends from the Toronto North Hunt Club



James Whelan
celebrating 50th birthday with friends and family
of retired Canadian champion jockey
Eurico Rosa da Silva at
Woodbine Race Track



GM Brian Tropea with
OHHA Director, Mark Williams
accompanied by
Ontario Minister of Agriculture,
Food and Agribusiness,
Trevor Jones
congratulating winning driver
Alex Lilley at
Leamington Raceway
on opening day



GM Brian Tropea with
Hilda MacDonald,
Leamington Mayor and Warden
of Essex County



James Whelan with
Chris Lewis,
Federal MP for Essex



WATCH FOR THE FALL / WINTER 2025 ISSUE OF

ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER



— THE ONTARIO —
EQUINE EDUCATION AND
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

