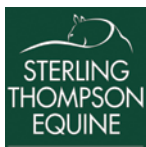


THE
HORSEMEN'S
JOURNAL



SPRING 2023

THE
NATIONAL
HBPA
WOULD LIKE TO
THANK ITS
CORPORATE
SPONSORS



AFFILIATES

BOARD OF DIRECTORS - AFFILIATES

Dr. David Harrington, Alabama
Robert Hutton, Arizona
Bill Walmsley, Arkansas
James Miller, Charles Town
Kim Oliver, Colorado
Chris Vaccaro, Finger Lakes
Jim Watkins, Illinois
Joe Davis, Indiana
David McShane, Iowa
Rick Hiles, Kentucky
Benard Chatters, Louisiana
Jason Uelmen, Michigan
Pete Mattson, Minnesota
Jami Poole, Mountaineer Park
Garald "Wally" Wollesen, Nebraska
Anthony Spadea, New England
Paul Jenson DVM, New Mexico
Joe Poole, Ohio
Joe Offolter, Oklahoma
Ron Sutton, Oregon
Sandee Martin, Pennsylvania
Mike Dini, Tampa Bay Downs
David Ross, Virginia
Pat LePley, Washington



CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Steven Barker
Dr. Kimberly Brewer
Dr. Clara Fenger
Patricia McQueen
Jennie Rees
Jen Roytz
Peter J. Sacopulos

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Denis Blake
Breeders' Cup/Eclipse Sportswire
Grace Clark/Kentucky Downs
Coady Photograph
Hodges Photography
Patricia McQueen
Jennie Rees
Jen Roytz

STAFF

Tom Law
Editor
P (859) 396-9407
hj@hbpa.org

Michelle McShane
Advertising Director
P (515) 508-1811
info@hbpa.org

Limb Design
www.limbdesign.com
Graphic Design

THE HORSEMEN'S JOURNAL

3380 Paris Pike
Lexington, KY 40511
P (859) 259-0451
F (859) 259-0452
hj@hbpa.org

HBPA WEBSITE

www.hbpa.org

COVER PHOTO

Coady Photography

The opinions, representations and viewpoints expressed by the authors in the articles contained in *The Horsemen's Journal* do not necessarily reflect the opinions, representations and viewpoints or the official policies or positions of *The Horsemen's Journal*, National Horsemen's Administration Corporation or National Horsemen's Benevolent & Protective Association Inc. and its affiliates (collectively "HJ"). HJ is not responsible for, and expressly disclaims all liability for, damages of any kind arising out of use, reference to or reliance on any information contained within this issue. Information in this issue may become outdated due to the rapidly changing nature of the horse industry. The publication of any advertisements or articles should not be construed as an endorsement of any product, service or position unless specifically stated.

The Horsemen's Journal, Volume 70 #1.

Postal Information: *The Horsemen's Journal* (ISSN 0018-5256) is published quarterly by the National Horsemen's Administration Corporation, with publishing offices at 3380 Paris Pike, Lexington, KY 40511. Copyright 2023 all rights reserved.

The Horsemen's Journal is the official publication for members of the Horsemen's Benevolent & Protective Association, a representative association of Thoroughbred owners and

trainers. HBPA is a non-profit 501(c)6 Kentucky corporation. Members receive *The Horsemen's Journal* as a benefit of membership paid by the national office from affiliate dues. Annual non-member subscriptions are \$25. Single-copy back issues, if available, are \$7. Canadian subscribers add \$6. All other subscriptions outside the U.S. add \$20 payable in U.S. funds. To order reprints or subscriptions, call (859) 259-0451.

The HBPA National Board of Directors has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required of the association. Views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and/or advertisers and do not necessarily represent the opinion or policy of the publisher or HBPA board or staff. Query the editor prior to sending any manuscripts.

Periodicals Postage Paid at Round Rock, Texas and additional mailing offices.

CANADA POST: Publications mail agreement no. 41530527. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: P. O. Box 503, RPO West Beaver Creek, Richmond Hill, ON L4B 4R6.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Horsemen's Journal*, 3380 Paris Pike, Lexington, KY 40511.



**RACE TRAINING
BREAKING
LAYUPS
FITNESS & THERAPY**

COMPLETE SUITE OF SERVICES

STATE OF THE ART TRAINING & THERAPY CENTERS



Training Track
1-3/8ths Mile Turf Gallop
Gate Schooling
European Style Panel Walkers



Veterinary Services
X-ray & Ultrasound
Dynamic Endoscopy
Equine Acupuncture



Full Therapy Center
Aqua Treadmills
Cold Saltwater Spa
Vibration Floor Stalls

For more information, contact Jeff Hooper Cell (817)992-0609



5247 Texas Highway 19 South • Sulphur Springs, Texas 75482
www.HighlanderTrainingCenter.com
(903) 485-8440



www.HTC-TX.com

Differentiation With Quality

COURTESY OF HIGHLANDER TRAINING CENTER

Highlander Training Center continues to grow and gain acceptance

By Jennie Rees

Larry Hirsch, searching for a facility to prepare his young racehorses and provide R&R for others, had a vision when he saw the old Rafter L Ranch. It just required looking past the dilapidated barn, the full-sized trees that took over the paddocks and pasture, the widespread stash of rusty and broken machinery and a training track obscured by towering weeds.

TRAINING AT SUNRISE AT HIGHLANDER TRAINING CENTER IN SULPHUR SPRINGS, TEXAS

Hirsch built his Dallas-based private equity firm, Highlander Partners, into a global force by recognizing diamonds in the rough. So when looking at Rafter L Ranch, Hirsch didn't see a massive reclamation project after two decades of neglect. He saw possibility.

"You could see it had 'good bones,' " he said. "It's beautiful property, great topography—as opposed to flat ground in Texas. It had rolling grounds that came down, which means that water and rain—which we have a lot of in East Texas—would roll off the property. It was treed, which meant we have shade for our horses. It had a wonderful track that hadn't been used for 20 or 25 years. But the soils, everybody we showed them to said they're extraordinarily good for preserving the health and training of horses. It wasn't hard to come to the conclusion that this was the right place to be."

That was 2017.

Today, yearlings and weanlings romp in undulating pastures that are part of Hirsch's 189-acre Highlander Training Center on Texas Highway 19, just minutes off Interstate 30 in Sulphur Springs. Two-year-olds learning the fundamentals and older horses coming off layoffs jog and gallop over a traditional training track and lope up a 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ -mile turf gallop.

The spacious barns feature vaulted ceilings and skylights that can open and close via remote control but are programmed to automatically close when it rains. The 12-by-12-foot stalls with springy flooring under bedding provide horses with maximum comfort.

"You'd think you just drove into Lexington, not Sulphur Springs, Texas," said trainer Lon Wiggins, whose main circuit is Kentucky and Arkansas.

"It's a facility that belongs in Kentucky as far as the quality is concerned," concurred Kentucky-based trainer Joe Sharp, whose main winter stable is based at Fair Grounds. "To have that in the South and give people down here options like that, it's really beneficial."

Sulphur Springs, with a population of 16,000, is home to the Southwest Dairy Museum and Education Center, which chronicles the town's roots as Texas' one-time dairy capital. The region is populated with cattle farms interspersed with horses of various breeds. And located 80 miles east of Dallas, Highlander is an easy drive to tracks in Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana and less than 800 miles from Churchill Downs and Keeneland Race Course.

"I know of only one other facility similar to this, which would be WinStar," said Dr. Ali Broyles, the veterinarian and equine surgeon who oversees Highlander's equine medical care, in reference to WinStar Farm in Versailles, Kentucky. "For this kind of weanling-throughout-racing timeline, in addition to these therapy modalities, there are not very many facilities of this scope in the country. It's a relatively new facility, but I know they have already seen a lot of growth and acceptance from the Thoroughbred community on a national level."

The 11,000-square-foot Highlander Fitness and Therapy Center was a critical part of Hirsch's game plan. Depending on horses' needs, they could head to the above-ground cold saltwater spa where 35-degree water churns around their legs, in-ground and above-ground aqua treadmills or two stalls with full vibration-plate floors.

Soft-tissue injuries that once would have forced a horse's retirement are treated with such tools as groundbreaking regenerative laser therapy from Sound. The list of diagnostic equipment on hand includes a portable digital X-ray machine, ultrasound and dynamic endoscopy (examining the upper airway to detect abnormalities that may only be found during high-speed exercise).

"What is going to make you different from competition from Ocala, Kentucky, Louisiana, et cetera?" Hirsch said. "Those of us who believe we want to have horses that run at 4 and 5 years old and retain them in a healthy manner throughout their lives know the importance of having some place to lay up horses, some place to improve them, some place to get over injuries. That was the concept—differentiation with quality—with creating something special here."

“
You could see it had 'good bones.' It's beautiful property, great topography ... It wasn't hard to come to the conclusion that this was the right place to be.
—Larry Hirsch



COURTESY OF HIGHLANDER TRAINING CENTER

HORSES CAN TRAIN ON HIGHLANDER'S TRADITIONAL DIRT TRACK OR ITS 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ -MILE TURF GALLOP.



For years, Hirsch trusted his yearlings, 2-year-olds and layups to the father-son team of Ed and Scooter Dodwell at their Diamond D Ranch in Lone Oak, Texas. After Ed died and the ranch was sold, Hirsch opted to establish his own training center. He tasked Scooter Dodwell with finding suitable property.

That turned out to be the Rafter L Ranch property 12 miles away. Much of the Diamond D crew relocated with Dodwell, who served as Highlander's president and head trainer before retiring in 2022.

Highlander general manager Jon Newbold—a Diamond D veteran whose deep experience included working for Valor Farm in Texas, Taylor Made in Kentucky and Eddie Woods in Ocala—was charged with cleaning up the property so horses could return.

"It was wilderness," Newbold said. "It was really beautiful, but it was a challenge to get it fenced to where we could make it functional. . . . To see all of the progress and the transformation, there has been so much done every single day to get it to where it is now."

Newbold heads the training preparation of yearlings and 2-year-olds. Shannon Ritter, a WinStar veteran brought in to lead Highlander's therapy center, oversees the racehorses preparing to return to the track.

"Shannon has an exceptional reputation of working with horses at the track, of working with project horses and horses that needed a little extra TLC and incredible horsemanship," Highlander Chairman and CEO Jeff Hooper said of Ritter, a successful jockey and trainer who also served as assistant trainer to Elliott Walden before Walden became WinStar CEO. "By having Shannon overseeing our operations in the therapy center and also leading the training of the older horses, it's really a seamless process. . . . We're getting very positive response from trainers at the track about the horses they're getting back, their condition and their fitness."

Just ask Robertino Diodoro, who races all over the country. He's had "a little bit of everything" at Highlander, from rehabbing horses to 2-year-olds and yearlings being broken.

"It's first-class facility with a first-class staff," Diodoro said. "I've been to a lot of places that have a beautiful facility, but they don't have the staff to go with it. Highlander has both, very top-notch and great communicators."

Hooper joined Highlander in 2019. He is one of Texas' most respected executives, having worked on both the racetrack (Lone Star Park) and the horsemen's (Texas Thoroughbred Association) side. Jose "Cuco" Mendez works as a trainer alongside Newbold and Ritter after 28 years as an exercise rider, assistant and trainer. Office manager Dee O'Brien, from a racing family and with extensive experience on the equine auction side, heads up administrative functions, including client relations and new project initiatives. Destin Heath, formerly WinStar's farm trainer, helps out as a consultant.

Highlander places so much importance on its eight full-time riders and 14 full-time experienced grooms that their photos are included on the operation's website along with management.

"We think horsemanship is the key and foundation of what we do here," Hooper said. "We want to bring each horse to the best of their abilities, whatever that may be. We're fortunate to have experienced and highly professional people in all of our leadership roles here. But we always want to learn from others too and blend old-school horsemanship with the cutting-edge technologies available. Racing can be a game of inches. So anything we can do to help these horses achieve what they're capable of, we want to have those tools at our disposal."

While Highlander values the Texas market, the goal has always been "to be a top facility on a national basis that is strategically located in Texas," Hooper said. Highlander averaged 135 horses on its property in 2022, up 22 percent from 2021, he said.

"The best advertising is the quality of the product that we're sending to the trainers at the track," Hooper said. "While our ultimate goal isn't to see how many horses we can get, we're pleased that owners and trainers are entrusting us more and more with their horses and with some really nice horses."



LARRY HIRSCH (CENTER WITH TRAINER JOE SHARP TO THE LEFT AT KENTUCKY DOWNS) HAS SEEN HIS HIGHLANDER TRAINING CENTER DEVELOP INTO A TOP-TIER FACILITY ACCESSIBLE FROM TRACKS IN THE SOUTHWEST AND MIDWEST.

“

We think horsemanship is the key and foundation of what we do here. We want to bring each horse to the best of their abilities, whatever that may be.

—Jeff Hooper

”

Highlander for the first time had a yearling consignment at the Texas Thoroughbred Association's sale in August and utilized its aqua treadmills to help prepare the youngsters.

The average and median prices for that first consignment were more than double the Texas Summer Yearling Sale's overall average and median prices. Highlander sold the sales topper, with the Texas-bred daughter of Too Much Bling going for \$100,000 to Mansfield Racing.

Trainer Bret Calhoun, whose main divisions are in Kentucky, Louisiana and his native Texas and whose clients include Hirsch, said selling yearlings was a logical extension of the Highlander facilities, which he said fill a gaping hole in the South and Southwest.

“It was a much-needed place in the region, for sure, if not across the United States and racing in general,” said Calhoun, who will train the sales topper. “The therapy center is a big addition but also the training facility. There are less and less training facilities in that region, fewer people breaking and training. With all that together, it's been a very important place and getting more important all the time.” **HJ**



COURTESY OF HIGHLANDER TRAINING CENTER

DR. ALI BROYLES (RIGHT), A VETERINARIAN AND SURGEON WHO OVERSEES EQUINE MEDICAL CARE, AND SHANNON RITTER, WHO LEADS THE OPERATION'S THERAPY CENTER AND OVERSEES RACEHORSES PREPARING TO RETURN TO THE TRACK, ARE TWO KEY MEMBERS OF THE HIGHLANDER TEAM.