

Jeff Scott: Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation announces new fundraising initiative

By JEFF SCOTT

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All Thoroughbred rescue, retirement and retraining organizations - from the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF) to the smallest "backyard" operation - have one thing in common: none of them ever has enough money. Two recent initiatives, both involving the TRF, exemplify the sort of creative giving these equine organizations need in order to continue their important work.

One initiative is the "Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation Saylor Challenge," which will match all funds (up to a total of \$50,000) donated to the TRF between now and Feb. 29.

In a statement announcing the initiative, Thoroughbred owner and breeder Paul Saylor made it clear he was responding to an urgent need, as well as to a personal calling he hoped others in the industry shared.

"I am issuing this challenge to motivate people in the racing industry and Thoroughbred lovers to donate to the TRF," said Saylor, whose best-known runners have been champions Ashado and Fleet Indian. "Thoroughbred racing as a business needs to show that caring for retired racehorses is a priority. I am pleased to be doing this work through the TRF, which I have found to be under sound management and on responsible financial footing given the difficulties that most charities are experiencing raising money in these times."

Saylor's initiative has obvious advantages over a straight donation. Not only will more funds potentially be generated, but more people will be brought into the process, people who may be moved to continue their support in the future.

"Challenge grants are great because every donation basically gets doubled," Diana Pikulski, TRF's director of external affairs, said in an email Friday. "So every gift has twice as much impact and twice as much meaning. Our business is full of seasoned philanthropists who see the benefit of giving to a challenge grant campaign."

The second recent initiative was a \$225,000

start-up grant from the Harriet E. Pflieger Foundation that will be used to "create a program to retire, rehabilitate and retrain up to 100 Thoroughbreds per year from NYRA

tracks." Part of the money will be used to make capital improvements to the groundbreaking TRF farm at Wallkill Correctional Facility. The New York Racing Association and New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association have pledged to help sponsor the program.

"Every Thoroughbred racehorse should be given a life after retirement," Linda Pflieger Edwards, trustee for the foundation, said in a statement. "We are proud that the principals of New York racing have partnered with us and the TRF to make this model program a reality."

Nothing is more damaging to racing's public image than the widespread sense that not enough is being done for retired horses. Efforts such as those of Paul Saylor and the Harriet E. Pflieger Foundation help a great deal but aren't nearly enough. There needs to be an industry-wide commitment, both financial and philosophical, to providing post-career care and opportunities for which all horses - not just the sport's stars and those used as breeding stock - are eligible.

There also needs to be creative thinking done to determine how this might best be accomplished. Fortunately, in New York, some creative thinking has already been done by the New York State Task Force on Retired Racehorses. This task force, which was created by the state legislature several years ago, has recommended that a tiny percentage of all VLT commissions (one-tenth of 1 percent, or \$1 of every \$1,000) at the new Aqueduct casino be directed toward providing for retired horses. A similar percentage would come out of purses. Additional monies would bring the total raised to \$5 million per year. Distribution of funds would be overseen by a 13-member advisory board that would consist of representatives from all major state racing, horsemen's and breeders' associations.

Thus far there hasn't been much of a public response to the task force's recommendations. But with all the money New York racing and breeding will be receiving from their share of VLT receipts (estimates range as high as \$50 million per year), there is no better time to put in place a program of dependable funding for retired racehorses, a program that has been long overdue.

For information on how to donate to the TRF Saylor Challenge, call 508-226-0028 or go to www.trf.org.

Jeff Scott writes about horse racing Tuesday in The Saratogian. He may be reached at utahpine1@aol.com.