



HE OPERATES THE MOST POWERFUL HARNESS RACING STABLE IN THE WORLD, YET RON BURKE IS LARGELY UNKNOWN IN THE INDUSTRY. THERE MAY BE A NUMBER OF REASONS FOR THAT BUT THERE IS NO DENYING HE IS A MAN ON A MISSION.

ALONG WITH HIS FATHER MICKEY, HIS OPERATION IS APPROACHING \$15 MILLION IN PURSES FOR THE SEASON, A REMARKABLE ACCOM-

PISHMENT GIVEN THAT THE STABLE WON CLOSE TO \$11 MILLION IN BOTH 2007 AND 2008.

PRIOR TO 2002 THE BURKE STABLE WAS LARGELY JUST A FACE IN THE CROWD NOT HAVING WON \$1 MILLION BEFORE THEN. BUT AS RON BURKE EXPLAINS IN THIS INTERVIEW WITH *THE HARNESS EDGE'S* HAROLD HOWE, A VERY CLEARLY THOUGHT OUT PLAN WAS PUT INTO PLACE THAT IS NOW PAYING OFF HANDSOMELY.

EXAMPLES OF STABLES WITH MORE THAN 100 HORSES ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN TODAY UNLIKE 25 YEARS AGO. THE BURKE STABLE IS RUN LIKE A MILITARY OPERATION WITH A CONSTANT TURNOVER OF HORSES AT A VARIETY OF RACETRACKS.

AT AGE 40, RON IS THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BUT IS NOT AFRAID OF DELEGATING, AS ONE MUST WITH 16 ASSISTANT TRAINERS. THE BURKE STABLE IS THE MODERN DAY EXAMPLE OF A JUGGERNAUT AND WOULD APPEAR WELL POSITIONED TO TACKLE 2010 WITH THE SAME AGGRESSIVE TACTICS.

MEET RON BURKE.

RON BURKE



Photo by New Image Media

As we do this interview your stable has won over \$14 million from more than 3,000 starts in 2009. This has required your horses to perform at a large number of tracks across the United States and Canada. There are people who are wondering why you would want to conduct a business like that.

Basically, we just love to race. Our owners have the same mindset, it's almost a sickness. If we don't have 10 in to race every day it seems like something

The Burke stable suffered a huge loss earlier this year when barn favourite Maltese Artist had to be put down after breaking his leg in an elimination of the Molson Pace at Western Fair Raceway. The eight-year-old had \$2.3 million earned in his impressive career.

is not right. We are constantly panicking to get more horses.

We love to race and the money is great too. Never did we think we'd be making the money that we are in harness racing. It's just outstanding.

What is the size of your stable today?

Right now we'd be pushing close to 150 but in the heat of the summer after we culled out some we were close to 110. Most of the money is made by that group and the rest fall by the wayside for the most part.

The Meadows has 80 and New Jersey has 60 or so. In the past I have gone back and forth but this year stayed closer to home and brought horses to me. Shannon Murphy ran the barn in New Jersey but we all go back and forth. Jamie Rucker handled our horses in Indiana when we were there.

In the winter, Dad (Mickey) will have 40 babies in Florida at Reveille Training Centre. Every month or so I go down to have a look because he is the eternal optimist whereas I'm the eternal pessimist. Between us we generally settle on the potential of a young horse.

Anderson and Goodrow

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Conrad Photos

Tell us about the farm you purchased near The Meadows racetrack.

Earlier this year we bought a training centre where we keep 55 head. It has enabled us to grow this year and has been one of things that allowed us to step it up. We can have more horses at home to get ready before moving them on to the other tracks.

The farm was built by Robert Murphy who owned Dontellmenomore. The track was built to the exact specifications of the Delaware County Fairgrounds' track. You can train a horse pretty well over it.

It has very nice stabling and it's nice that we are out there by ourselves. The horses like it especially the aged horses. They just seem to like it better out there.

You have one of the largest operations in all of harness racing. What is the breakpoint for a stable that size?

To tell you the truth I don't know anymore and that's being honest. I know we are doing well but there was a time I figured \$500,000 a month. If that's true we are making ridiculous money, which we are not. It's hard to tell because of the increase in the prices of horses.

Now I figure that if the stable is batting a .300 average with the quality of barn that we have we would make money. We keep the bills down and that figure seems to hold true for the barn.



Won The West has earned in excess of \$2 million in his career and Burke says the five-year-old Western Hanover gelding could enjoy a breakout season in 2010.

The stable was not always this size. The records show that prior to 2002 the barn had not won \$1 million in purses. What changed?

We looked at the opportunities that were coming due to the slot machines and started to build. That's why we went to the Meadowlands when we did in order to start building our barn so we would be ready when Pennsylvania got the slots in place.

Truthfully, it was a real plan that has worked to perfection. It was one of those things that we thought would work and it did. As we were able to expand we did to where we are today.

How many people do you employ?

Last time I counted up we had 16 trainers, one for every 10 horses. I think there are about 40 others whether they are grooms, shippers or whatever.

Christmas Greetings and best wishes for happiness in the coming year.

Sincere thanks to our clients, friends and everyone who supported us in 2009.

DUSTIN JONES STABLE

Marianne, Dustin, Emilie and Tyler



Seasons Greetings From



2010 Race Schedule

Where
Horsemen
&
Fans **1ST**
Finish

APRIL

S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
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- VERNON DOWNS 6:55
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- TIOGA DOWNS 6:50
- TIOGA DOWNS 1:30
- VD 6:55 & TD 6:50

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What about equipment?

That is all my Dad's thing and he loves it. We have at least eight rigs now. If I ask my Dad if we can get another one he's down the road before I finish the sentence.

And for us it's the right thing. We don't want to be sitting around being told we can't ship at such and such a time.

The way we are set up we go when we want. I would not hazard a guess on how many miles a year we travel. But I do know one business credit card is over \$10,000 per month. It costs a lot to run all these trucks. I think maybe we break even on the trucks but the trailers make us money so in the long run it works.

Tell us a bit about your father Mickey's background.

Dad drove in his first race in 1954. There are some people who think he just got into the game recently which is just not right.

He had General Motors dealership until 1981 when he came home one day and announced that the car dealership was doing poorly. He wanted to sell it



Photo by New Image Media

Burke calls \$1.4 million winner Buck I St Pat the best horse he's been around. The six-year-old daughter of Jailhouse Jesse will be back to race in 2010.



IL VILLAGGIO
2,1:55.4 (\$488,183)

Merry Christmas

To All Our Friends In Racing

ERV MILLER STABLE
Erv & Heidi

and try training racehorses full time. I was just a kid and remember thinking this is crazy. We were lucky to win a race a month at that time.

The economy in southwestern Pennsylvania was bad then and the car industry went with it. So he started with one horse and grew it. I think I'm right in saying we never took a backward step with the horses.

Then my brother and I got out of college before my sister came back to work for us. I have to say one thing is that my Dad always allowed us to change and do things differently. He was always all for it and never stuck in his ways.

Did you always believe that your career was going to be racing horses?

Actually, I wanted to get right into it at the end of high school but my parents made me go on to college. My father said I could come to the barn after I finished college. I didn't have a lot of choice, it was either go to school or go out on my own. This way I could still work with the horses in my time away

from school. Going on my own was never an option. I always wanted it to be my Dad and me.

I got my degree in pre-law and was going to go on to law school but things started picking up with the horses. At that time I was 21 which was in 1991. I liked school but it was always about the horses for me.

So how did the Burke stable go about expanding?

Basically, each of us went out and borrowed a lot of money to start buying into horses. Not only were we going to start training more horses but we were also going to own a lot of them too.

That was the first part of the puzzle and then the next part was when Mark Weber came aboard. Then came some others like Howard Taylor, big-time guys who were spending more money and were keen on getting into more horses.

Mark has been a gambler all his life who wanted to really take a shot at owning horses. He and I are almost the same age. Now we live five houses apart and

get along great. He brought more people on board and it just took off.

How many family members are involved?

There is my brother Mickey II. He is much the same as I am, an assistant trainer. We have 16 of them and we all do whatever it takes to get the work done. We all ship, warm up, do paddocks, whatever is needed. No one feels they are better than someone else.

There's my sister Michelle who basically runs the barn at The Meadows when I'm not around.

And then of course, there's my Dad.

What do you bring to the party?

I have the ability to process a lot of information. I've always read at an incredible clip and tend to retain a lot of information. That helps when it comes to doing all of the entering, approving veterinary work, moving the horses to where I think they will best fit and that sort of thing.

While I talk with everyone, in the long run I'm the one who has to make the final decision on these sorts of things.

'TIS THE SEASON TO BE MERRY

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Dave Palone, who drives many of the Burke Stable horses, says you are a type A personality. He said that was shown when you got up in the middle of a Stanley Cup playoff game involving the Pittsburgh Penguins to take a cell phone call.

People won't believe this but it's got to the point that I carry two cell phones so I can be texting on one and talking on another. In a way I don't know what I did with my time before we got to this size.

Mark and I have a box set up at The Meadows. We have multiple televisions where I can watch all the racing I need to. There are computers and things like that so I am constantly in contact. And the crazy thing is that I really don't mind it.

My Dad is 73 and he's the same way. I don't think he would miss 100 races out of the 3,000 we race in a year. Maybe I am worse because even when I'm on vacation I will have someone put a phone by the television so I can hear the races that interest me.

How does this work for family life?

I am married with two kids. That is hard at times but I am home more than I'm not. Still, as the kids get older I'm hoping they can spend more time with me on the road. I would enjoy that.

My wife Diane is very understanding. She was an executive with a pharmaceutical company and basically retired so she could take care of so many things that I don't have to worry about, like house payments or car payments or licensing for

"We love to race and the money is great too. Never did we think we'd be making the money that we are in harness racing. It's just outstanding."

example. All I focus on now is training racehorses and worry about racehorse things. I couldn't do it without her.

You and your father have been mentoring driver Matt Kakaley. People are saying he's getting a great opportunity with the Burke stable but also looks like the real deal. There was some discussion that you were going to send him to Ontario with 10 to 12 horses but instead he went to Pompano Park. What happened?

Matt's mother needed some help in Florida where he has a bit of an affinity. Plus we were trying to make a decision about going to Canada which was right when my father got sick. It's difficult to come to grips with expanding when you are worrying about your Dad's health.

I still think eventually Matt will end up either in Ontario or New York for us. I'm hoping our relationship with Matt is just beginning and not ending.



It's Always Better In
The Maritimes

Season's Greetings

With the holiday season upon us we wish to thank our buyers, bidders and consignors for their support in 2009 at the eighth annual Atlantic Classic Yearling Sale. Watch for details of the 2010 sale at Crapaud, Prince Edward Island.



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How did the idea of mentoring Matt come about?

That was 100 per cent due to my father. He went to Pompano to race Maltese Artist. Tom Harmer and Wally Hennessey called him aside and said this kid is the next coming but needs to get out of here to somewhere he can get a lot of drives.

My Dad just walked over to Matt and introduced himself. He told him that he'd heard some good things about him and we needed a driver in Ohio. Matt said he'd be there in four or five days. My father called me to tell me the news and my reaction was 'yeah right – we'll see.' But five days later he called to say he was on his way and asked where did we want him to go.

Since then Matt worked with my brother every day in Ohio and driven all the horses. He'd go anywhere we asked and you could see early on he could make a horse go. The thing I remember most is that he got parked every step in an invite with one of our horses but still won the race. Afterwards my Dad and I discussed it and agreed that we can teach him how not to get parked like that but can't teach him how to keep a horse going and still win.

Tell us what happened with your Dad's health.

My Dad contracted Legionnaires' disease in Lexington. That led to full-blown double pneumonia and his heart got out of rhythm. If you asked him he would have said he was not that sick which was very different from what the doctors were saying.

My sister has connections to a clinic in Cleveland and finally we made the decision to move him there where he made a great recovery. But he still spent over two weeks in intensive care and lost over 30 pounds. Then he just went back in again for gallstones.

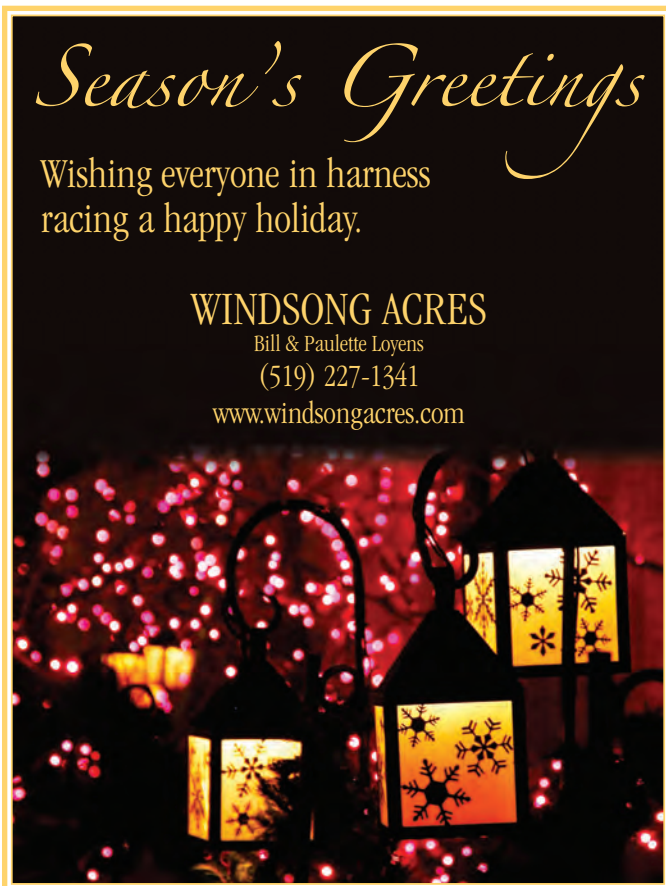
He's unbelievable though. As we do this interview he is driving to Florida and then we're going on a cruise. He's a tough guy.

This is as good a time as any to discuss the \$2,500 fine and four month suspension for the two lidocaine positive tests from the Meadowlands that was handed down by the New Jersey Racing Commission.

We do not know what happened. Neither of our veterinarians carries lidocaine on the track and we do not have lidocaine. We have spent a fortune trying to figure out what happened. We tested our horses on our own but never could figure it out.

Regardless, this does fall under the trainer responsibility rule. Dad had to serve the time for failing to properly safeguard our horses. To him it has been a big deal because we could not race in some places but more importantly the legacy of this and his good name. He is a staunch believer in playing clean.

But now he is back off suspension and hopefully nothing else will happen in the future. Now we have cameras in the barns that record for 30 days. The fact that we do not know what happened is what scares us.



Season's Greetings

Wishing everyone in harness racing a happy holiday.

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Holiday Wishes

A special congratulations to two of our 2008/2009 guests and their connections, Elusive Desire and Won The West for their tremendous performances throughout the year.

Happy holidays to everyone in harness racing.

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This Holiday Season*




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This was a real bone of contention between my father and I. He wanted to fight it right to the Supreme Court level. But I argued that sooner or later we were going to have to settle this and move on. He protested that we did not do it but I said we did get positives and there is the trainer responsibility rule no matter how unfair it is in this instance. It is causing a lot of hardship but we have to move on.

What was the fallout from the attention it drew?

Our owners never doubted us for a minute. They see the veterinary bills which I would suggest are the lowest in the game. If the horses race well I do not give credit to the vet and if they race badly I don't blame them. We're the trainers and we decide what has to be done.

I think that those people who are heavy on vet usage do so because they feel they need to in order to compete. The truth is if they would just focus on having them in the right class with the

right driver, most of the problems are taken care of.

Let's talk about some of the horses that have been in your barn of late starting with Foiled Again.

Absolutely never goes a bad race and the most consistent horse I have ever been around.

Buck I St Pat.

The best one I've ever been around and truly the one that when she is on her game is almost unbeatable. The trip to Sweden for the Elitlopp was an outstanding experience but I learned how hard it is on North American horses to go there. The way it is set up for transport puts the North American horses at such a disadvantage versus the ones there. Any horse that can do it and perform well is a great horse.

She'll race one more year at least; things held together pretty well. Next year we'll stay in the US and Canada. Hopefully, she and Southwind Wasabi that we bought in Harrisburg will be a

great pair.

Won The West.

He's improved every year and maybe next year will be his breakout season. All along I've said this could be the best horse in North America at some point. The last several months he has really started to shine.

Ginger And Fred.

She's just a good horse. It's a shame she ran into the Bulletproof killers. Every time she was beaten it was by one of those horses. Otherwise, you would be talking about her being one of the best of all time.

Sheer Desire.

Maybe a little bit of a disappointment this year. He's a very fast horse that I still have not given up on the idea of being a top notch pacer. He was maybe a bit of an underachiever and maybe a bit of a train wreck. Things never went right other than for a period of about five weeks which salvaged the year.

SEASON'S GREETINGS



New Image Media



WELL SAID

p,2,1:51, 3,1:47.3-'09 (\$2,690,820)

A special thank you to all my owners, drivers and staff for a great 2009 season.

Best of racing luck in 2010.

STEVE ELLIOTT



*Merry Christmas and
Happy Holidays*



Many thanks to my many clients and friends for their support this past year. Wishing everyone the best for 2010.

PERRY SODERBERG

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*May you feel the warmth of
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From our family to yours, all of us at Milton Equine Hospital join in wishing you a Merry Christmas and a healthy New Year.

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KATIE SMITH, BVetMed, MSc, ACVS diplomate

Bone A Fide.

Yannick (Gingras) calls her the best filly he has sat behind since Darlins Delight. A very good horse and we have high, high hopes for her at three because she should improve with age.

Tell us about the tragic loss of Maltese Artist who had to be euthanized after suffering a catastrophic leg injury earlier this year in the Molson Pace elimination at Western Fair.

He is still the all time favourite in the barn. He was the horse who brought us to where we are now. He was the one that we really stepped out on and bought for \$146,000 and he delivered. That was our first foray into paying big money and that just multiplied for us. He never disappointed.

The loss of him at Western Fair was just about the worst thing that could have happened. What a loss.

Any others come to mind?

Cams Fast Gun comes to mind because he was the first we ever won

\$100,000 with in one year. He was the first that we took to the Meadowlands and that maybe let people know we were a barn on the rise. Those were horses that laid the groundwork into getting Maltese Artist who in turn led to so many good horses.

Go On BB won \$260,000 this year and has been the female version of Foiled Again. She never goes a bad mile.

Ideal Weather was another. She won \$800,000 for us after being bought for just \$17,000. We owned a big part of her and she did nothing but make money. How can you not respect horses like that?

How do you find horses today?

That is a 100 per cent team effort on the part of several people, Mark, Kevin Corey of the JJK Stable, me and a lot of agents. I have a much better view of agents than most people. I think they have been up front with us. They are trying to fill a niche in the industry which needs to be done.

When we go to the sales we go seri-

ous. We buy a lot of horses at public auction which is my favourite part of the game. Mark likes the private purchases while some of our owners like claiming but I prefer the sales. There is so much opportunity but we work it.

We talk to a lot of people and watch a lot of video. Every day we look to buy a horse. Very few days go by where we don't buy or sell one.

So there is a big turnover of horses in the barn?

It's incredible. There are days when we'll lose seven and get seven. The amount of horses we go through is unbelievable. But I love it; I'm like a kid with a new toy when a new horse comes in.

I'm not sure if it's the greatest thing for horses in terms of getting claimed and turned every other week. But that is the nature of the beast if you want to be in the claiming game. I'd much rather do the Maltese Artist, Buck I St Pat thing that we can race for three or four years. We control their schedules with the aim to have them racing for a long time.

Happy Holidays

From the staff and management of

WESTERN FAIR RACEWAY

To our trainers, drivers, owners, caretakers and patrons.

Best wishes for a prosperous 2010.

www.westernfair.com

We'd like to send *special thanks* out to all our Trainers, Caretakers, Drivers and Partners in both Canada and the U.S. for a most memorable year in which we were fortunate enough to win, among other races, two Breeders Crown titles.

And most of all we'd like to thank the horses!

- ◆ POOF SHES GONE 2, 1:55.1 (\$1,076,326) Breeders Crown, Merrie Annabelle & OSS Super Final Champion
- ◆ COSTA RICA 2, 1:55s (\$989,355) Peaceful Way and Goldsmith Maid
- ◆ ALL SPEED HANOVER p,2, 1:50.3 (\$497,380) Breeders Crown
- ◆ CLEAR VISION p,3 1:49.3f (\$456,290) Pennsylvania Sires Stake
- ◆ IN FOCUS 3, 1:52.3f (\$783,393) 2008 Breeders Crown
- ◆ SENOR GLIDE 2, 1:55.2s (\$193,522) Champlain Stakes
- ◆ CODE WORD p,2 1:51.3s (\$201,090) OSS Super Final Champion
- ◆ CANTAB IT ALL 2, 1:55.3 (\$198,799) Kentuckiana Stakes
- ◆ KEYSTONE RAPTOR p,2 1:53.3s (\$190,555) Ontario Sires Stakes Gold
- ◆ HARD LIVIN 2, 1:56.4f (\$210,640) Pennsylvania Sires Stakes
- ◆ FEDERALRESERVENOTE 2, 1:56.2f (\$153,283) Pennsylvania Sires Stakes
- ◆ BLOGETTE HANOVER p,3, 1:51.2f (\$231,817) Adioo-Voloo

Wishing all of our friends a *Happy Holiday Season*
and *All The Best in 2010.*

JOHN D. FIELDING ◆ JIM FIELDING ◆ RAY JOHNSTON

I would say we turn over maybe 60 horses in a busy month, the norm being 30 to 40. I think we go through 400 horses in a year.

The purchase of Southwind Wasabi was an interesting one. That may be a unique situation in that this might be the first time that a filly of that quality (Moni Maker and American-National winner) was purchased by someone who is not a breeder. You bought her to race at a cost of \$220,000.

That may be where we have been different than most people. We are on the edge of always trying new things. The ownership group we have gives us the ability to do something like this. We thought we were going to have to pay a lot more for that mare and they were all for it.

Basically, she is being groomed to be heir apparent for Buck I St Pat and we've seen there is serious money to be made at that level. We like racing in those races and she looks like she could be that calibre.

Drivers seem to be an incidental decision in your operation. While Dave Palone drives a lot of your horses there are quite a few others as well. Am I right in saying that?

Yes, each track has maybe one driver that we try to focus on. Ricky Macomber does all our driving in Indiana and does a wonderful job. Yannick Gingras does 90 per cent of Chester.

Greg Grismore and Anthony Napolitano handle Pocono. The Meadowlands is Brian Sears but it is hard to lock up anyone there. There are so many over there that can do the job.

At home if I could have David (Palone) on every horse I would be thrilled but there are times I have to use other guys. At The Meadows we do have a wonderful colony. I do want the top drivers and the best guys but as long as I am getting a top five guy on every horse I can live with it.

There is an advantage to having the same guys on the same horses because they can come back and tell me that the horse was not what he was three weeks ago.

In Ontario the whipping rule is a subject that just will not go away. What are your thoughts?

I know I will be ostracized for saying this but I think the Ontario whipping rule is ridiculous. Previously, rules were in place that would have been sufficient if they had been enforced. The rules were not enforced.

When I was driving in my younger days I know I over whipped which I believe was because I grew up watching other guys and thinking that was the way it was supposed to be. Probably Brian Sears opened my eyes as much as anyone to the fact that these horses do not need to be clubbed on to get them to go.

But there are horses that do need to be encouraged. Putting human standards on horses will not work which does not mean I treat the horses with any less respect. Just because we like something does not mean they will like it.

I think the gamblers are turned off by it. We are losing sight of the fact that the gamblers are very important to us.

Happy Holidays

To our staff, owners and fellow horsemen, we wish you all the best in 2010.

Mark, Katherine, Shawn and Clarke
MARK STEACY STABLE



Hana Hanover

p,2,1:53.4s, 3,1:49.2, 1:48.4-'09 (\$1,248,556)
2009 Breeders Crown Champion

Nigel South Photo



The people with the disposable income who want to bet on the races are maybe a little more important than the wives and children who don't approve of the product.

What do you feel about the claiming rule restrictions?

I don't mind them but would love to have it an open free for all where I could take them and move them at will. It would be a big advantage to be able to move horses around. I understand that the tracks are trying to protect their people and horse population. I'm fine, just tell me what the rules are and apply them the same to everyone.

You also have some thoughts on the issue of wagering takeouts.

It seems simple to me. The Meadows is a good one to try changing. We do not rely on the wagering handle for our purse money. But what happens if we cut the takeout down? That would lead to the return of the bigger gambler who has a real issue with this. I know because I have some owners who are big gamblers. That is what they tell me.

Bigger gamblers lead to bigger pools.

We need to have it such that people feel they are getting more of their money back. That's why people like slots

where something like 90 per cent is given back whereas a superfecta gives back something like 73 per cent.

This is a big deal that has to change. Obviously, the system we have now is not working plus if we cut the takeout we will cut out the rebate shops. They no longer have the room to maneuver. Listen, there is plenty of money being bet on racing, it's just not being bet into the track pools.

Any final thoughts?

It's been a great year, we won some big races and it would be hard to complain. I just hope we can come back and repeat it. 🎁

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**HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL OF OUR CLIENTS AND FELLOW HORSE PEOPLE.
BEST WISHES FOR A PROSPEROUS 2010**