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Pacific Fella — Everything's Easy — Artsplace p, 2, 1:53.3; 3, 1:48.4; 1:48f (\$2,640,532)

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Camluck

Cam Fella – Lucky Lady – Striking Image p, 3, 1:52.4f; T1:48.4 (\$1,003,260)

Fee: \$12,500

Stonebridge Regal

Artsplace – Lady Joanna – Barberry Spur p, 3, 1:49.3s; 1:48.1 (\$1,065,578)

Fee: \$4,000

Western Maverick

Western Hanover – Diamond Dawn – Laag p, 2, 1:52 – 1:53h (\$236,278)

Fee: \$3,000

trotters

Federal Flex - New For 2010 - Book Full & Closed!

Muscles Yankee – Scully FBI – S J's Photo 2, 1:56.1s; 3, 1:53.3 (\$840,643)

Fee: \$5,000

In Conchnito

King Conch – Ina's Gaetane – Super Pleasure

2, 1:57s; 3, 1:54s (\$1,084,193) **Fee: \$3,000**

Pegasus Spur

S J's Photo – Keystone Imperial – Speedy Crown 2, 1:58f; 3, 1:55.2f – 1:54 (\$1,302,599)

Fee: \$4,000

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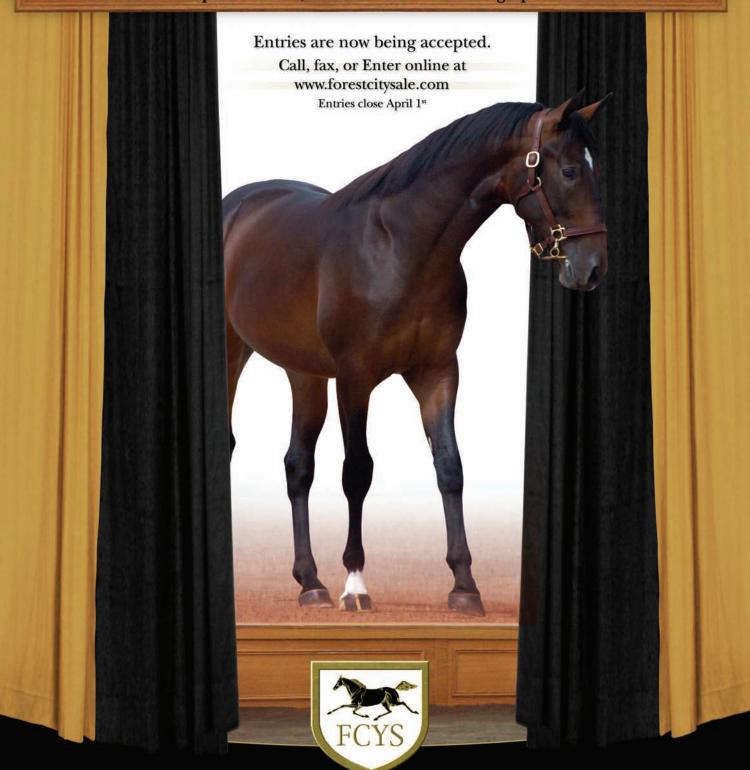
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Terry Keyko was recently named to one of the most challenging positions in Canadian racing, COO of Horse Racing Alberta. Story and photos by Jonathan Huntington

You know you are walking into a pressure cooker when:

- 1. The harness handle at the only 'A' track in the province is noticeably down.
- 2. Slot machine play is also down at that track to start 2010.
- 3. There is no apparent sign of hope for another 'A' track coming to life in the province anytime soon.
- 4. Top-level horses are leaving the area.
- 5. There are discomforting comments coming from a key horsemen's group.
- 6. The upstart new provincial political party, which is fighting the governing Tories, has publicly stated its opposition to slot machine revenue helping racing.





That is what Terry Keyko is staring at as the new COO of Horse Racing Alberta, the governing body of the sport.

"I hope in my term we can go from drinking out of a fire hose to drinking out of a garden hose," remarked Keyko. "That is the best way I can describe it."

After a six-month search for a new racing czar, which attracted several top-notch candidates with racing experience, Keyko emerged with the job on February 12. He brings virtually no experience within the sport to the table.

That brought critics to the surface with unsolicited comments within moments, quite literally, of his appointment. "Well, I guess all is really lost now," shot Elaine Macpherson, a prominent Thoroughbred owner and breeder, who sat on the HRA's marketing committee in 2009.

"Another government employee . . . and that's the kindest thing I can say. Not only is the boat waterlogged, the oars just fell off."

Keyko has spent 30 years within the government of Alberta. While that line on his resume and the lack of a racing back-

Racing action at Northlands Park resumed in early February and will continue until mid April. The Thoroughbreds will take over the only 'A' track in the province from mid May to October 11 leaving the Standardbreds with the coldest months of the year at the Edmonton oval.

ground has some fuming, it has others holding out hope.

"The (racing) expertise is there (within our industry)," said HRA chair Shirley McClellan. "What we need is somebody to work with those groups (in the industry), pull it together, to build this back into a cohesive, go forward, positive organization."

There is no shortage of dissention and squabbling to deal with. Since Stampede Park in Calgary closed its doors to live racing in 2008, the sport has taken a nosedive.

In the final year of Stampede Park's involvement in the game, the overall handle in Alberta was \$182 million, the fourth straight year wagering increased. But without a racetrack in Calgary, betting has dropped dramatically.

In 2009, wagering fell \$24 million within the province. Even worse, some experts suggest the industry has lost \$20

million in revenue without an 'A' track in Calgary. Stampede Park's closure has also left the harness industry with the short end of the stick at the only remaining 'A' track, Northlands Park in Edmonton.

On the latest 2010 calendar, it appears Northlands Park will only host 47 days of Standardbred racing, with the Thoroughbreds receiving 85 days. And those harness dates come at the worst time of the year in February, March, November and December.

It leaves the pacers in the small town of Lacombe from May through to the end of August.

If there isn't a solution in the Calgary market by the end of the year, be it confirmation that construction will re-start at the stalled Balzac racetrack project or Stampede Park re-entering the picture, there is speculation the harness sector will see some major defections in people and horses in 2011.



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No wonder Alberta Standardbred Horse Association's manager Fred Gillis issued this response when asked his first impression on Keyko: "I guess it is how quickly he can adapt and if he can stand the stress of what he is going to face."

Ironically, Keyko didn't come looking for this new job. "One of the recruiters came to me and said, 'I think this is a job for you,'" he recalled of that October discussion.

"I am really intrigued. There is opportunity, but there are huge challenges. Maybe this is the biggest challenge I have ever had and I have had big ones.

"But that is me. I am about taking on these things and trying to figure out how to help organizations through it and see where we end up."

Keyko has a long history of working on immensely successful events including as director of operations for the Edmonton 2001 World Championships in Athletics, a volunteer with the 2002 Edmonton Grey Cup and the 2003 Molson Heritage Classic outdoor NHL game "I am really intrigued. There is opportunity, but there are huge challenges. Maybe this is the biggest challenge I have ever had and I have had big ones."

- Terry Keyko

and executive director of the Alberta 2005 Centennial project.

It is that last event on the list that brought the biggest challenge before joining HRA. "Being called in 2003 and asked to lead Alberta's Centennial, the challenges of that were political, financial, organizational and timing," he remembered.

Politics, finances and timing can be

linked to almost every challenge the Alberta racing industry faces right now.

Besides the Calgary market problem, the second major issue coming Keyko's direction involves growing criticism of racing's tie to slot machine revenue at Northlands Park and smaller community tracks.

The Wildrose Alliance – the new right-wing provincial political party – has made horse racing part of its platform.



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Surging in political polls against the governing Tories, the Wildrose is opposed to slot machine revenue flowing to the sport.

Northlands Park is home to more than 625 slot machines. The revenue the industry earns from those is the lifeblood of the sport. More than 60 per cent of the purse pool is from slot revenue. Eliminating that part of the equation, which is what the Wildrose Alliance is suggesting, would be deadly.

"If you link up the Wildrose's political philosophy and you think of who would be in the horse racing business, aren't they shooting themselves in the foot?" remarked Keyko. "Isn't that the people who support them?"

"What we need is somebody to work with those groups (in the industry), pull it together, to build this back into a cohesive, go forward, positive organization." - Shirley McClellan

Whether it is finding the solution to the Calgary issue or dealing with growing political noise, Keyko is facing a stiff test on a short timeline. The 56 year-old wants to start winning battles by the summer.

To help prepare him for those battles, McClellan publicly stated on February 12 that Keyko will not start 'answering the phone' until March 15. It will be a onemonth cram session on learning the inside of HRA. He's already learning the politics within the industry.

While ASHA had several representatives at the media conference to announce the COO appointment, the Thoroughbred horsemen's group didn't send one. The first media question from the floor dealt with that glaring signal.

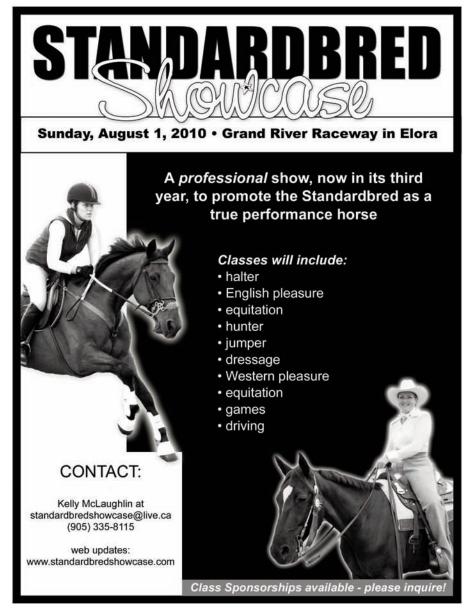
Within moments, the HBPA chimed in via email with their thoughts. "At this time, the HBPA of Alberta has no comment with respect to HRA's hire of the COO," shot Mat Monaco, the executive director. Reading between the lines, that says a lot.

Stating calmness is one of his most important attributes, Keyko will surely be challenged on that front during his two-vear contract term.

"I don't over-react (to situations)," he remarked. "Not to say I won't react. I am not dead. Sometimes you think a guy who has been in government for 30 years – does he fall asleep at the job?

"What I try to do is bring focus to the issue. And really try to bring calmness around that issue. A lot of times when you are rushed around those things then you are dealing with the symptoms, not the problem.

"I hope I can bring a focus for the board (of directors at HRA). And bring some focus to the industry and let's see where it takes us."





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