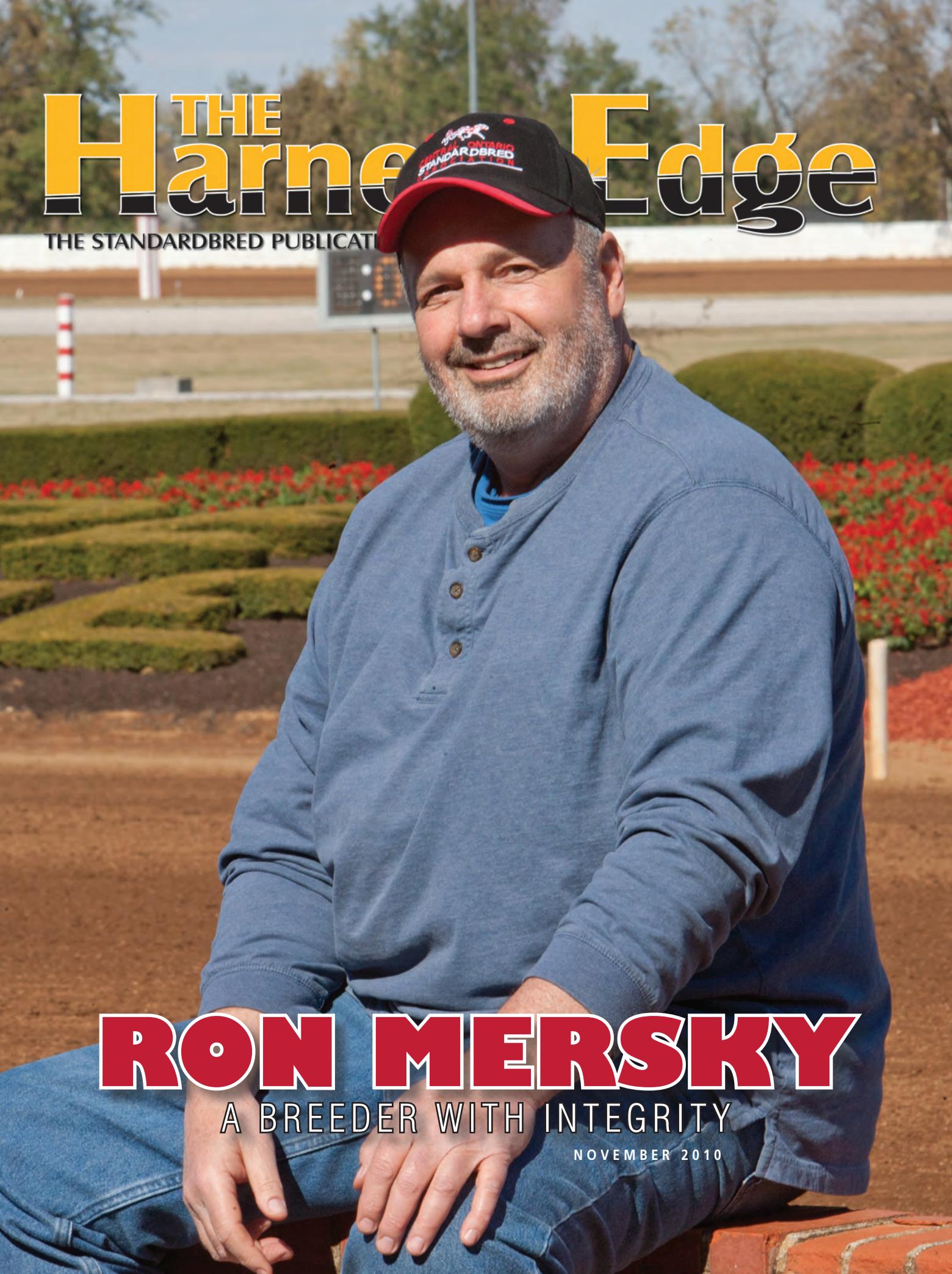


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THE STANDARDBRED PUBLICATION



RON MERSKY

A BREEDER WITH INTEGRITY

NOVEMBER 2010



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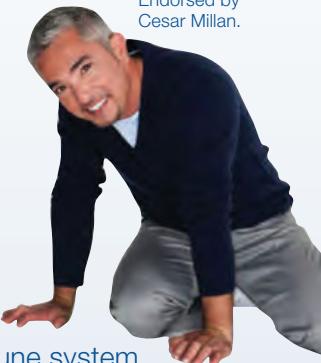


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The Analytical Breeder

Ron Mersky's academic background has proven valuable in his career as a horse breeder as shown by the success of Fred And Ginger and Ginger And Fred.



A Ps Money Maker Lives Up To Her Name

Despite an ornery personality and questionable conformation, A Ps Money Maker has become one of the premier pacing mares in Canada.



Taking The Valley By Storm

Jamie Copley is the star trainer at Rideau Carleton Raceway these days and has a real chance to be the first to win \$1 million in purses at the Ottawa, Ontario track in a single season.

Regular Features



The European View

Adding more two-year-old racing in Sweden could be the answer to the problems with this year's yearling sales.



The View Downunder

After difficulty finding venues to host the Inter Dominion Trot, organizers have decided to do away with the event after 2012 and replace it with one that should attract more attention and interest from host tracks.

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Pretty Katherine (New Image Media Photo)



Lucky Chucky (Fred J. Brown Jr. Photo)



Cross Of Lorraine (New Image Media Photo)



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had the opportunity to witness two different types of horse racing this past month, one live and one on the big screen.

I saw the movie Secretariat last week and although it hasn't received great reviews, I thoroughly enjoyed it. Like most Disney films the cinematography was breathtaking and the race scenes were gripping. It is best to see it on a movie screen to get the full impact of the action and sound of each race.

I loved the fact that they used footage from the real Secretariat in the Belmont Stake (which he won by more than 30 lengths to secure the elusive Triple Crown). It gave the viewers living proof as to the horse's dominance and talent.

The movie may not be action packed but it's a wonderful family flick with a great feel good ending. And what I like best is the fact that it gives horse racing many new viewers. Who cares if it's Thoroughbred racing? If it means a few more people get to a race-track over the next year it's a good thing.

Now we just need someone to write a book on one of our Standardbred champions and have Disney turn it into a movie.

I had the chance to take in a card of Quarter Horse racing with my dad and Dr. Al Bowness, who handled all of the equine vet work when my parents had their breeding farm. We went to Picov Downs on their closing card for the year and we were quite impressed with the clean, open facilities.

You have to pay attention once the race goes as it's over in just a few seconds and the finishes, or at least most of the ones we saw, were very close. It needs someone like Kelly Spencer to add some entertainment between races, as it tends to lag which seemed more noticeable than most harness programs likely due to the fact that the few

bursts of entertainment (the races themselves) are so short.

On the Standardbred side, I noticed with some concern a question that was poised on the Standardbred Canada website recently asking readers if they believed Rock N Roll Heaven should win the O'Brien Award as Canada's Horse of the Year. I will preface my remarks by saying I believe that colt is an exceptionally talented performer and one that should likely be named Horse of the Year in the US.

However, the criteria for the O'Brien Awards is to recognize the horse or person in each division that the voters felt made the greatest contribution to Canadian harness racing over the past season. Rock N Roll Heaven only made three starts in Canada this year (the minimum by O'Brien rules) although he did not finish in the Burlington Stake so his eligibility may be in question from that standpoint.

He won his elimination of the North America Cup and was fourth in the final, not exactly Horse of the Year performances. He has gone on to totally dominate the glamour boy division with sparkling performances in prominent races such as the Jug, Breeders Crown, Tattersalls, etc. but all of those were in the US. He is not Canadian owned, trained, bred or sired. His only tenuous Canadian connection is the fact that his two drivers, Dan Dube and John Campbell, were born in Canada.

So how any one can justify voting for him as making the greatest contribution to racing in this country is beyond me. If anyone can explain it, I'd love to hear from you, just [click here](#) to send me an email.

That's all this month, good health and good racing to all,

Harold Howe

Publisher/Director Advertising Sales
hhowe@theharnessedge.com

Heather MacKay Roberts

Managing Editor
hmr@theharnessedge.com

Kathryn Patchett

Art Director
kpatchett@theharnessedge.com

Greg Reinhart

Website Reporter
news@theharnessedge.com

Marian Howe

Office & Circulation Manager
circulation@theharnessedge.com

Contributing Writers

Todd Beelby, Jay Bergman, Paul Delean,
Neale Donnelley, Bill Heller, Jonathan Huntington,
Klaus Koch, Nicole Kraft, Dave MacLean,
Gary McKay, Anna Meyers, Robert Okpu,
Kimberly Rinker, Kathy Rumleski, Beverley Smith,
Christy West, M. Kelly Young

Photographers

Kevin Bissonette, Thomas Blomqvist,
Sylvain Gagnon, Chris Gallow, Jim Gillies,
Ryan Haynes, Therese Hebert, Laptime Photo,
Lisa Photography, Dale MacMillan,
Bonny MaKarewicz, New Image Media,
Christa Sanders, Nicole Sellers, Nigel Soult,
Time Capsule Photography, Peter J. Thompson,
Monica Thors, Kevin Tunney, Paul vanPeenen

This month's cover:

Photo by Nigel Soult

1562408 Ontario operating as:

The Harness Edge

45 Dalkeith Drive., Unit 5,
Brantford, Ontario, Canada N3P 1M1
519-752-2800 • Fax: 519-752-2207

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The Analytical Breeder

Ron Mersky's academic background has proven valuable in his career as a horse breeder as shown by the success of Fred And Ginger and Ginger And Fred.

By Nicole Kraft • Photos by Nigel Soult

Many great horsemen have proven it doesn't take book smarts to have equine success. Ron Mersky is living proof, however, that having both can't hurt.

Mersky, of Paris, Kentucky, built his life in academia as a college professor and later became a school superintendent. But he set aside both pursuits more than a decade ago to teach and learn in a career with Standardbreds.

And those who pay close attention to the lessons from the breeder of such top pacers as millionairess Ginger And Fred and her younger, full brother Fred And Ginger, may find themselves with their own degree, one in developing winners.

"It's like the saying, 'The outside of a horse is good for the insides of a man,'" said Mersky, quoting Winston Churchill. "There is much you can learn from horses."

Mersky's lessons with horses have actually been ongoing since boyhood, as his father, Jacob, had a career driving and training, and his brother, Edward, became an equine veterinarian. But Mersky was pulled onto the academic path early, earning a degree from Concord College before following up with a master's degree at George Washington University and a PhD from Virginia Tech.

His research focus was teaching educators to be better teachers, but just three months after securing tenure at Kentucky's Morehead State University, Mersky abandoned higher learning for his own hands-on experience.

"I wanted to practice what I preached," he said simply.

That desire led him to a career as a school superintendent, first for the Appoquinimink School District in Delaware, and later for the Essex County District of Virginia. Mersky also found time to horse around a bit, owning a few broodmares on his home farm and serving as business manager for a small string of horses raced by Jeff Cameron, son of famed horseman Warren Cameron.

"When you are active in education, you can only do so much," he said. "Breeding seemed much more reasonable to do than driving or training. I fooled around with training a little bit, but breeding suited me better."

As settled as he was in his equine pursuits, Mersky was not equally as comfortable in his career circumstances. When in 1996 the stress of his academic career resulted in significant health concerns, Mersky and his wife, Margaret decided their equine hobby might actually be worth a broader look.

LOOKING FOR INTEGRITY



Photo by Racehorsephoto.com

"We all process stress through some part of the body," he said. "For me it was sarcoidosis (inflammation) of the lungs. I felt it was necessary to walk away."

"My wife grew up around horses in Virginia, and we always had horses on the side. We both said, 'Let's give this a shot.' We really enjoy the horses, and you want to do something you enjoy in your life."

The Merskys started their new enterprise by boarding a few horses on their Virginia farm, but soon saw that opportunities for Standardbred success would be limited in the Old Dominion State. That led them to return to Kentucky where the land seems to have been formed to grow horses.

And it proved fertile ground for the mare who would provide the foundation bloodlines for the farm they named Green Creek.

Mersky was still teaching in 1993 when he went to the Standardbred Horse Sale Company's Harrisburg sale and took home the Tyler B mare Meadow Ginny, who had already produced six foals, including \$480,000 winner Zero Inflation, and was pregnant with her second foal by Beach Towel.

That foal, a filly, born May 17, 1994, was named Graceful Motion.

Though Mersky sold Graceful Motion in Harrisburg as a yearling, he never lost

Fred And Ginger was one yearling that Mersky did sell at public auction securing a final bid of \$65,000. While not the best of his class, the Real Artist three-year-old has won \$518,000 this year and was runner up to Rock N Roll Heaven in the Breeders Crown. To watch his victory in the \$300,000 Hempt Final at Pocono Downs please click on the video icon.

sight of her through her four year racing career. And when she hung up her harness in 2000, Mersky reunited with his old friend and brought Graceful Motion home.

Breedings to The Panderosa in 2002 and 2003 proved unsuccessful, so Mersky switched the mare to Real Artist in 2004. The resulting foal, Papa Hemingway, earned \$110,000.

Mersky, ever the researcher, knew positive data when he saw it, and he liked the nick of Real Artist on his Beach Towel mare. He sent Graceful Motion back to her paramour, and the rest was history. The next foal was Ginger And Fred, who Mersky actually bought back at auction for \$25,000 but sold after her initial two-year-old starts for \$375,000.

The now four-year-old has gone on to earn \$1.3 million racing against the best in her class, and her three-year-old full brother, Fred And Ginger, has won more than \$590,000.

"I don't breed solely on the nick, but I do think it's a powerful tool," said Mersky. "When I was in higher education, I did a lot of research. It's a natural part of me

to do that, and it does transmit well to the horse industry."

Mersky applied his logic to modern-day super sire Rocknroll Hanover, who the breeder said crosses best with Artsplace mares, as is evidenced by the fact that eight of his 10 richest foals are from Artsplace bloodlines, seven daughters and one, Kikikatie, a daughter of the Artsplace son Real Artist.

"When I first met Ron, I didn't know his background, but he seemed extremely analytical," said trainer Dan Altmeyer with a laugh. "He is a very intelligent guy. And he is analytical about everything. He studies everything and nine times out of 10 he comes up with the right answer. He does his research."

And that research doesn't just stop with modern bloodlines.

"I look for balance in the pedigree," said Mersky. "I love Most happy Fella. I love to see Most Happy Fella on the top and bottom of a pedigree. Look at Beach Towel. You could have almost given his fillies away. But he has become a really good broodmare sire. Look at Mach Three.

Another one is Direct Scooter. Everyone thought his fillies were terrible, but then you go to Matts Scooter, and he is a very good broodmare sire.

"Look at Jennas Beach Boy. He was not well thought of, but he's turned out to be a very good broodmare sire. It's not exact science. I believe in doing the homework and applying it and having a belief system. I don't believe in necessarily following the latest hot stud."

Mersky's appreciation and understanding of nicks is becoming noticed among his fellow breeders. He recalled being at Harrisburg in 2001, bidding strongly on Lilting Laughter, dam of millionaire McArdle. Outbid by Hanover Shoe Farms, Mersky approached Hanover Vice President Russell Williams and commented on the daughter of Nihilator, "I hope you are going to breed that mare to Artsplace."

"He said, 'What's wrong with our stallion?' meaning Western Hanover," Mersky recalled of the conversation, "but Artsplace with Nihilator was a golden cross. It's a percentage game. You can increase your percentages by trying to do the right things."

Hanover opted for the Western Hanover route and ended up in 2003 with \$80,000 winner Longshaw Hanover. A year later, the mare had a foal by Artsplace, Last Call Hanover who has earned \$260,000.

"Gosh knows I make mistakes," said Mersky. "It's like the Piet Hein quote: 'Err and err and err again, but less and less and less.' The goal is to learn from mistakes."

And Mersky has strong convictions when it comes to whatever he feels constitutes a mistake, even if it might impact how he makes a living.

Among his recent decisions was to stop selling his yearlings at public auction, preferring instead to have some say over which owners and trainers have the chance to take his prize pupils to the races.

"I am associated with three trainers, Dan Altmeyer, Bobby Myers and Robbie Siegelman, and one thing they all have in common is integrity," he said. "They are real horsemen. I am tired of having my work of more than two and a half years go into hands that I could not root for. I found myself rooting for the horses and rooting against the trainer. I couldn't do it anymore."

What Mersky can keep doing, it seems, is finding breeding success. In addition to Graceful Motion and Meadow Ginny (who Mersky sold in 2000 and repurchased in 2004), other broodmares who call his farm home include the Falcon Seelster mare Falconstor, dam of \$600,000 winner Cheyenne Trish, \$170,000 winner First Draw and Torrid Affair, a sister to \$745,000 winner Lucky Man.

Graceful Motion has a two-year-old Ponder colt, Dancing Rusty, who qualified twice this year, and the dancing theme continues with her 2010 colt Arthur And Kathryn, by Real Desire, born via embryo transfer. The foal was named for dance studio king Arthur Murray and his wife, and Mersky said he likes giving horses names with meaning.

"There was never a dance couple more graceful than Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and they were both real artists, so that's why I named those two foals that way," he explained. "I try to do names meaningful to me."

"I'm hoping Graceful Motion next has a filly I can name Kathryn And Arthur so I can keep it up."

Mersky also raced a pair of fillies with Altmeyer who had monikers close to his heart the Dragon Again fillies Hokie Heart, a winner of \$76,000 and Hokie Spirit, a winner of \$98,000. Both were named for the mascot of Mersky's alma mater, Virginia Tech, but it was more than just the act of a faithful alum. It was a way to recognize the heartbreak of April 16, 2007, when a mass shooting on the campus left 32 people dead.

"That was a terrible tragedy that occurred there," he said. "A lot of people were very sad, but for those associated with the university, it hit hard. I wanted a way to honour them."

Mersky proves each day on his farm that life moves on through challenges and triumphs. He lost Graceful Motion's 2009 Mach Three colt when her surrogate slipped, so he has no yearling from his prize mare for sale this year. Hokie Heart did not come back as well as he hoped, so she is heading off to the Harrisburg sale, while Hokie Spirit rests up for another racing campaign and a future life as a Mersky broodmare.

Since he and Margaret do much of the farm work themselves, his days are taken up caring for mares and babies for himself and clients like 92 year-old Bill White. It is a quiet life for a man who once trained the teachers of tomorrow, but Mersky likes that he has never stopped teaching or learning.

"Anything I've ever done," he said, "I've tried to work at it really thoughtfully, but also spend a lot of time and effort at it. Now I'm in situation where I still have pressure, but I am responsible. I have some control. If I make a mistake, it is my mistake. And I can live with that."

"I just try not to repeat it." □

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