

## **Thoroughbred Aftercare: Owning Responsibility for our Thoroughbred Athletes**

### Introduction:

In recent months a great deal of media and public attention has been cast upon the Thoroughbred racing industry with regard to a multitude of issues that surround the welfare of racehorses once their careers at the racetrack have ended.

Racing fans, horsemen, industry stakeholders, veterinary groups, humane organizations, and even the United States Congress have expressed deep concerns for the welfare of our horses post their racing careers and as a result, many racing jurisdictions have implemented or are in the process of implementing programs which specifically address both the logistics and funding of Thoroughbred aftercare.

In Illinois, Fairmount Park has implemented a zero slaughter tolerance policy in order to prohibit the sale of retiring racehorses to slaughter facilities or auctions. Fairmount Park, through the efforts of the Illinois HBPA have gone one step further by developing their own aftercare program complete with a sustainable method with which to provide the funding needed in order to properly transition their retiring horses into qualified placement/adoption organizations. The IL HBPA currently collects a \$2 per start fee from each owner racing at Fairmount Park. The \$2 per start fee is then matched dollar for dollar by Fairmount Park (see enclosed HBPA press release).

Arlington Park, through a comprehensive equine welfare and safety policy (see enclosed CDI press release) handed down through CDI, has also implemented a zero tolerance policy on slaughter, however, neither Arlington Park or CDI have yet to develop or implement a viable aftercare program or the means to provide sustainable funding.

Hawthorne Race Course has also expressed interest in mandating a zero tolerance policy on slaughter, and I remain in contact with Jimmy Miller as we continue to work towards developing and funding a comprehensive and sustainable aftercare program for Illinois' Thoroughbreds.

In order to properly address the retirement needs of Thoroughbreds racing at Arlington and Hawthorne, a viable and comprehensive aftercare program must be established and made readily accessible to owners and trainers. We must also implement a sustainable method by which all parties involved are able to financially contribute to the costs associated with properly transitioning horses into new homes and vocations. The owners of each racehorse owe particular financial and moral obligation to ensure that each of their horses are afforded appropriate aftercare. It is widely accepted that the racetracks themselves should also contribute to aftercare programs that provide services and care to horses who participate at their tracks.

I've outlined such an aftercare program and greatly appreciate your consideration of this proposal and welcome any questions you might have.

Gail Vacca, President  
Illinois Equine Humane Center, NFP  
19501 West Ballou Rd.  
Wilmington, IL 60481  
Tel: 815-476-5257  
Fax: 815-366-8208  
Website: [www.ilehc.org](http://www.ilehc.org)  
Email: [info@ilehc.org](mailto:info@ilehc.org)

## **ITHA Thoroughbred Aftercare Program Proposal**

The intended goal of this proposal is to protect our retiring racehorses from being sold to slaughter, and to also assist owners and trainers who seek humane retirement options for their horses whose racing careers have ended.

A comprehensive list of qualified Thoroughbred placement and adoption groups should be made readily available to all owners, trainers, and equine veterinarians.

A protective bill of sale should also be made available for those owners/trainers who wish to sell or otherwise transfer ownership of their horses to private parties. The bill of sale should clearly state that the horse is not to be sold to slaughter or to a low-end auction where the horse could be sold to slaughter.

### **1. Transitioning horses to aftercare facilities:**

a) *Interim transition:* In order to help facilitate the transitioning of retiring Thoroughbreds, both Arlington Park and Hawthorne Race Course will need to set aside holding stalls where horses who have suffered career ending injury or who are just no longer wanted by their owner, can be transferred (if need be) until arrangements can be made to transport the horse to an adoption center. The daily care of the horse will remain the trainers responsibility. Injured horses should receive preference. Catastrophic injuries that occur during a race will remain the responsibility of the owner or their representative.

b) *Veterinary evaluation:* In order to properly determine which placement/adoption group will best meet the needs of each individual horse, a diagnosis of any injury sustained by the horse should be made along with a prognosis for a return to riding soundness. This process can be determined by the horses attending veterinarian or by seeking the assistance of one of the IRB state veterinarians.

c) *Transitioning to the proper placement/adoption group:* Horses that are riding sound and those that suffer from minor injuries that offer a good prognosis for a return to riding soundness, should be transitioned into organizations that are qualified and equipped to rehabilitate, retrain, and rehome Thoroughbreds. Please see attached list of organizations that offer such services. Horses whose prognosis for a return to riding soundness is poor, should be transitioned into organizations that provide affordable long-term sanctuary, such as the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation.

### **2. Funding Thoroughbred aftercare programs:**

a) The NTRA suggests within its recently launched Welfare and Safety Alliance - Code of Standards that the bulk of responsibility with regard to providing the funding necessary in order to safely and humanely transition retiring racehorses, falls upon the horse-owner. The NTRA guidelines with regard to TB aftercare reads as follows:

*Sec.5 - Aftercare and Transition of Retired Racehorses: In support of horse owners, the Alliance and horseracing industry as a whole share in the responsibility for providing care and/or retraining of racehorses after they can no longer compete on the racetrack. Racetrack Members shall affiliate with and provide funding for recognized placement/adoption program(s) that meet AAEP criteria. Member Tracks shall help facilitate the transfer of horses to its affiliated recognized placement/adoption program(s) by doing such things as: Providing owners and trainers with direct contact information for recognized placement/adoption program(s); promoting placement/adoption program(s); cooperating with state funded programs; providing stalls and/or staff to help facilitate the transfer of horses to affiliated placement/adoption facilities; or other means intended to assist with the placement of horses in transition. Racetrack Members are encouraged to implement a funding strategy that imposes the costs of funding on owners of horses through mutually agreed upon methods such as per start fees or purse check-off programs.*

b) In order to cover the costs incurred by placement/adoption groups who accept Illinois based retiring racehorses into their programs, it is necessary that a sustainable and permanent mechanism to collect such funds be put into place. Other racing jurisdictions have achieved this by enacting per start fees or by allotting a percentage of the daily available purse money to a designated aftercare account. Based on the purse structure at Arlington and Hawthorne, we suggest that a \$5 per start fee be charged to the owner and that the horsemen in turn seek an agreement with each track to match the funds contributed by owners. Another funding option currently in practice in California, allows for a percentage of available purse money to be earmarked for Thoroughbred aftercare.

Owners who wish to opt out of paying into a funding program should be allowed to do so upon written request made to both the ITHA and the Horsemen's Bookkeeper.

c) Jockey participation in the funding of TB aftercare should be encouraged. Some racing jurisdictions offer a means by which jockeys can check-off a pre-determined dollar amount from each winning mount. Suggested check-off amounts are as follows;

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100.00 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50.00 \_\_\_\_\_ \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00

d) Additional fundraising and educational events are suggested in order to encourage public participation. Advertisements in racing programs and website-based information promoting racehorse adoption are also recommended.

### **3. Dispersal of funds to qualified placement/adoption groups:**

a) Financial agreements should be reached between the ITHA and the placement/adoption groups that will be called upon to provide aftercare for retiring racehorses. The Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF) currently charges \$150.00 per month for each horse that remains in their care. The TRF has the physical resources necessary to provide long-term sanctuary for horses who are unlikely candidates for retraining and/or

rehoming. The Illinois Equine Humane Center (ILEHC) currently charges \$250.00 per month for each horse that remains in its care. The ILEHC does not have the physical resources necessary to address the needs of long-term sanctuary horses. The ILEHC does however, specialize in rehabilitating, retraining, and rehoming Thoroughbreds that are physically capable of being transitioned into new homes and vocations. Ultimately, sanctuary horses may likely require a much greater, long term financial commitment than those horses who are capable of being transitioned into new careers.

#### **4. The scope of TB aftercare in Illinois.**

*The following figures are based on information provided by the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation which has over 22 years experience in providing services to the Thoroughbred racing industry.*

Experience indicates that approximately 2 horse per week (104 annually) retire from most racing jurisdictions.

Approximately 20% of the horses retiring are sound and ready for retraining within 6 months.

15-20% will be re-trainable after 1-2 years rest.

50% of the horses will need lifetime retirement and can be placed with programs that offer permanent sanctuary.

At least 10% of horses retiring from racing need to be euthanized, not retired.

#### **5. The cost of TB aftercare in Illinois.**

The cost of providing care to each retired TB is \$5/day for sanctuary horses and \$8/day for horses that are re-trainable and adoptable.

Additional annual expenses:

Transportation - \$25,000 - \$36,000

Veterinarian - \$25,000 (approximately 15 castrations per year, lameness exams, treatments, surgeries).

Euthanasia - \$4,750 (10 horses @ \$475 to cover euthanasia and body disposition costs).