



## Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association

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Dear Horsemen,

Our racing season has come to a close and it's time to renew your IHHA membership. As harness horsemen in Illinois we have seen our opportunities to race and earn a living plummet, yet we are surviving and still standing, barely yes, but we are still here. While we all knew that we had been in survival mode the last decade, the closing of Maywood and Balmoral was a defining moment in our history. While we have raced at Hawthorne on and off throughout the years, this is now our permanent home. Sharing the racetrack with our thoroughbred brothers and sisters is not an ideal situation. However, no one is building new racetracks these days in states like Illinois, where "racino's" are not allowed. So, we march on, doing everything we can in the short term to make it through another year while keeping an eye on our long term goal of making Illinois a harness destination with year round racing for quality purses and a breeding program that would make us all proud.

As our horse population and the jobs that go with it decline, understandably so do our membership numbers. Many who are reading this are longtime members of the IHHA and for that we are extremely appreciative. Many of you have also needed to adapt and have begun to race out of state. Many, have unfortunately cut way back on their racing operation and have found other ways to support themselves. All, very understandable and predictable outcomes stemming from our current state of the industry. Yet still, we need good membership numbers and we ask for your participation and support. Occasionally this question will come up, "Why should I join the IHHA, what do they really do for me?" Here are just a few of the reasons of why everyone participating in Illinois should join:

First and foremost the IHHA gives you one collective voice to work on your behalf. With an election every year and 15 directors as part of the team, everyone who wants to be heard has that opportunity. With that one collective voice, we negotiate contracts with the racetracks. We don't negotiate total purse dollars with them because that comes from a formula in the law. However, because of the dreaded "recapture law" we have been able to get the racetracks to waive and or defer millions of recapture dollars throughout the years. Meaning, we have actually been racing for more money than what comes to our purse account. The contracts also spell out how much of the purse dollars are to be used for the ICF stakes program. There are many other benefits in our contract as well, too many to detail here, but we encourage everyone to read the contract which can be found on our website.

This Association also gives horsemen a united voice to work legislatively on their behalf. It's no secret that right now our General Assembly is in disarray. Despite that, we were able to lobby effectively and eventually secure purse money that went to Springfield/DuQuoin, the Night of Champions races and the Springfield Fall Reviews. There is also additional purse money earmarked for ICF races in 2018. As most of you know, we have passed major gaming bills that are excellent for horsemen and although they were vetoed by our then Governor, the horseracing piece of that legislation is still teed up, agreed to and ready to go. There are also internet gaming bills that could play a major role in the future of horse racing and they will garner attention in 2018. We are very pleased that horsemen have been heard and are included in those early pieces of legislation. Throughout the years there has been many other legislative matters that come up which could have negatively impacted us. Because of our presence, however, we have been able to keep them away. Also, our solid relationship on the legislative front, with the t-bred horsemen in Illinois has increased our ability to get things accomplished.

These are just a few very brief examples of how the IHHA works on your behalf and what we do and yes, there are many, many more. So today, please fill out the enclosed membership application and send it in with your check for \$40. Supporting the group, the IHHA that supports you, is simply the right thing to do.

We sincerely thank you,

IHHA Board of Directors