



Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association

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Dear Horsemen,

The IHHA is your association that works for your benefit. We are 15 Directors, plus staff that is merely an extension of our industry. Everything that we do as an association is done with an eye on improving quality of life for our members. It seems as though every year recently has been about hope for the future, about hanging in there, trying to survive. This year, the mood is a little different. There is excitement surrounding us and that light at the end of the tunnel is now shining bright and we are poised to flourish once again.

Last year at this time, we wrote the following paragraph in our membership letter:

"THIS COULD BE OUR YEAR: A bold statement? Yes it is. We understand that we've had our dreams of legislative assistance for a healthier horse industry squashed in the past. We've heard plenty of encouraging words from well-intentioned politicians yet, here we are, still stymied to compete with other states. So, why are we encouraged that this year be any different?"

Well, as you all know, it did come together. We got over the proverbial hump. Yes, we passed a gaming bill and yes, the Governor signed it.

This "jobs" bill for us is a terrific piece of legislation which allows racetracks to become "racinos." It will eliminate recapture, it will give us a fair share of the profits for purses and will guarantee us our live racing opportunities. It will ensure that purse money supports the ICF breeding program and will allow for another standardbred track to be built, which is crucial to us.

Now, as mentioned in earlier updates, we probably won't begin to reap the benefits of this in 2020, but the following year we should begin to realize the improvements. Hawthorne, currently our only racetrack, doesn't anticipate opening its casino doors until at least the Fall of 2020. Our second racetrack, which at one time was earmarked for Tinley Park, has recently suffered a setback. That area is still a possibility but the uncertainty exists. There will be others pursuing the Standardbred racino license. We will pay close attention to all future sites and possibilities and try to ensure the best scenario for us to prosper long into the future.

However, we also are well aware that there is still work to be done and issues to be addressed. When Arlington Park decided to not submit for their gaming license, it was a huge disappointment for all of us, thoroughbred and harness horsemen alike. They have not committed to racing beyond their 2021 season. If Arlington Park doesn't continue racing that will leave Hawthorne as the only existing racetrack. Our goal has always been to have year round racing which cannot happen if both breeds are sharing a racetrack. We were able to get language in the bill for a new standardbred track, now we have to make sure it becomes a reality.

As we look forward to our increased racing dates in 2020 and the reality that we cleared a major hurdle legislatively, please understand that we need everyone's support once again. There is strength in numbers and as our industry begins our upward climb, our membership participation needs to rise as well. So, please return the enclosed membership application with your \$40 check and support the organization that fights hard for a stronger future for all of us.

Thank you.

IHHA Board of Directors