

The Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association held an open meeting for all horsemen at the Springfield State Fairgrounds on Thursday, September 30 at 10:30 before the start of the races. There were approximately 75 people in attendance. 10 IHHA Directors were present as well as Tim Norman with the Illinois Dept. of Agriculture. President of the IHHA, Marty Engel opened the meeting with an explanation of the 2023 racing dates. He explained the schedule, 49 days at Hawthorne and 15 non-betting days in Springfield. Springfield days will begin the week of June 12th and continue through early August. The 15 days in Springfield are currently scheduled to be on Monday and Tuesday but will likely be changed to other days of the week to allow for maximum horse population with the County Fairs. The purses for the added Springfield days will match the current purse structure. In addition, the traditional State Fair at Springfield will host five days while two are currently scheduled at DuQuoin. The Dept. of Agriculture will also host one day for the Spring Preview races and one day for the Fall Review. The days at Hawthorne will begin September 9th and go until the end of the year. The plan right now is also to stay on at Hawthorne for the early months of 2024, although those dates will need Illinois Racing Board approval which cannot officially be granted until next year. A lengthy discussion ensued on the reasons why pari-mutual wagering at Springfield during the 15 added days would not take place. The status of the start of construction for the Hawthorne racino was discussed. It was reported that the current timeline was that it was to begin this December with a completion date of March 2024. That conversation worked right into a lengthy discussion on the status of the 2nd Racino. It was explained that there were other interested parties exploring that additional available license. It was unknown if they would partner up with Hawthorne or choose to go it alone. If they would choose to go alone it might necessitate a change in law regarding the 35mile rule. In the IHHA's conversations with legislative leaders, they too, are growing weary of the delays and are paying close attention to the situation. We have and will continue to gather information and consider all of the options before us. Everyone in attendance was encouraged to speak up and give feedback to the IHHA board. Many horsemen voiced their frustrations with the current situation and brought up relevant concerns. The formal portion of the meeting concluded at approximately 11:40 although many stayed to talk for for another 30 minutes.