



Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association

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A year to remember....

When 2020 began there were high hopes that prosperous opportunities were right around the corner for Illinois harness racing and they were.... until Covid 19 took center stage in our lives. Because of this pandemic harness racing was halted on March 15 after just 12 days of racing. We didn't start back up until June 6th, and missed 33 days.

As this crisis dominated the headlines, we witnessed political unrest as we haven't seen in this country in a long, long time. Much of our workforce was either shut down or forced people to work from home. This shutdown directly impacted us by delaying the licensing requirements for construction to begin on Hawthorne's "racino." It also slowed the process for another Illinois Standardbred racino to be approved. With Arlington Park still uncommitted to race beyond 2021, a second Standardbred track is crucial to our goal of getting back to year round racing.

Despite these disappointing setbacks, progress is being made, albeit slower than we had hoped. Hawthorne has begun construction on a racino and hopes to be open by the end of next year. While we will not reap any benefit from this in 2021, it will set us up for a stronger purse structure in 2022.

With one eye on the present:

We will continue to work on behalf of harness horsemen in Illinois as we have always done. The IHHA consists of 15 Directors, plus staff that are merely an extension of who we all are. Every board member is either a trainer, and or a driver, and or a breeder and or an owner. In very general terms, just a few of our responsibilities are: negotiating a fair contract to race at Hawthorne Racecourse which includes accident insurance for trainers and drivers: racebike insurance on race nights and insuring that the bookkeeper can work interactively with horsemen who have multiple accounts and partnerships. We advocate for horsemen in front of the Illinois Racing Board. We have assisted the County Fairs with the addition of 15 IHHA sponsored races as well as an accident insurance policy. Through our national affiliation with Harness Horsemen International, we continue to offer with a paid membership a 3rd party liability insurance policy. That insurance follows you no matter which state you race in. We have a strong presence in Springfield and must continue that as we to continue to lobby on your behalf.

And one eye on the future:

The long term goal of the IHHA is to preserve harness racing well into the future in Illinois. Tirelessly spearheaded by our very own Bill Wright, we have embraced a concept of our future that he has been working on for many, many years. We have been disappointed in seeing how some other states have built their racinos by showcasing the casino area while the racetrack is merely a low-cost afterthought. Simply put, this vision requires that our new racino be the focal point of the facility. The plan is extensive, well thought out and very specific at times. We will be publishing more highlights of the plan at the beginning of 2021, but rest assured, we do understand where we have been and where we need to go to have Illinois harness racing prosper into the future. So please, return the enclosed membership application with your \$40 check and support the association that works on your behalf. Thank you.

IHHA Board of Directors