

THOROFAN VOICE

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Fans propel racing

Without fans there is no racing, no need for racetracks and the breeding industry all but disappears, and yet the fans are the only arm of the industry without viable representation in issues concerning racing. That in a nutshell is why I involved myself in the not-for-profit, membership-driven organization ThoroFan. I got on board with this group before they became official. I already knew Joanne Yepsen and she introduced me to Michael Amo and Niki Rowe, the other board members. Upon learning the motivation behind, the purpose of, and the plans for ThoroFan--I fell head-over-heels in love with the potential. That being to increase the fan base of a sport whose attendance figures continue to diminish. Some of you know the history of ThoroFan; we became official in July. From that day forward I have been on a ramped-up learning curve.

I came equipped with my long experience in the Thoroughbred industry, and my love of racing is well-known. The steep part of the learning curve has been all the hurdles and expenses involved in establishing a not-for-profit organization. The individual steps are not complicated, and had we funds to draw from we could have completed them more expediently. But, we are doing most of this out-of-pocket and personal credit cards are bearing impact. Four racing syndicates grasped our purpose and each gave us a small stipend in exchange for visibility on the website, plus we have over 300 members who paid entry level dues of \$20.00. The latter amount paid most of our printing costs and the former provided a website. The Daily Racing Form paid a portion of our educator expenses for the daily forums which we conducted every day at the Saratoga meet. A number of dedicated volunteers manned our information booth which NYRA provided to us at Saratoga. I do their newsletter pro bono, and if you go there you'll see that I have recruited a small stable of writers and photographers who have generously contributed engaging material. To date, there have been 29 articles and/or letters posted to the newsletter, and within the week Dennis G. Hogan will be contributing a marvelous piece on the story of Tin Cup Chalice and his connections.

The purpose of this column is not to give you a profit and loss statement or to complain of the labor ThoroFan requires. I do however want you to comprehend the seriousness of this organization's commitment to racing. For those of you following my Saratoga Today articles for the past fifteen months, you know many of the plights racing faces. We could blame the shrinking attendance numbers on the economy, and for this year it would be partially accurate to do so. But, let's face it--racing has been diminishing in popularity at most tracks in America for several years. The average age of racing fans is 50-plus and we're not bringing on many young replacements. The only hope this industry has is to nurture present fans and to educate new ones.

People in the racing business or those having any portion of their recreation or income delivered through the industry might want to look closely at ThoroFan. If you are too busy to lend them time, ideas, or financial support so that they can hire some extra hands, could it be that you are not properly measuring the importance of their mission?

Every dollar I made for twenty-three years of my life came from racing horses. My involvement with Thoroughbreds was a labor of love and so is my work with ThoroFan. There are untold millions who would love racing too, if only they were provided the right entry into it. This role is best served by people of passion, the work that needs to be done does not fit a usual business model, and that is why racetracks fail at marketing the sport. There is a critical need for ThoroFan, and to have its presence or something similar to it at tracks around the country. Without proper nurturing, potential fans will continue to pass racing in favor of other recreational/gambling choices.

The racing industry is not going to thrive on its history; like everything it must evolve or become extinct. ThoroFan is a new fan broker, an educator, and a passionate lover of racing that can help. We can work together with Darley, Synergy Investments Ltd., Fasig-Tipton, and Sheikh Mohammed's team to help them transition into our community and into our local racing economy. Is it important, do they need us? No, their money will accomplish their goals, but even their goals require fans that will evolve into owners buying horses at their sales and breeding to their stallions. If their investments are not supported up to expectations, it is

not likely that they will keep these properties long-term. They will have so much invested that it is not probable another horse entity could afford to buy them. To draw that picture any further is depressing. Do you care about providing opportunity for future racing-oriented generations, or must we say Dubai to the greatest racing in the world?

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