

California Again Leading the Way

by **CLIFF GOODRICH**

After 35 years of being involved in the corporate side of racing, I was given the opportunity to give something back to an industry that has been very good to me. In October of 2000, I assumed the position of Chief Executive Officer of the California Thoroughbred Horsemen's Foundation, Inc. (CTHF), an organization dedicated to the backstretch worker.

While Thoroughbred horses are treated like kings and queens, and properly so, the workers who tend to these great athletes are sometimes overlooked. I have come to realize there is no other entity in the United States that offers the extent of services CTHF provides. This article gives me an opportunity to enhance your appreciation.

Our primary mission, under the guidance of our President, long-time trainer Noble Threewitt, is to improve the quality of life in the community of stable workers occupied with the care of Thoroughbred racehorses at California's major race tracks, fair circuit tracks and CHRB recognized off-track training centers. Categories of eligibility include grooms, hot walkers, stable foremen, exercise riders, watchmen, pony riders, assistant trainers and trainers.

The CTHF is regulated by the California Horse Racing Board and is administered through a five-person volunteer board of directors. CTHF is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation whose primary purpose is to financially assist needy backstretch workers, and their primary dependents, in the area of healthcare. The Foundation also provides assistance with eye glasses, financial aid, burial assistance, social programs, free clothing, and financially assists the Winners Foundation, when necessary, in efforts to wean workers away from chemical dependency.

The Foundation has two clinics, one at Santa Anita Park and the other at Bay Meadows. Both clinics provide medical and dental professionals, along with our own employees, to service currently licensed backstretch workers. Between the two clinics we provide services to nearly 10,000 patients annually. The clinics are open on a Monday through Friday basis throughout the year. In addition, doctors are on call during non-office hours.

To be eligible for services at one of the clinics, the backstretch worker must produce a current CHRB license. Services are available for the backstretch employee and his/her immediate family as long as the worker is currently employed, or has been employed within the past twelve months. A small co-payment is requested when services are rendered, to help offset clinic operating costs.

Should a patient require an outside referral, a more difficult standard applies. This includes evidence of employment, recent tax returns, etc., in order to determine if the applicant qualifies as 'needy'. The CTHF is not an insurance company, but acts as a "gatekeeper" insuring that eli-

gible patients are pre-authorized, at discounted contractual rates whenever possible.

The CTHF's budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2002 is approximately \$2.2 million. We receive most of our funding from provisions in the racing law that allow us to be the beneficiary of a portion of winning, unclaimed parimutuel tickets. Annually, about \$1.5 million accrues to the benefit of the CTHF to aid backstretch workers from this source. CTHF also receives about \$150,000 from a one percent share of the purse money generated at the California racing fairs. The balance of the revenues are derived largely from the generosity of racetrack foundations, with miscellaneous income from interest bearing accounts, outside trusts, individual donors, and co-payments from eligible patients.

Due to a \$600,000 decrease in money received from winning, unclaimed tickets over the past six years, (CTHF receives nothing from intrastate or interstate wagering) the Foundation has found itself in a negative financial position. We had only two choices—increase revenues or reduce services. CTHF felt it would be devastating to reduce its services and in the spring of 2001 collaborated with the Thoroughbred Owners of California (TOC), in an effort to increase the awareness of our activities and support.

Utilizing a previously unused section of the racing law, the TOC agreed to donate purse money from one race per meeting, at Thoroughbred associations, to be dedicated to the CTHF to financially assist eligible backstretch workers with their healthcare needs. The first race was held on closing day at Del Mar and the final race will take place at Hollywood Park's 2002 spring meeting. Appropriately, the TOC board recently voted to name each of these races after the late Gary Burke, who cared so much for the backstretch employees. This TOC program is expected to generate over \$110,000 in additional funding, bringing the CTHF closer to a break-even position, which should be achieved with the ongoing support of racetrack foundations.

However, the CTHF cannot continue to depend solely upon the TOC and racing associations every time a financial need arises. As we embark on broadening our funding base, we are aware that CTHF is looked upon as an 'industry' organization by the outside world—one that should receive most, if not all, of the funding from its own. The largest asset at any race track is the cumulative value of horses in its backstretch. Shouldn't we insure that the people who help maintain these assets are cared for appropriately?

In closing, I would ask two things. First, please visit one of our clinics and witness what a great program we have. Secondly, consider a tax deductible donation. Your support will help California racing continue to demonstrate its commitment to improve the quality of life for the backstretch worker.