



Guest Forum

A Decade of Progress Through Cooperation

by **RON CHARLES**

The Thoroughbred Owners of California (TOC) celebrated its 10th anniversary last month. Ten years seems like yesterday in some respects, yet you have to struggle a little to remember what it was like to be an owner prior to the formation of the TOC.

The organization is proud of the many and varied accomplishments they have made within the industry, and a number of those were certainly directly related to the interests of CTBA members. The TOC's 10th anniversary issue of *Owners' Circle* does a fine job of identifying what they've been able to achieve. If you haven't already read the magazine, I encourage you to get a copy.

I won't reiterate the TOC's entire list of accomplishments here, but I would be remiss if I didn't cite two landmark gains which established the TOC as the preeminent Thoroughbred owners' organization in the country. One was the contractual protection of owners' proprietary rights, while the other was the passage of legislation for license fee relief.

Speaking of effecting crucial industry change, this is a good place to mention what the TOC and CTBA have been able to accomplish together. But before I do, I must say that I am gratified by the professional and receptive mindset that the CTBA Board of Directors and its Executive Vice President Doug Burge bring to our interaction—it makes for greater productivity and positive change. The TOC is committed more than ever to doing everything in its power to help make the future of the California breeding industry better and brighter. With over 60 percent of the horses racing in the Golden State being California-breds, the importance of the Cal-bred to the future of local racing cannot be overstated.

Without question, one of the TOC's most important achievements was the implementation of a 30 per-

cent bonus for Cal-breds competing in open company. Former TOC Director Marvin Malmuth started the ball rolling, and with TOC and CTBA support, legislation was enacted in 1997 that put more money in Cal-bred owners' pockets, both through increased purses and a higher value being placed on Cal-bred Thoroughbreds.

What are some examples of the change brought about by this



TOC/CTBA cooperation? One is the promotion of a year-round Cal-bred stakes schedule that also makes owning and breeding Cal-breds more attractive. Another is the coordinated TOC/CTBA effort that has, beginning with the Santa Anita Park meet, raised the minimum Cal-bred claiming price from \$32,000 to \$40,000. That \$32,000 minimum maiden claiming price had been that way for about 20 years, so both the TOC and CTBA agreed that, with inflation and the expense that it costs an owner to get their horse(s) to the races, this was a long overdue and necessary increase.

Then there's the \$3.6 million Sunshine Millions. It's a unique day of racing where the combined efforts of the TOC, CTBA and MEC (Magna Entertainment Corp.) have been able to fund enormous purses benefiting not only California breeders, but also both the owners of Cal-breds and California owners of Florida-bred horses. We feel

the event is good for the entire racing industry, and well serves to promote the excitement and interest of owning a Cal-bred.

I believe these are just a few examples of the positive results produced by our two groups working together to bring about change for California racing and breeding.

As for the future, the TOC is working hard to protect and increase revenues from the betting dollar. At present, our efforts are focused on the restructuring of rebating practices and business models, and on challenging the threat posed by illegal offshore betting and betting exchanges. This is one of the TOC's top priorities for 2004, and you're sure to hear more about it in the coming months.

No discussion of the TOC accomplishments or agenda would be complete without addressing our efforts regarding the Workers' Compensation situation. It was, and still is, our collective "biggest problem." Fortunately, however, our racetrack partners have been more than willing to work hand-in-hand with us on this issue, and together we were able to incorporate a number of creative ideas into what we believe is a truly workable solution to this challenge. The bill—AB900—will be voted upon in early January, so please encourage your representative to support its passage. The TOC anticipates that, when passed, the program will bring real and effective relief for all of us in the racing industry.

So, rest assured that the TOC will continue to work with the CTBA to bring positive change to the California racing and breeding industry.

Ron Charles, a founding member of the TOC, was recently elected the chairman of the board. He has been in the printing and publishing business for 25 years. A Thoroughbred owner for 29 years, he currently has over forty horses. He lives with his wife, Kathy, and daughter, Tawny. Ron Charles can be reached at his e-mail address of roncharles@attbi.com.