



The Horsemen's f Newsletter

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Sniffen Named Backstretch Worker of the Year



Charles Sniffen, who got his training license in 1968 and for the past 20 years has been assistant trainer for Ferris Allen, has been selected as the Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association Backstretch Worker of the Year for 2025.

Sniffen, who was born in Gettysburg, Pa., and grew up in Olney, Md., is a fifth-generation horseman. He began his training career racing at Charles Town Races and Shenandoah Downs, where he was stabled in Barn K. In the late 1980s he ventured to Maryland, where in 1981 he won the Grade III Riggs Stakes on the turf at Pimlico Race Course with Advan for owner Helen Pollinger.

Sniffen later returned to West Virginia as a trainer, and then became a blacksmith, including at Tampa Bay Downs, where he was paddock blacksmith. He spent three years as a trainer in New England at Rockingham Park and Suffolk Downs, and then at Penn

Continued on Page 2 ➔

Finalists Announced For End-of-Year Awards

The Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association has announced the 2025 finalists for various horsemen and equine awards that will be presented as part of this year's Renaissance Awards luncheon, which will be scheduled for sometime this spring.

The Renaissance Awards honor the top owner, trainer, jockey and breeder of the previous year in Maryland, as well as Maryland-bred horses in various categories and other awards for horses that have competed with distinction at Maryland tracks but may not be Maryland-bred.

The MTHA awards process is as follows: A slate of candidates for each category is prepared by several individuals with knowledge of day-to-day racing in the state and through statistics compiled by Equibase. The human categories are Owner, Trainer and Jockey, while the equine categories are Dirt Male, Dirt Female, Turf Male,

Turf Female and Claimer of the Year.

The candidates are submitted to the MTHA Board of Directors and selected media members and handicappers, and each member then votes for their top three choices in each category. The MTHA, beginning with the 2022 racing season, added the five equine categories to the overall Renaissance Awards program.

The Backstretch Worker of the Year Award, selected by MTHA staff after trainers are solicited for nominees, also is part of the Renaissance Awards program.

Based upon discussions by organizers, the Renaissance Awards will be rebranded to a race day luncheon, most likely at the end of March. Details on the event will be announced at a later date.

The following are the finalists for the three human awards and five equine awards.

OWNER OF THE YEAR

MADISON AVENUE RACING STABLE,
MORRIS KERNAN JR., JAGGER INC.

LARRY RABOLD

THE ELKSTONE GROUP LLC

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

BRITTANY T. RUSSELL

GARY CAPUANO

MICHAEL TROMBETTA

JOCKEY OF THE YEAR

MYCHEL J. SANCHEZ

SHELDON RUSSELL

YEDSIT HAZLEWOOD

CLAIMER OF THE YEAR

BOLD DIVERSION

CLUCK CLUCK

ZERO BLITZ

Continued on Page 2 ➔

➔ **Sniffen, continued from Page 1** —

National Race Course, where he received a call from Allen in 2005.

“Ferris called and asked me to work with his string at Delaware Park and Gulfstream Park,” Sniffen said. “For about 10 years, I was at Delaware during its meet, and spent the other six months at Gulfstream.”

When Colonial Downs shut down in 2014, Allen, the all-time leading trainer at the Virginia racetrack, brought Sniffen to Maryland to be his assistant trainer. Colonial Downs reopened in 2019, and Sniffen primarily stays year-round at Laurel Park, where he is a well-known presence on the backstretch.

Sniffen has developed a reputation for assisting the backstretch population with personal matters, appointments, financial needs and travel arrangements. He is a regular in the Laurel Recreation Room where he socializes with members of the community.

Sniffen was asked what he likes most about his job. “I get to have all the fun and don’t have to pay the bills,” he said with a laugh. “It’s a great experience working for Ferris. He’s easy to work for. I also love working with the help. Even though I don’t speak the language, we all get along really well.”

“Charlie is an incredible member of our backstretch community,” Allen said. “He is a top-notch assistant trainer, completely reliable van driver, and unwaveringly helpful and supportive with our entire staff as well as the entire backstretch community.”

Pension Signups Are Coming In April

Virtual sign-ups for the Maryland Backstretch Pension Plan will again be available beginning in April, with a deadline of June 1, 2026.

Those employed in the care of horses on the backstretch at Laurel Park, Pimlico Race Course, or the Fair Hill Training Center, including trainers, may be eligible. Participants must have worked at least 1,000 hours in 2025 and provide documentation such as a W-2, 1099, or tax return.

Benefits are available at age 65, or at age 55 with 25 years in the Plan. Additional details are available at <https://mdhorsemen.com>.

Van Service Available For Appointments, Events

The Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen’s Association provides van service for both personal needs and recreational outings for those working on the backstretch.

Recreation Director Dan Mangum offers van service up to three times per week—primarily Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays—at Laurel Park. Transportation is generally provided to social services agencies, food markets, medical appointments, and the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration.

Because Mangum’s schedule can fluctuate based on demand, it is important to arrange transportation in advance and confirm availability before scheduling appointments. This is especially critical for medical visits that may be difficult to reschedule. The MTHA staff appreciates the cooperation of backstretch workers who assist friends and coworkers by sharing transportation when possible.

Often, multiple individuals travel together with Mangum to the same offices or businesses. He typically arrives between 9:00 and 9:30 a.m., once training concludes, which allows him to coordinate multiple stops efficiently. Advance notice helps ensure that as many requests as possible can be accommodated.

“I stay pretty busy, and without a day or two of notice, it can be hard to fit everyone in,” Mangum said. “That’s especially true if someone has an appointment far from Laurel Park.”

With sufficient notice, Mangum said he can occasionally adjust his schedule to provide service on a Monday or Friday if needed. He can be reached at 410-802-5798. As part of the

recreation program, Mangum also organizes and hosts poker tournaments, with the next one scheduled for Wednesday, February 18, at noon in the Laurel Recreation Room.

The MTHA continues to offer a full calendar of activities through its expanded recreation program. Bryant Paz, whose family operates the Laurel Track Kitchen and satellite kitchens on the property, serves as the van driver for these events.

The monthly events schedule is distributed via flyers, with reminders sent through WhatsApp on the Maryland Backstretch Discussion and Announcements group. For trips requiring transportation, Paz maintains a first-come, first-served sign-up list, as the van accommodates only 10–11 passengers. Those unable to attend a trip are given priority for the next outing.

Paz also promotes upcoming events when backstretch employees visit the kitchen. Flyers are posted in the Recreation Room, and Paz can be reached at 240-319-1892 for additional information.



➔ **Awards, continued from Page 1**

MALE DIRT HORSE OF THE YEAR

BARBADIAN RUNNER

POST TIME

SLAM NOTION

MALE TURF HORSE OF THE YEAR

CORINGA

HAD TO HAVE HIM

WITTY

FEMALE DIRT HORSE OF THE YEAR

COMPLEXITY JANE

ONYX TEN

TAKETHEMONEYHONEY

FEMALE TURF HORSE OF THE YEAR

LIFELOVENLAUGHTER

ULTIMATE LOVE

WORTH A DIME

MSA Has Tentative Agreement To Purchase Laurel Park

The Maryland Stadium Authority (MSA) on January 12 announced that it has reached a tentative agreement with 1/ST Racing (The Stronach Group) to acquire Laurel Park for the purposes of redevelopment into a premier hub for Thoroughbred training in Maryland.

The MSA said the deal is projected to save roughly \$50 million for the Pimlico Plus plan and marks a strategic realignment of the state's plans to transform Pimlico into the heart of statewide Thoroughbred racing, build a world-class horse training center, and secure the future of Maryland's multibillion-dollar horseracing industry.

"The action marks the first step in writing the next chapter of Maryland's rich Thoroughbred racing heritage," MSA Chairman Craig A. Thompson said. "This represents more than a planned acquisition—it represents the preservation of a storied racing facility. By pursuing Laurel Park as the home of Maryland's statewide training center, we are creating a path to secure the state's historic investments into Maryland's horse industry and develop the next generation of Triple Crown champions."

Since January 1, 2025, the state has leased the 229-acre site from 1/ST Racing as a transition facility while Pimlico is being redeveloped, as outlined by a master agreement approved in May 2024. Under those terms, racing operations would have permanently ended at Laurel at the conclusion of the lease. While final details will be negotiated in the coming weeks, the MSA hopes to assume ownership of Laurel, pending necessary approvals and closing procedures, giving the historic landmark a renewed purpose as a best-in-class horse

training facility.

"This plan represents a pivotal opportunity to secure the future of Maryland racing," said Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association (MTHA) President Katharine M. Voss. "By preserving and reinvigorating Laurel Park as a premier Thoroughbred training center and aligning it with a reimagined Pimlico, the state and Governor Wes Moore have taken decisive action to preserve a historic industry that has supported Maryland families for generations.

"This approach delivers long-term certainty for horsemen, stability for thousands of workers, and ensures that Maryland's rich racing heritage remains a strong and sustainable economic engine for generations to come."

Further details were revealed during a January 21 meeting of the Maryland House Appropriations Committee, which held a hearing on the overall racing industry in the state. Gary McGuigan, the MSA Vice President of the Capital Projects Development Group, said there is a letter of intent to purchase Laurel. He said the cost of the purchase had not been determined, but did say about \$120 million would be available for the purchase and upgrade of the Laurel stable area, which includes dormitories.

McGuigan noted the plans for Pimlico continue to change. After receiving feedback from state and local officials in Baltimore, it was determined that Pimlico would become a ship-in track with a Preakness stakes barn and hundreds of other stalls housed in a receiving barn. Not building a full barn area for year-round training will allow for about 1,000 more parking spaces.

MSA officials noted that the Pimlico

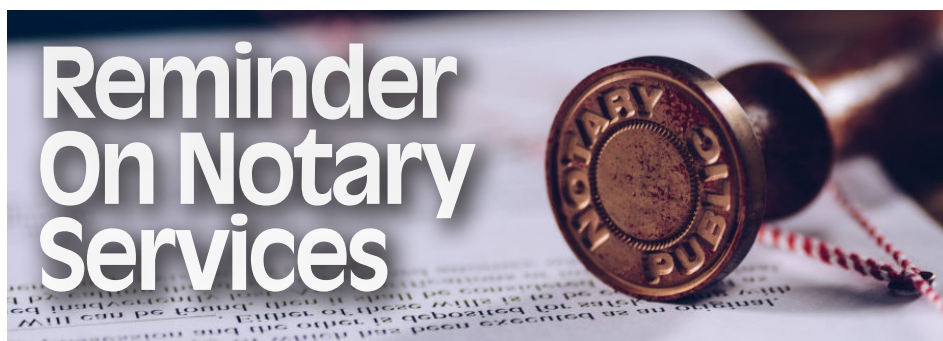
clubhouse/grandstand building will double as event space for the local community, and they said there already has been interest from the business community on the five "out-parcels" at Pimlico which are primarily located between Rogers Avenue and Northern Parkway. A request for proposals will be issued in the summer of 2026.

The 151st Preakness will run at Laurel as scheduled on May 16, 2026, before returning to Pimlico in 2027. McGuigan acknowledged construction most likely will be going on at Pimlico next year, so the Preakness will be an "overlay event," meaning heavy use of temporary facilities.

Once finalized, acquisition costs for Laurel will be paid by the MSA with available project funds. At that point, the state will pursue methods to offset the costs, to include revenue bonds issued by the Maryland Economic Development Corporation (MEDCO). The Maryland Jockey Club (TMJC) will continue to oversee daily operations at Laurel under state ownership.

"This planned approach affords maximum flexibility, cost savings and efficiencies going forward on behalf of the state and Thoroughbred industry," MEDCO Executive Director Tom Sadowski said. "We look forward to the prospect of Laurel Park continuing to support Maryland's storied racing tradition, with a renewed focus on training excellence and equine health."

The state had purchased Shamrock Farm for about \$4.5 million to be the site of a new training center, but MSA officials said environmental issues and cost overruns led them to change course.



The MTHA provides free notary services to members of the backstretch community and other individuals working at Maryland racetracks. These services, conducted by a certified notary public, are regulated by the Maryland Office of the Secretary of State and must adhere to specific legal guidelines.

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HORSEMEN CAN NOW STREAM LIVE RACE VIDEO

<https://vimeo.com/event/4865441>
Password: mtha2025!

** For Horsemen Only*



TAX TIME IS HERE

MTHA will assist backstretch workers and trainers to prepare and file their state and federal tax returns.

An appointment is required.
Contact the MTHA office at 410-902-6844 to schedule.

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