



# WINNER'S CIRCLE



Volume 16, Issue 1

The Newsletter of the Race Track Chaplaincy of America

Spring 2002

## My orange tree is blooming – spring is coming!

When evening approached, I decided to take a walk around the back yard area of our home. I suddenly became conscious of the sweet smell that filled the breeze. I began to speculate about where this wonderful aroma originated. I followed my senses and soon enough discovered that the aroma came from my orange tree that is presently in full-bloom. I pondered the beauty of the tree and realized that it looked more beautiful than usual with its brilliant combination of deep green leaves and pure white flowers. Spring has sprung all over the garden. The peach tree is full of leaves, and the apple tree is bursting with tiny buds. Everything around the garden was alive once more. Indeed, spring is a time of resurrection, the vegetation that was once dormant is now awake and new life springs everywhere.

The book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3, verse 1 says: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: Time to be born, and time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted..."

In the race industry, spring is a time of new beginnings in different ways. The racetracks that have not been racing year round start preparing their facility for the new season. Likewise, in horse farms across the country beautiful foals are being born. The farms take on a majestic look as the yellow grass burned by cold weather starts changing to a beautiful deep green. Spring is a beautiful time of the year!

During this time of spring Race Track Chaplaincy of America is also in full bloom with different projects for the improvement of our ministry and service at the racetracks. Our goal for the last 30 years has been to meet, with excellence, the spiritual, emotional, physical, and social needs of horse industry people across the nation. During spring, we celebrate the Easter holiday, where our emphasis is the Resurrection of our Lord. The Resurrection is a message of hope, a hope for a better life in God at the racetrack and a hope for life beyond death for anybody willing to accept it. The Resurrection symbolizes victory over death. Our Chaplains, as agents of this victory, bring this message of hope and victory to thousands of people. We are constantly celebrating the many victories that our chaplains share. Many people have been released from illness and many more have been saved from chemical dependency. Our chaplains, in various ways, have been helping people with so many needs that include, but not limited to, social welfare, agency protocol, conflict resolution, crisis intervention, etc.

As my orange tree produces a beautiful aroma during this spring-time, I see our chaplains also producing an aroma that attracts people. They are bringing the aroma of a sincere smile, an aroma of a word of consolation at a time of sorrow, an aroma of counseling, an aroma of spiritual support, an aroma of comfort to the hurts and ills, an aroma of physical support to the needy, an aroma of spiritual guidance, and an aroma of hope and of victory.

Praise the Lord God for our chaplains. Praise the Lord for the opportunity He has granted our chaplains to be instruments of blessings at the Racetrack and for bringing God's aroma to so many individuals at racetracks across the country.



"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing"  
1 Corinthians 2:15

– Dr. Enrique Torres, Executive Director

## RTCA CAPITAL CAMPAIGN - A NEW DAY FOR RTCA

### Progress Report

Please accept our heartfelt "thanks" to the many generous contributors to the "New Day" RTCA Capital Campaign. The Capital Campaign is beginning the second year of a three-year effort to raise \$1 million to expand the support of the RTCA ministry. The campaign will fund new chaplaincy programs, provide educational opportunities for our chaplains, recruit new chaplains and expand the support programs provided to the horse racing industry. RTCA tithes 5% of whatever is raised to other ministries with a preference to those connected with the horse racing industry.

To date, the Capital Campaign has received \$80,732 in contributions from \$ 113,442 in pledges. As of the end of March, RTCA had nearly \$91,000 cash in reserve.

The Capital Campaign Committee is in the process of identifying individuals who might feel called to make significant contributions to the RTCA ministry. We have asked the members of the Committee, the RTCA Board and the RTCA Industry Advisory Committee to pray and provide the names of potential donors. We will then begin contacting these individuals to tell the story of RTCA chaplains serving God on America's racetracks.

With the help of graphic artists at the American Quarter Horse Association, RTCA advertisements are being placed in racing industry magazines, horsemen's association newsletters and track programs. An example of the ad appears in this "Winners Circle" newsletter. The ads will also be furnished to denominational publications. While RTCA may from time to time place and pay for these ads, we hope the publications and tracks will run the ads as public service announcements when space is available. Ad sizes range from 8 1/2 X 11 down to 2 X 3.

Anyone who would like to become involved with the RTCA Capital Campaign is more than welcome. Please contact Dan Fick at 877-AAA-RACE, or Dr. Torres at RTCA Headquarters at Hollywood Park at 310-419-1641.

– Dan Fick, "New Day" Chairman

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# Pat's Day in the Son

- By Betsy Parker

Forgive the racing fans if they call it the Holy Trinity of horse racing. The Triple Crown – Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont Stakes – imbues the spring with humble devotion to this Sport of Kings. It is part homage to the Thoroughbred, part veneration of competition, part worship of excellence.

Hall of Fame jockey Pat Day accepts the reverence, their dedication to the game. He loves it too, and, like everybody, eagerly anticipates the annual American classics. His 1992 Derby victory aboard longshot Lil E Tee – and five Preakness wins and three Belmont triumphs – give him a taste for these highest ranks of racing. He understands, then, the almost religious fervor racing heralds each spring.

It wasn't always that way.

When young jockey Pat Day won his first U.S. riding championship in 1982, he was unprepared for the demands of the racing press, the searching questions, the probing interviews. At a press conference after the year-end awards party, a persistent hack pressed Day for the secret to his incredible connection, seemingly a secret language, with racehorses. Day was armed with a glib answer, his usual. "It's a God given talent." He didn't mean it.

"I'd been riding races since 1973," said the Brush, Colorado native and former bull rider on the western rodeo circuit. "And finally, I was fortunate enough to have won the riding title. I thought that when I grabbed that brass ring, it would finally equate the contentment that was missing from my life."

Though Day was a champion athlete in high school – the 98-pound state title-holder when a junior at Eagle Valley High – he said that drinking and drugs controlled his early years on the racing circuit. "So, of course after I won that first title, I had to go out and party," he said. "When I came out of that stupor the next day, I took an inventory of my life. I realized that success and joy were not related. I mean, winning the title was a great accomplishment, but it didn't provide what I was looking for."

For that, Day had to look within.

Though he'd been brought up in the Lutheran Church, Day said that his knowledge of God and the Bible were "bookish. It hadn't touched my heart. I questioned my purpose, and realized racing had lost its luster on the way to the top." Drugs and alcohol still shadowed his life.

Day won a second riding title in '83. He was at the top, but he knew something had to give. "It was January 27, 1984, in Miami," Day recalled, remembering the experience as if yesterday. "I was down there to ride a race at Hialeah. When I got to my hotel that night to crash, I turned on the television for company while I brushed my teeth." Day said he glanced in the mirror, watching the Jimmy Swaggert crusade over his shoulder. Thinking he was already "there" as a Christian, Day flipped the switch and crawled into bed.

"I fell instantly into the deepest sleep," Day continued. "It seemed like it was a very long time later but it turns out to be just a few minutes had passed when I woke up. I had the distinct feeling I was not alone. I couldn't see anyone, of course, but there was this presence.

"I turned the TV back on. Jimmy Swaggert was still going on about the spirit of the living God. I just knew it was an appeal to invite Christ into my life," Day said. "It was that minute that I realized what was missing."

Day knew then that a personal relationship with the Lord was the answer. He leapt from the bed and fell to his knees, right then, right there, in the darkened hotel room.

"All things are new again in Christ," Day paraphrased the Bible when recounting his "rebirth." "I was a new creature. That night on the plane back to Colorado, the stewardess came by and asked if I wanted a drink. Without even thinking about my personal inventory, I knew the chains of bondage to drugs and alcohol were broken. I said 'no, thank you m'am.'"

When Day returned home that night, he said he wanted to tell his wife

Sheila about his experience. Sheila was raised a Christian but, like the Day who'd left home two days previous, was not a devout follower. "But I didn't know how," he recalled. "So I didn't tell anyone at first."

Day finally shared his renewal with fellow jockey Sam Maple a week later when on the backstretch at Oaklawn Park. "I knew Sammy was a good Christian," Day said. "I told him briefly what I'd felt. He was so happy. Sammy introduced me to the new [Racetrack Chaplaincy of America] chaplain Mike Spencer. Mike invited me to chapel the next day. I hadn't even been back to church because I didn't know what to do.

"Mike became my spiritual mentor," Day said. "A few weeks later he asked me to share my hotel room experience. I was a little scared and embarrassed, but he reminded me I was in a body of believers when in the chapel." In the end, Day told his story, but a new question loomed – should he give up the race riding he found so natural for a new calling to the ministry that had edged in as the most important part of his life? Only Day could decide.

He thought. He prayed. He looked within. And, in the end, he considered his previous, impudent answer to the reporter's query about his "God-given talent."

"I poured my heart out to Mike Spencer," Day said. "He quoted a Scripture to me that helped me feel confident staying in the racing business because, clearly, God has a plan for all of us. Mike told me I must have been saved while I was in horse racing for a reason. I felt like maybe I was to work within the racing industry as His messenger. I decided I'd use my success as a platform to call attention to the Lord."

And this is what he's done. "Pat was the one who led me to the Lord through his testimony," said Churchill-based trainer Elliott Walden. "From that standpoint alone, anything he does is fantastic." Walden provided the mount for Day's 8,001st racing victory. "We have a very close relationship in racing, and through Jesus Christ," Day said.

Day remains involved in RTCA ministry and feels that it is the important first point of contact for backstretch workers seeking devotion. "The RTCA provides many of the physical and material needs for the backstretch workers," he said. "But it caters to their spiritual needs, too. It was God who commanded us to love Him, first, and to love one another."

Day said his favorite song puts it well, and he did his best to warble the refrain: "Don't tell them Christ loves them 'til you're ready to love them yourself."

A winner before his personal Damascus experience, Day's racing career has been punctuated with increasing success since his rebirth. In addition to his nine Triple Crown wins, Day has won 13 Breeders' Cup races, four Eclipse Awards and is third for all-time career wins with more than 8,200. Only Bill Shoemaker, 8,833 and Laffit Pincay, still active with more than 9,000, have more.

As far as the future, Day said that the Lord will guide him. "One day at a time, one race at a time," he said. "I'll see what the Lord has in store for me. I understand that at some moment in time, God is going to call me into another arena. I want to do what He wants me to do. In regards to passing Shoemaker or Pincay one day, if that's God's will and God's design for my life, that will come to pass. If it's not, if tonight during my prayers, God gives me a call to do something different, that will be my last day in the saddle."

Day said that if he wins the May 4 Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs, he secretly hopes that a reporter will ask him about his special communication with racehorses. His answer will be obvious.

"It's a God given talent."

This time, he'll mean it.

*Betsy Parker is a writer living in Flint Hill, Virginia. She is the Virginia correspondent to the Thoroughbred Times and Horse and Field Editor for the Times Community Newspapers in Virginia.*

Editors Note: Pat is tentatively scheduled to ride "Buddha" in this year's Derby.



photo by Z



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# Why is there a Preacher at the Meadows Racetrack?

I have been asked that question time after time. My answer is usually summed up in a few short statements. Every racetrack in this country is a mission field. Most of the employees at tracks across the country have no church affiliation. There are many needs to be met. Missions is not geography ... it is people! People who do not know the Lord in a personal way are a mission field. Those who do are missionaries. It has nothing to do with going overseas. Jesus said to "Go into "all" the world and preach the Gospel to everyone, everywhere." This would include those at racetracks. Many would have never heard the "Good News" unless chaplains went as missionaries to tracks like the Meadows.

One good example of the work taking place at the Meadows is the story of a father and son from Sweden. The father was an atheist and the son an agnostic. They often shared many reasons why they could never attend church or believe in a personal God that loves them. During the Thanksgiving and Christmas outreaches of the track ministry they received food and a few gifts. It amazed them to receive these items since they did not attend chapel services or any of the ministry outreaches or functions. About two months later on a Sunday Morning they walked into the chapel. I was surprised and blessed to see them. They enjoyed the service and started attending every week. Eventually they purchased a Scandinavian Bible so they could study in their own language. In time, they moved back to Sweden. It has been close to five years since the move and they still call me around every six weeks to say hello and keep in touch. That is what makes it all worth while.

God is blessing this ministry and providing for the needs too! The little old chapel that the men from Sweden attended has been replaced by a beautiful worship facility. People are amazed to see such a nice chapel sitting in the middle of a racetrack. We have a children's area, kitchen, office, two restrooms, storage, etc. The neat thing is not one plea was made for finances and no formal fundraisers were put together.



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## Your Marriage: A Garden of Love

Proverbs 24:30-34, viewed as a parable on marriage

Have you ever walked into a well cared for garden of beautiful flowers or a vineyard with vines weighed down with ripening grapes? You probably were filled with awe as you beheld God's fruitful creation. Your marriage "garden of love" can be just like that and bring delight to all who see God's blessings in your marriage. It is God's desire that your "garden of love" produce fruit such as, "love, joy peace, patience kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23). This requires tender loving care by the gardeners.

Proverbs 24: 30-34 tells about the garden and vineyard of a "sluggard." They are full of weeds and thorns and the protective wall around them are broken down. A neglected "marriage garden" will be the same-lots of weeds and thorns, such as sarcasm, criticism, belittlement, busyness, poor communications, and many more unwanted ugly things. In such a garden you will find the husband avoiding being there, working long hours or perhaps looking into another "garden." The wife also may be looking elsewhere.

When my wife and I have seen or heard of Christian friends or leaders separating or divorcing, we take a good look at our own "garden of love" to see if there were weeds we need to tend to. We know that we are not immune to such things.

Lasting fruit in a "garden of love" will not come over night. Weeding takes more than just trying, it takes help from God. It takes hard work and tender loving care. Jesus said to His disciples, "He that abideth in me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit." (John 15:5) It will take a commitment to God, His word and prayer by both "gardeners" to produce that lasting fruitful "garden of love." As Paul said to the elders of Ephesus, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the WORD of His grace, which is able to build you up..." (Acts 20:32).

As a couple, take a good look at your "garden of love." Purpose to spend time together in prayer and in the Scriptures. Acknowledge the weeds and thorns and seek God together to help you eradicate them.

Do it now!  
God Says So

*Hal and Dee Denney  
2002 RTCA Chaplains School speakers  
Director of Marriage GetAways at Glen Eyrie, CO.  
A ministry of The Navigators*

One by one track workers kept saying we need a bigger facility and money started being donated. Track management offered to take care of all the labor costs if we had the money for the materials. God provided every penny and we held the first service totally debt free. He continues to meet our needs and touch lives in the new chapel just like the old. The surroundings do not matter. We just need His presence and to be in His will. I know it is His will to have a preacher at the Meadows and every other track in this country and beyond.

*– Joe DiDonato, Meadows Chaplain*

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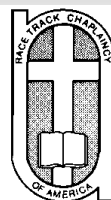
## RTCA 2003 Annual Meeting Announced

The 2003 National RTCA Chaplain's School and Annual Meeting will be held in New Orleans, January 22-27 at the Ambassador Hotel. Jack Cordell, Philadelphia Park Chaplain, will serve as Chaplaincy School chairman. Carol Marino and Carol Heausler are serving as Arrangements Committee co-chairs.

### A NEW DAY FOR RACE TRACK CHAPLAINCY OF AMERICA

You can join with us in meeting the most basic of racing's needs every day of the year on a one-to-one level.

*The workers deserve it. Horse racing requires it. Only you can provide it.*



Please send contributions to:  
RTCA  
P.O. Box 91640  
Los Angeles, CA 90009  
Or call: 1-310-419-1640

One of four advertisements created by AQHA for RTCA.

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## Corey Johnsen Addresses Prayer Meeting And the Industry on Racetrack Chaplaincy

Corey Johnsen lifted a Bible in his right hand as he spoke, "I am convinced that any type of counseling -- whether it's for relationship problems or addictive behavior -- that is not based on God's word is basically ineffective."

Johnsen, president and general manager of Lone Star Park at Grand Prairie, Texas, was speaking to some 40 attendees at a 7 a.m. prayer breakfast hosted by RTCA at the 28th Annual Symposium on Racing at Tucson, Arizona.

A born-again believer, Johnsen shared his faith in Jesus Christ. He also expressed his appreciation to what God is doing through the race track chaplaincy throughout the racing industry. He has been the general manager of Lone Star Park since February, 1994, and was promoted to president-general manager in January, 2000. Under his leadership, Lone Star Park attracted nearly 1.3 million people during its inaugural season in 1997. Johnsen had previously held the position of general manager of Remington Park in Oklahoma City, and was the director of marketing for the DeBartolo Racing Group, where he coordinated the marketing, sales and customer service efforts at three race-tracks: Louisiana Downs in Bossier City, Louisiana, Thistledown in Cleveland, Ohio, and Remington Park. A Tacoma, Washington, native, Johnsen attended Arizona State University, where he graduated with a degree in communications. His first job was in the marketing department at Turf Paradise, where he eventually served as director of public relations and marketing for the Phoenix, Arizona track.

Following the prayer breakfast, Johnsen was invited to speak about the chaplaincy program to industry leaders at a panel discussion on "Backstretch Issues." "What I'm actually speaking to you about is assets, management principles, and return on your investment," the track GM told his listeners. "When we think about our major assets at the track, we generally think of our track facility, the horses, our franchise, or our group of owners. I submit to you that the greatest asset we have is the people who work with and for us at the track. Of course, we invest salaries, wages, and health insurance in these people, but I believe that the most efficient use of our money on our Lone Star Park employees is our chaplaincy program.

"At Lone Star Park, our chaplain is the most valuable person on our team, and I encourage each race track to make your chaplain an integral part of your organization - not just provide him an office in the racing area and a salary, but get him involved in your overall employee picture. We have our chaplain at Lone Star, who is Sam Spence, as a speaker at our employee orientation rallies, and we have him open our management and department head meetings with a short message that really sets the tone for our meeting. The chaplain also has a weekly e-mail letter to all of us at the track, which includes announcements, a prayer list and a devotion.



Corey Johnsen with Chaplain Sam Spence

"In addition to his regular chapel services and Bible studies, weddings, funerals, and hospital visits, Chaplain Sam oversees an employee benevolence fund to help employees, both on the front side and in the barns. We seeded that program back in 1997 and told the chaplain to use it any way he saw fit. Employees began giving into the fund from their weekly paychecks, fundraisers were held, and horsemen began to contribute, along with owners. Today, that fund is five times larger that it was in 1997, and hundreds are helped through the fund each year. I personally feel the benevolence fund has been one of the greatest morale and teamwork builders we have at Lone Star Park.

"September 11th changed the focus for many of us. If I'm asked what is the greatest threat to our nation today, my answer is not terrorism, bio-terrorism or Osama Bin Laden - much more dangerous is a decline in religion and our faith in God and the values this has in our daily lives and in our organizations. Our industry is tremendously blessed by the race track chaplaincy, and I encourage you to introduce your chaplain to all your employees as well as the horsemen. There are so many people who do not know God. Think about it...if you can be a part of getting one person saved, you've made your organization, and the world, a better place."

### Industry Associations Support RTCA

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