

Harness Racing Hall of Fame embraces new members

Sunday, July 03, 2016 - by T.J. Burkett, Hoof Beats Executive Editor



Goshen, NY---Breeder and industry executive Charlie Keller III and trainer Bruce Nickells were inducted into the Harness Racing Hall of Fame during ceremonies held at the Harness Racing Museum Sunday (July 4) evening.



Keller stressed during his induction speech his family and friends were the reason he was at the podium.

Also honored were Communicators Hall of Fame inductees David Carr and Jerry Connors; Living Horse Hall of Fame inductees [Real Desire](#), [Muscle Hill](#), Solveig and Arl's Troublemaker; Immortal inductees Carl Allen and Princess; 2015 Del and Mary Lib Miller Horse of the Year Wiggle It Jiggleit; 2016 Amateur Driving Champion Hannah Miller; and U.S. Harness Writers Association Unsung Hero Award winner Joanne Young.

Keller took over management of Yankeeland Farm after the death of his father, Charles Keller II, in 1990. From then until the farm's closure in 2006, Yankeeland produced such standouts as Hambletonian winners [Muscles Yankee](#) and Yankee Paco; Breeders Crown winners Cashmere, Yankee Slide and Strong Yankee; longtime standout sire [Yankee Glide](#); North America Cup winner [Yankee Cruiser](#).

Keller was also a longtime industry executive, serving as executive chairman of the Hambletonian Society and a director of the USTA. He thanked his parents, wife, children and nephews for their help in supporting his harness racing career.

"This is not an award only for me," he said. "It's for the family and my family put me in this position. I'm a very blessed person."

Nickells, who has been training horses for 70 years, first gained prominence as the trainer of such horses as Kentucky, Batman, Fast Clip, Combat Time and Sprite Rodney. He vaulted on the national stage when he trained six pacing fillies that took divisional honors in the 1980s and 1990s: Follow My Star, Central Park West, Miss Easy, Hazleton Kay, Immortality and Freedoms Friend. He was named Glen Garnsey Trainer of the Year in 1991.

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The trainer, who turns 88 on July 5, shared a recent conversation he had with fellow trainer Peter Wrenn.

"He said, 'Hey Nickells, you got your speech all ready?'" Nickells said. "I said, 'No, I haven't got one at all. I might not make one.'

"Pete said, 'There's nothing to it. Just get up there and start talking like you are trying to sell someone a horse.'"

Communicators Hall of Fame

David Carr, recently retired director of information and research at the USTA, founded that department in the mid-80s and headed the group for more than 30 years. He was integral to the development of the Pathway online statistical database, the *Trotting and Pacing Guide*, *Crosses of Gold*, sales pedigrees and state stallion directories. He thanked Dean Hoffman for hiring him at the USTA, along with Stan Bergstein for calling attention to his work.

"When you wander through the museum, you get a chance to see the names and images of the men and women who created and advanced the sport," said Carr. "And they were giants. There are many giants here tonight. When we reach for the stars, we stand on the shoulders of giants. When we try to reach farther into the frontier, we walk along a path that was blazed by giants. I have my own giants that I would like to recognize tonight."

Over a career spanning four decades, Connors worked as a sire stakes administrator, track publicist, public handicapper, track announcer, race timer and charter and magazine columnist. He's also been an USHWA director for 23 years and the organization's national secretary since 2002. He thanked the industry leaders who helped him in his formative years for helping him enter the Hall of Fame.

"Look at some of the groups I've worked with," said Connors. "Four of the first five people that hired me are in the Hall of Fame: Marv Bachrad, Bruce Stearns, Dean Hoffman and Jim Lynch. When I worked for the USTA, I worked with six Hall of Famers: Dean, now David (Carr), John Pawlak, Carol Cramer, George Smallsreed and Ed Keys. How could I miss?"



USTA/Mark Hall photos

Connors and Carr enter the Hall of Fame after decades of friendship and a close working relationship.

Living Horse Hall of Fame

[Real Desire](#) p, 2, 1:50.4; 3, 1:49; 4, 1:48.2 (\$3,159,814) qualified for the Hall of Fame based on his \$3 million in lifetime earnings and being voted Horse of the Year in both the U.S. and Canada in 2002 at age 4. He was driven throughout his career by John Campbell for trainer Blair Burgess and co-owners Brittany Farms, Perretti Farms, Bob Burgess and Karin Olsson Burgess.

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"This horse was a life-changer for us," said Blair Burgess, whose wife, Karin, groomed [Real Desire](#). "He allowed us to buy a farm, which we always wanted to do. And to this day—which is probably a bad sign because it was 15 years ago—he was probably the fastest horse I ever had. He had that line gait that Bruce Nickells told me you need in a pacer—no wasted motion."

[Muscle Hill](#) t, 2, 1:53.3; 3, 1:50.1 (\$3,273,342) qualified for induction by all criteria: he was a \$3 million lifetime winner, unbeaten in 12 starts at age 3, and voted Horse of the Year at age 3 in 2009. He also won 95.2 percent of his lifetime starts for driver Brian Sears, trainer Greg Peck, and co-owners [Muscle Hill](#) Racing LLC, Southwind Farm, T L P Stable, and Jerry Silva.

"You don't start in this industry as an owner with [Muscle Hill](#)," said Silva. "You start many years ago with other horses, whether they are claimers or babies or whatever they are. You need a lot of luck; you need a good trainer and a good vet; and you need a lot of money to succeed."

Solveig t, 4, 1:54.4f (\$820,791) was elected for owners Solveig's Breeders after producing Shake It Cerry 3, 1:51.2 (\$2,497,785), Uncle Lasse 3, 1:51.4f (\$931,268) and [Dontyouforgetit](#) 3, 1:52.1f (\$598,049).

Spending her broodmare days at Winbak Farm, Arl's Troublemaker produced Art Maker p, 1:49.1 (\$1,036,217), Stock Market Wiz p, 1:49.3 (\$739,283) and Breakin The Law p, 1:49.4 (\$504,932).

Immortal Hall of Fame

A trainer and driver for 30 years, Carl Allen is best known for training 1995 Horse of the Year CR Kay Suzie. He was voted Trainer of the Year in 1994. He trained and drove 1998 divisional winner [CR Commando](#) and trained 1999 Breeders Crown winner CR Renegade. He died in 2004.

Living from 1846-1877, Princess took a mark of 2:30. In a series of match races in 1859, she pushed Flora Temple to set the all-age record for trotters four times, including the mark of 2:19-3/4 that stood for eight years. Bred to Hambletonian in 1863, she produced Happy Medium, whose sire line still flourishes today.

2016 Harness Racing Hall of Fame Amateur Driving Champion

Hannah Miller, 24, set a single-season record for amateur drivers when she recorded 32 victories in 2015. Last year she drove at 21 North American racetracks, represented the U.S. in an amateur driving contest in Majorca, Spain, and this year will represent the Stars and Stripes in the International Amateur World Cup in Budapest, Hungary.

USHWA Unsung Hero Award

Joanne Young, development director at the Harness Racing Museum and Hall of Fame, was presented with the Unsung Hero Award for her tireless work in recruiting members and raising money for the Hall. She was unable to attend the Dan Patch Awards dinner in March to be given her award, so she was presented with the award in her own backyard.