



MHIB Addresses Horse Park Selection Process



Maryland Horse Industry Board • 410-841-5861 • www.marylandhorseindustry.org

You may or may not know that the Maryland Horse Industry Board (MHIB) has been extremely busy lately. The following is just a short list of the board's most recent activities:

- The MHIB, the Maryland Stadium Authority and the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development are in the middle of a feasibility study for a Maryland Horse Park.
- The MHIB is planning to redo the Maryland Equine Census in 2006 to measure changes in the industry over the previous four years.
- The MHIB has just awarded 22 new grants for 2005.
- The MHIB is in the middle of developing a media guide for the industry in conjunction with the Office of Tourism Development.
- The MHIB is completing the appointments for a Horse Health Advisory Committee in the Maryland Department of Agriculture.

The activity that has been receiving the most press has obviously been the Maryland Horse Park (MHP). The history behind the Maryland Horse Park goes back to 1998, when the MHIB was reshaped into its current form by the Maryland state legislature. In response to a number of questions, we have decided to explain the project in detail in this month's issue of *The Equiery*.

How did the Maryland Horse Park project come about?

The board publicly expressed its intent to establish the MHP in the late '90s, and has been working towards that goal, among others, ever since. However, it did not want to rubber stamp any single facility, instead wanting to ensure that the best possible site for the Maryland horse industry and for the state was chosen.

History

- In 1999, the MHIB began to discuss how it would go about establishing the MHP, and wrote in its mission statement that the establishment of the MHP was one of its main goals.
- In May 2000, the MHIB toured the Kentucky Horse Park and met with leaders of the Kentucky horse industry – as well as leaders of the state – to evaluate how the establishment of that park was undertaken.
- By 2002, the MHIB had saved enough of its budgeted funds to conduct the first-ever Maryland Equine Census, which would establish the economic status and distribution of Maryland's horses and horse people. Using that data, the MHIB garnered the support necessary to move forward with a number of projects, including the MHP.
- In 2003, at the request of Governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., the MHIB and the Maryland Department of Agriculture began to organize the Maryland Horse Forum, at which the development of the MHP was a central topic.
- In October 2003 and January 2004, groups representing different locations around the state approached the MHIB expressing their interest in establishing a Maryland Horse Park in their areas.
- In June 2004, the board drafted its criteria for the MHP, which included a program vision and features of said facility.
- Also in June 2004, the board determined that the best possible way to guarantee an impartial analysis of all prospective MHP sites was through the selection of an independent agency to head up the feasibility study and eventual selection of a MHP site.
- By the end of 2004, the recommendations from the Maryland Horse Forum were published online at www.mdhorseforum.com, and the board was encouraged by Governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. to move forward with the recommendation to task the Maryland Stadium Authority with a study on the feasibility of a MHP.
- In May 2005, MDA Secretary Lewis R. Riley, on the recommendation

of the MHIB and with the approval of the office of Governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., asked the Maryland Stadium Authority to conduct a feasibility study for the establishment of the MHP.

- In May 2005, the Maryland Stadium Authority, the MHIB and the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development committed a combined \$250,000 to the feasibility study of a Maryland Horse Park. This step was absolutely necessary in order to gain the acceptance of the Maryland state legislature.
- By June 2005, the MSA had organized a selection committee.

Are there equestrian representatives on the MHP Selection Committee?

The selection committee has been outlined in previous reports, but the MHIB would like to let the public get to know the horse industry representatives. Of the seven members of the committee, four have equestrian backgrounds. Moreover, the advisors to the committee are made up of some of the leading horse industry representatives both inside and outside of Maryland.

Voting Members of the MHP Selection Committee with Equestrian Backgrounds

- **James Steele**, *chairman, MHIB*. A Thoroughbred owner and breeder for over 30 years, Jim Steele has managed the multi-breed stallion station Shamrock Farm since 1977. Steele is currently president of the Carroll County Farm Bureau, Vice President of the Maryland Horse Breeders Association, a board member of the Maryland Farm Bureau Political Action Committee and a board member of the Maryland Farm Bureau.
- **Charles C. Fenwick Jr.**, *member, MHIB*. An advocate of land preservation, Fenwick seized the opportunity to help save 300 acres at Shawan Downs from development, while ensuring the land's preservation through a world-class equestrian center and annual steeplechase race, the Legacy Chase. Fenwick is a five-time winner of the Maryland Hunt Cup, a 10-time winner of the Grand National Steeplechase, a three-time winner of the My Lady's Manor Steeplechase, a three-time winner of the Virginia Gold Cup and, in 1980, won the English Grand National. In addition, he is a member of the State of Maryland Athletic Hall of Fame as a steeplechase jockey.
- **Gregory Gingery**, *former chairman, MHIB*. Gingery has served as both vice chairman and president of the Washington International Horse Show, as well as chairman of the MHIB from 1998 through 2003. One of the first supporters of a Maryland Horse Park, he led an MHIB tour of the Kentucky Horse Park in 2000. Gingery is an active, competing member of the United States Equestrian Federation, as well as the United States Dressage Federation and the Potomac Hunt Club. He is also a director of the Marion duPont Scott Equine Center in Leesburg, Virginia.
- **Alison Asti**, *executive director, Maryland Stadium Authority*. Asti owns four horses, rides, and is the mother of an up-and-coming young three-day event rider. She has also escorted her daughter to competitions, including national championships at the Kentucky Horse Park.

Equestrian Consultants to the MHP Selection Committee

- **Todd Gralla**, *special projects director, gh2 Gralla Architects, LLC*. Gralla's firm has planned and designed more than 380 equestrian and livestock facilities across North America, Latin America, Europe, and Southeast Asia for individuals, corporations, universities and governmental organizations. Gh2 Gralla Architects, LLC is considered by many to be the international authority on equestrian and livestock planning and design.

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- **Stanley W. Gralla**, *founder/principal, gh2 Gralla Architects, LLC*. See above.
- **Lachlan Oldaker**, *senior equestrian architect, gh2 Gralla Architects, LLC*. Oldaker has over 20 years of experience as an equestrian facility designer and project manager. Projects of note include The Hippodrome Equestrian Sports Complex, Augusta, South Carolina; Imhoff's Farm Equestrian Olympic Training Facilities, Kometji, South Africa; and the Virginia Tech Equine Science and Reproduction Center, Blacksburg, Virginia.
- **David Distler**, *Olympic equestrian facility specialist, gh2 Gralla Architects, LLC*. With more than 30 years experience as a Federation Equestre Internationale and United States Equestrian Federation-licensed steward, judge, and event manager, Distler's input is invaluable to the project team. He is the most internationally recognized FEI official residing in the United States.
- **Susan Sieger**, *national director, KPMG LLP*. KPMG is an internationally renowned accounting firm that employs over 17,700 people. The firm has had over 100 years of experience analyzing public and private projects such as the Horse Park. Of particular note: its work on the Salt Lake Equestrian Center, the Meadowlands and Monmouth Racetracks, the Mississippi State Fairgrounds, and the 1996 American Horse Council Foundation economic impact study of the United States horse industry, including break-out data for Maryland.
- **Roger Courteney**, *vice president, EDAW Inc.* A landscape architect and designer with over 25 years of experience, he has received numerous national awards for his projects. Courteney is also the father of an up-and-coming young equestrian, and can be seen at numerous competitions around Virginia and Maryland filling in as a groom.

Equestrian Advisors to the MHP Selection Committee

- **Rob Burk**, *executive director, MHIB*. A lifelong horseman with a history of accomplishments in numerous equestrian disciplines and equine-related academic fields.
- **Mike Hopkins**, *executive director, Maryland Racing Commission*. Another lifelong horseman, with a reputation as one of the most knowledgeable members of the industry. Hopkins is a member of one of Maryland's most storied equestrian families, which operates Elberton Hill Farm in Darlington.
- **Steve Hershey**, *assistant secretary, Department of Natural Resources*. A Thoroughbred hot-walker in his younger years, Hershey has a passion for horses. He brings to the table a group of department individuals with expertise in trail specifications for state-run facilities and open space preservation programs.

How is the selection committee going to obtain equestrian community input?

Two months ago, the selection committee began to distribute surveys to Maryland horse industry participants; the survey was also included in the August issue of *The Equiery*. To date, the board has received surveys from individuals and organizations representing thousands of Maryland horsemen and women. Each response is entered and recorded by an independent analysis firm, and all responses will be part of the MHP feasibility study and will be utilized when deciding exactly what to have at the Maryland Horse Park and where it will be located. When the final site is selected, a hearing will be held and all Marylanders will be encouraged to come out and provide input on the Maryland Horse Park project. Moreover, as previously stated, an expert team has been organized to evaluate each potential Horse Park site. The intent of the selection committee is to pick the best possible site that will benefit the Maryland horse industry and the state. Every step the committee takes is done with the oversight of the entire Maryland Horse Industry Board.

Is this a fair and unbiased process?

The members of the MHIB have been adamant that if this project were simply a rubber stamp, then the board would not back the eventual MHP. The MHIB could have taken the easy way out and simply named the first location proposed to the group in the late '90s;

however, it wanted to make sure that this project was the best possible Horse Park that could be designed in Maryland. Because of this point, the board decided that the best way to guarantee a fair process was to go to the Maryland Stadium Authority, an organization known for completing large projects like Camden Yards and Ravens Stadium on time and on budget. Moreover, the MSA was established by the Maryland legislature to be an unbiased third party that would undertake large projects such as this and guarantee that they were located in the best possible place. The MSA established criteria for a Maryland Horse Park before it knew who was applying. Two independent architectural firms, an engineering firm, a landscape architectural firm, and an economic advisory firm were hired out of dozens of possible choices. The hiring of all of these firms took place only after a rigorous review process. Every step of the way, the MSA has conducted this project in a most professional and expedient fashion, earning the awe of the entire selection committee and every agency of the state government assisting with this project – including the office of the governor, the departments of Agriculture, Business and Economic Development, Labor Licensing and Regulation, Natural Resources, and Planning.

So the project sounds great, but will there actually be a Maryland Horse Park, or is this just a pipe dream?

If the feasibility study confirms the MHIB's view that this would be an excellent addition to Maryland's rich equestrian landscape, then the project will move forward for legislative approval in 2006. If the construction of the park is approved, then plans call for the completion of the entire facility by 2009. So far, the legislature as a whole has expressed interest and support for this project. However, that support will only be strengthened by the vocal support of the horse community. If you believe that this is a worthwhile project for Maryland, then only you can make it happen by publicly voicing your support. As this project for the betterment of the Maryland horse industry becomes more and more visible, the dreams of many Maryland horsemen and women are moving closer and closer to reality. ■

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