

Steve Wolf

Horsing around is a way of life for this Delray businessman.

Steve Wolf never planned on owning and operating three world-class horse-training centers west of Delray Beach. In fact, until he purchased the 177-acre Sunshine Meadows training facility as part of a complex real estate deal 15 years ago, Wolf knew very little about what it takes to run equestrian centers.

"I kind of backed into the horse business," says Wolf, 68, who started out in the ski business, running a company called Sportsman's Trading Post in New York before getting into the real estate business on Long Island. He has owned Brookside Realty Corporation, a Boca Raton-based company involved in real estate sales, acquisitions, development, leasing and management for more than 25 years. An antique car collector, Wolf also is the owner of European Autobody Inc., which buys and sells collectible automobiles.

"I had no idea how to run a horse farm," he says. "But you learn quick."

Today, Wolf's stable of horse farms includes Sunshine Meadows Equestrian Village, Palm Beach Downs and the Delray Equestrian Center, all within a short distance of one another. The largest of the properties, Sunshine Meadows, is primarily focused on training harness racing horses, but it is also used for riders and trainers working with hunters, jumpers and dressage show horses.

During South Florida's winter equestrian season, the sprawling property off U.S. Highway 441 may house as many as 400 to 450 harness racing horses in its 18 barns, working out on three tracks of different lengths. There are dormitories on the property for the staff traveling with the horses as well as buildings that house veterinarians, farriers and those providing tack. For show horses, Sunshine Meadows offers eight training rings and also hosts summer camps and other programs for young riders.

The farm is also home to Sunshine Meadows Organic Compost, a four-year-old company that creates a compost of processed pine shavings and horse manure available to the public. Wolf's Palm Beach Downs, with two tracks and 192 stables in six barns, covers 85 acres and is the winter training camp for Thoroughbred racehorses; two Kentucky Derby winners have trained at Palm Beach Downs.

"We wouldn't have the best trainers in the world coming here if we didn't have the best facilities," he says.

The final piece of Wolf's horse farm trifecta is the 20-acre Delray Equestrian Center, which offers everything from boarding facilities and lessons to training for show horses and grooming services. While Wellington may be better known as the winter equestrian center, Wolf says his farms have helped Delray become recognized in the horse industry as a top-notch training area.

Wolf's foray into the world of equestrians began when Brookside Realty purchased property on the east side of 441, formerly the Delray Training Center, with the goal of preparing it for development. To increase the property's allowed density and make it more attractive to large developers, Wolf purchased Sunshine Meadows on the west side of 441 and then transferred the development rights to the property across the road. And that was when he got into the horse business.

Back then, the farm had seen far better days. There were 27 individual owners on the property, and each of the buildings was different. Roofs leaked, paint was peeling and the stables looked just short of ramshackle. Wolf decided to revamp the farm, and \$3 million later Sunshine Meadows was transformed.

"It's a beautiful place now," Wolf says. "I really enjoy coming here every day."

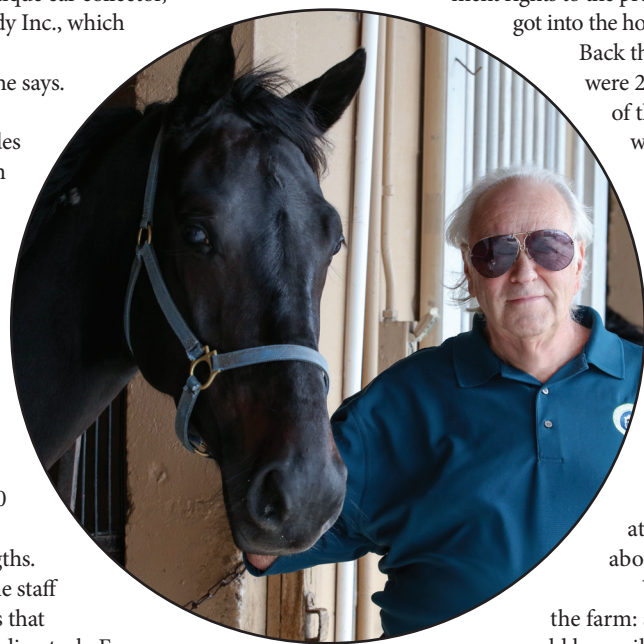
While horses are the center of attention at Sunshine Meadows, they're not the only animals on the farm. Wolf has transformed a portion of the farm into a sanctuary for feral cats that had lived on the undeveloped land. He estimates that there are about 150 cats making their home at Sunshine Meadows; feeding them costs about \$18,000 a year.

Wolf is hoping to add yet another facet to the farm: a veterinary hospital for small animals that would be available to those who can't afford therapeutic care for their pets. He is quick to point out that his focus at Sunshine Meadows is on creating a welcoming environment with top-of-the-line facilities.

"I don't run this place to make the last nickel," he says. "This is probably my favorite business of all the businesses I own. It's as close to country as you're going to get in South Florida."

Wolf says he tries to get to the farm every day.

"It's a happy place; nothing here is a necessity," he says. "I work very hard and very diligently at a hectic pace. This is a place to catch my breath. I have no desire to ever sell my farms. This is a passion." ☀



"This is a place to catch my breath. I have no desire to ever sell my farm. This is a passion."

Harness racing training and other horsing around at Sunshine Meadows
Inset left: Steve Wolf



AARON BRISTOL