



HORSE HEAVEN

Almost 300 Acres of Equestrian Training and Boarding Facilities Cater to Thoroughbreds and Beginners Alike

BY LYNN PEITHMAN STOCK

Last year's Florida Derby produced four thoroughbreds that went on to race in the Kentucky Derby. This year's Florida Derby is set for March 30 at Gulfstream Park in Hallandale Beach, but area horse lovers do not have to wait that long to see thoroughbreds trained in South Florida.

Nestled within a five-mile radius of each other, just west of U.S. 441 in Delray Beach, sit three extensive horse farms that cater to hunters, jumpers, racehorses and all of their accompanying support personnel. From horseshoes to practice tracks, the three farms — Sunshine Meadows Equestrian Village, Palm Beach Downs and Delray Equestrian Center — cater to everything horses.

The horse farms also are open to the public who would like to watch thoroughbreds train for this season's upcoming horse races, the Florida Derby on March 30, and then the granddaddy race of them all, the Kentucky Derby May 4 in Louisville. Sunshine Meadows offers viewing stands along a racetrack and it has a full service restaurant that is open to the public.

World famous and major event winning horses come to train at the facilities. "Horses with all of the major races have trained with us," said Steven Wolf said, who owns Sunshine Meadows Equestrian Village and Palm Beach Downs, and is a partner with Richard Bowman and Skip Olmstead at Delray Equestrian. In particular, Kentucky Derby winners Fusaichi Pegasus and Monarchos have trained at Palm Beach Downs.

The farms are within an hour of Gulfstream Park and Calder Casino and Race Course. Palm Beach Downs is about three hours from Ocala's horse country. With three training centers, horses and their trainers come from the colder northern environs in the winter to train, Wolf said. "We have very professional training facilities." The farms offer lessons, boarding, training, grooming ... one even sells its composted mulch and potting soil for gardens, putting the farm's output to good use.

More than a dozen years ago, Wolf bought the farms for their development rights and spent \$3 million in renovations. Sunshine Meadows Equestrian Village is the largest facility of the three, with 177 acres in west Delray Beach. It specializes in harness racing and hunters and jumpers. Palm Beach Downs caters to thoroughbreds and boasts 98 acres of gated boarding and private training, and Delray Equestrian Center, a concierge farm, has 24 acres with full boarding, training, lessons and grooming services. Both Sunshine Meadows and Palm Beach Downs offer hurricane proof housing for horses, Wolf said.

Special services for horses include a treadmill at Delray and a lake for horses to swim in at Palm Beach Downs, Wolf said. Several charity groups use the farms free of charge, such as a group for handicapped children that uses horses as therapy.

While Wolf does not ride himself, he enjoys being around the horses. "I like the animals. We have several charities on the farm and I like that."

LOCATIONS



SUNSHINE MEADOWS

16668 Winners Circle Drive, Delray Beach, 561.495.1455; sunshinemeadows2@bellsouth.net; sunshinemeadows441.com.

Located on 177 acres in west Delray Beach, the expansive property caters to harness racing training conditions with attention on day-to-day needs for horses and trainers. This facility offers on-site veterinary services, farriers (horsehoers) and a charity foundation.

Sunshine Meadows offers annual boarding, lessons and trail rides. For harness racing, Sunshine Meadows offers training conditions with attention on day-to-day needs for horses and trainers.

Highlights include three tracks: one mile, 5/8th mile and Euro track; auxiliary buildings on site for veterinarians, tack and farriers; 678 stalls; staff dormitories; and restaurant/social hall on premises.

For hunters and jumpers, Sunshine Meadows' show grounds have been built to accommodate hunters, jumpers, grand prix, dressage and western horses and riders. It offers summer camps, a pony ring and other amenities for young riders who are getting started.

PALM BEACH DOWNS

10317 West Atlantic Ave., Delray Beach, 561.496.0044; palmbeachdowns.com.

Palm Beach Downs Training Center is an 85-acre, gated, boarding and private training facility that is open year-round. Its facilities are ideal for all phases of training: two-year olds, rehabs, older horses, horses with nervous behavior, and horses that need special attention.

For thoroughbred training, highlights include one 1/8-mile dirt track, 65 feet wide; four-stall electric starting gate; 192 stalls in six barns, office or living quarters; and elevated viewing area above restaurant.

DELRAY EQUESTRIAN CENTER

14830 Smith Sundry Road, Delray Beach, 561.495.4701; delrayequestriancenter.com.

Located on 24 acres, Delray Equestrian Center is a full-service concierge farm offering full board, training, lessons and grooming services. With a full-time staff living on premise, Delray Equestrian Center caters to all levels of training, from beginners to Olympians. Preparing horses/riders for competition is its specialty.

For hunters and jumpers, highlights include two hunter/jumper rings; FEI regulation dressage ring; air-conditioned tack rooms; and trail rides. ■