

Taking Small Footsteps

New owner uses Facebook to get into racing

Matthew Sicinski, a 2010 graduate of the USTA Driving School, shares his story on how he became involved in harness racing, and how horsemen can help others do the same.

Let me start off by saying that last November's issue of *Hoof Beats* has been one of my favorites. I am writing in response to the article called "Face Lift."

I am a 27-year-old accountant from Philadelphia and have been a harness racing fan since a young age, but never had the opportunity to become actively involved. Why, you ask? My family was involved with only the gambling aspect of the sport. My parents and grandparents would take me to Garden State Park at a very young age to watch the races while they placed wagers.

Secondly, when you live in the city, farms and horses are rare. There are racetracks, but the only way you can get access is if you know someone. Until about a year ago, my involvement in the sport was no more than traveling to such tracks as the Meadowlands, Harrah's Chester and Ocean Downs.

One morning I decided that I wanted to take my interest in racing to a new level. I wanted to own racehorses and sought ways to make that happen. I asked myself, how can I become actively involved in the sport that I spent plenty of my younger years sit-



HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE:
The author participated in the 2010 USTA Driving School, which he said was "a great place to learn about the sport and network."

ting on the rail at Garden State Park asking drivers for whips and goggles?

Well, my option was Facebook. I started looking around for people to contact and stumbled upon a trainer from Monticello named Dustin Miller. I sent a message to Dustin on Facebook seeking advice. After talking with him,



he suggested that going to the USTA driving school would be a good start.

I did not even know that the school existed, and if I had known that it did I would have gone a long time ago. I signed up, but the school was not until May and this dream of mine could not wait.

I decided to message Dustin again and discussed helping him at the barn and jogging horses on the weekend. He was very open to letting me come up and help him in the barn and I started driving 2½ hours on the weekends to New York. The drive was long, but I knew it was my only option at the moment to get involved.

One year has passed and I have

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attended the USTA school in Ohio (a great trip to learn about the sport and network), jogged more than 100 miles on horses, trained a couple times and now own two horses of my own. My next goal is to obtain a Q/F license so that I can participate in some fairs

cious enough to spend some time on the phone with me talking about the sport, his stable, and my ventures over the past few months. It was great to talk to a fellow CPA who was in the same situation that I was in before getting involved.

I also recently attended the Harris-

this difficult to become involved in the sport of harness racing. I read articles about how the USTA needs to do a better job of promoting the sport. Is it really their job? Or is it the job of owners, trainers and drivers to put the effort into getting people like myself involved?

Facebook is a very strong social media network and needs to be utilized by the USTA, trainers, drivers, etc., to promote the sport, but if Facebook is filled with owners and trainers who are not willing to get others involved outside the sport, then is it beneficial?

Granted, if it were not for Facebook, I would probably not be involved in racing today, but it took a trainer to allow a complete stranger to get behind his horses and let him take the lines. Are there other trainers who are willing to do this? Or is everyone in the sport in a comfort zone?

There needs to be more people like Dustin and Ed that are willing to spend

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and amateur driving events. Though it would help to know more than one trainer, I am trying my hardest and I am getting closer to that license.

I also used Facebook to network with Ed O'Connor, the managing member of VIP Internet Stables. Ed was gra-

burg mixed sale with Ed and his team. The Harrisburg sale was my first sale and it was a great experience. I hope to one day have my own stable like VIP.

The reason I decided to reply to the two articles aforementioned was because I believe that it should not be



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**If more than 11 enter, race will be contested in divisions*

time trying to get the younger generation involved in the sport. In all reality, should it take a 27-year-old who loves the sport, who is willing to clean stalls and jog horses for free, to drive two hours to make this happen?

I post pictures of my horses on Facebook and get questions from friends and family who seem interested. They want to know how my horses are, how much they cost, where they are staying, etc., and some of these people have never been to a racetrack before in their life. There are definitely people interested, but we need to make an effort to reach out to these individuals.

In the end, it is going to come down to the racetracks, owners, trainers and drivers of the sport to promote racing and get the younger generation involved. Every day I try to figure out new ways to get family, friends and co-workers involved and interested in the sport. I send sales catalogs to co-work-

ers, suggest trips to Chester to watch the races, and force them to go to the OTB to watch my horses race. I am also in the process of getting investors together and starting an LLC.

My story is only one instance where a trainer let an individual, who was not actively involved in the sport, gain hands-on access to the sport. I learned the basics of the sport such as how to obtain a license, harness and jog a horse, and I have been lucky enough to paddock at Vernon Downs and Yonkers Raceway

Now I am trying to get others involved in the sport to keep it alive.

What if there were more positive stories like mine out there? What if other trainers and owners like Dustin and Ed were willing to spend the time and effort? I could only imagine that the popularity of the sport would increase and there would be a future for harness racing. I am only one of many who do

not want to see a great sport die because of lack of interest.

Multinational corporations don't move away from hiring the younger generation because they are unfamiliar with the business. What do they do? They train people and get them involved so that there is someone there to carry out the continuance of the business.

I have had so many good experiences in the past year and I would only hope that others will have the same opportunities. I really hope that harness racing is here to stay and that anyone with a dream of becoming involved gets a chance like I did.

Editor's Note: *The views contained in this column are that of the author alone, and do not necessarily represent the opinions or views of the United States Trotting Association. To comment on this article, e-mail us at readerforum@ustrotting.com.*

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