

# TDN *Q&A*

Yesterday, ballots were mailed to the approximately 5,500 members of the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association for the election of NYTHA President. The TDN emailed the following questions to incumbent president Rick Violette Jr. and challenger Terry Finley to hear their positions on a variety of topics. Their answers--and the bios they submitted--appear below.

## **RICK VIOLETTE:**

*Rick Violette Jr., a successful Thoroughbred trainer and president of the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association and the national Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, got his start in the equine industry showing*

*hunters and jumpers on the East Coast circuit. He also galloped racehorses part time before opting to make a career at the racetrack.*

*A graduate of Lowell University in his native Massachusetts, Violette began working on the backstretch at Suffolk Downs. He was assistant trainer to Emile Allain at Woodbine for two years, then went to New York*



*to take the job as assistant to David Whiteley. He started his own public stable in 1983. Top horses developed by Violette include graded-stakes winners Citadeed, Dream Rush, Free of Love, Gitchee Goomie, High Finance, Man from Wicklow, March Magic, Nijinsky's Gold, One and Twenty, Outperformance, Read the Footnotes, Samraat, Savedbythelight, Spurious Precision, Summer Doldrums, Upon My Soul and Worstcasescenario, as well as current Breeders' Cup Juvenile hopeful Upstart.*

*In addition to serving as president of the NYTHA and the THA, Violette is a member of the NYRA Board of Directors and chairman of the New York Jockey Injury Compensation Fund. He also sits on the Board of the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance, and is president of the TAKE2 Second Career Thoroughbred Program.*

**TDN: Let's start with the most basic and important question--why do you feel you will do the best job representing New York horsemen?**

**RV:** Experienced leadership will be particularly important after the upcoming election. Several incumbents opted not to run for reelection this year, which means that at least five of the 10 Board members will be serving for the first time. They will bring valuable new viewpoints and new ideas, but they may not have the benefit of first-hand knowledge of all of the many issues that currently face New York horsemen. One such issue is workers' compensation insurance. Going back to square one, redoing the research that has already been done, learning why the program in California won't work in New York, would stall the progress that has been made. We are close to starting the RFP process for an insurance plan that will save trainers 30-40% on their premiums. We can't afford to take steps backward.

In order to represent the horsemen effectively, I also believe you have to be on the front lines--at the racetrack, in the board rooms, year-round. It is a 24-7-365 position. We don't do this because it pays well. There is no salary, nor should there be. We do this because we are committed to New York's Thoroughbred racing and breeding industries, we're passionate about the business and the people and the horses. That dedication and passion is a true representation of NYTHA's membership.

I remember the last scene from the Robert Redford movie, "The Candidate." After some slick campaigning, Redford is elected, but the first thing he says after winning is, "Now what do we do?" I don't think New York's horsemen want to find themselves in that position.

**TDN: What are some of the accomplishments of which you are most proud?**

**RV:** First and foremost, the good work done by NYTHA is thanks to the collective effort of the smart and dedicated owners and trainers who make up the Board. You can't get anything done without the spirit of cooperation that the current Board exemplifies. Together, we have been able to accomplish so much, but the biggest achievements in the last decade have been:

- Bringing NYTHA from insolvency to a stable financial position
- Helping to return the Backstretch Employee Service Team to solvency and financial responsibility, and co-funding BEST's improvement and expansion of their services and the backstretch health clinics at Belmont and Saratoga
- Successfully protecting \$25 million in purses during NYRA's bankruptcy
- Negotiating an additional 2% of the VLT revenue, from 5.5% to 7.5%, for our purse account. The added revenue translates to an extra \$16 million in purses at NYRA tracks every year
- Facilitating the ban on steroids, and financing the equipment necessary to test for them

- Joining with the New York Thoroughbred Breeders, as well as the Standardbred owners and breeders and the New York Farm Bureau, to fund the New York State Equine Industry Economic Impact Study, which demonstrates the importance of the equine industry to the state of New York

- Spearheading the national Uniform Medication Program and the Multiple Medication Violation Penalty System

- Creating the TAKE THE LEAD Thoroughbred Retirement Program and, in partnership with the New York Thoroughbred Breeders, the TAKE2 Second Career Thoroughbred Program. More than 100 horses have been retired through TAKE THE LEAD in the last couple of years, and more than 500 Thoroughbreds have competed in the TAKE2 classes at horse shows nationwide

- Participating in the creation of the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance, and having an ongoing presence on their Board

- Doubling the funding for the NYTHA Scholarship Program, which now grants \$200,000 in scholarships to more than 40 students--backstretch workers and their children--each year

**TDN: From the outside, it seems as if the major issue in this election is the use of race-day medication, and Lasix in particular. First, is that a misconception? And second, what is your stand? How would you like to see New York racing deal with the race-day medication issue?**

**RV:** There is only one race-day medication permitted in New York, and that is Lasix. Is Lasix the only issue facing New York horsemen? Far from it. However, it is a significant issue, and the position of New York's horsemen has not wavered. The science says horses bleed, and that Lasix is the most effective treatment we have for exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage. Even those who oppose Lasix state that its use is in the best interest of the horse, but that it should be banned for political or PR reasons. We take the position that any decision on Lasix should be based solely on what is best for the horse. Absent a reasoned and researched alternative, we staunchly oppose a ban on raceday Lasix.

**TDN: If re-elected, you will represent the horsemen of New York, and their opinions obviously matter. Do you feel that the consensus opinion among horsemen is in line with your views on medication?**

**RV:** The NYTHA position on Lasix was not crafted in a vacuum. The research was done, the studies examined, the summits attended. There were meetings with the RCI, RMTC and the AAEP, as well as meetings and conferences with state regulators, regulatory chemists, researchers and scientists. We talked to owners and trainers, with large and small stables, face-to-face, by webcast and on phone conferences. The vast majority of horsemen, without hesitation, supported Lasix, absent an equally effective replacement therapy.

NYTHA submitted an 800-page white paper to the then-New York State Racing and Wagering Board supporting the continued use of race-day Lasix. We also distributed a booklet titled, "The Lasix Question" supporting the current policy. None of this was accomplished without considered and extensive contributions by countless people.

**TDN: What are the other major issues facing New York horsemen that you think have to be dealt with in the NYTHA head's next term?**

**RV:** We've discussed workers' comp insurance, and that is a big one. New York is sometimes a prohibitively expensive place to do business, and the cost of workers' comp has skyrocketed. That needs to be addressed.

A year-round racing circuit is also vital to our industry. Any substantive disruption to the circuit would have a severely negative impact on owners and trainers, it would hamstring the breeding industry, and would lead to jobs and revenue leaving the state. The protection of winter racing is a must.

Aftercare for our horses is a responsibility we all take very seriously. We've made huge progress in the care we take of our retired racehorses, but we will always strive to do better.

We have to forge ahead with the final stages of the Uniform Medication Program and Multiple Medication Violation Program until every state is on board.

We are constantly working to strengthen our position in Albany. We have a solid bond with the Chairmen of the Racing Committees in the Senate, Sen. John Bonacic, and in the Assembly, Asm. Gary Pretlow. We commissioned the economic impact study to underline to Albany the importance of the equine industry to the state of New York. We use connections through our membership to open doors and provide introductions in the State Capitol. We have a respected presence in Albany, and we will expand our efforts, create more allies, and take every opportunity to emphasize that our industry, and the tens of thousands of jobs we represent, merits protection.

**TDN: You are a trainer and your opponent is a owner. Does that matter? Does one job better qualify someone to head NYTHA?**

**RV:** Every individual brings something different to the table. Owners are not all cut from the same cloth, they have vastly different assets and weaknesses. The same goes for trainers. You can't stereotype people based on what license they hold. You have to judge each candidate for their accomplishments and experience.

**TDN: There are so many things that are uncertain about the future of New York racing. What is your position on:**

**-The possible closing of Aqueduct?**

**RV:** Aqueduct should not be closed or sold unless:  
1) The revenue from its sale is transferred to NYRA to finance a state-of-the-art "new Belmont Park" capable of showcasing our sport for decades to come and able to host racing year-round

2) There is an ironclad commitment to the continued investment of VLT revenue for our industry and the thousands of jobs it supports

### **-Expanding the Saratoga meet?**

**RV:** This is a tricky topic and could lead to a very slippery slope. The fate of Saratoga should not be decided solely on a predicted increase in NYRA's bottom line. That might be short-sighted, with very negative long-term results. Expanding to eight weeks, even though it would not increase the number of racing days, will still extend racing's presence, potentially wearing out our welcome. The electricity, the magic that is Saratoga could well become stale.

From a horsemen's point of view, it will only add to the cost of doing business without adding additional opportunity to support those costs. But I am certainly not suggesting we add more racing days. Some have suggested that horsemen will have the chance to run horses three times at the meet. In an era where horses average 6.3 starts a year, that doesn't seem likely.

A bigger factor to consider is that the additional cost and the length of the meeting could significantly discourage new stables in other jurisdictions from bringing a full contingent of horses to Saratoga. One of the most important components of the Saratoga equation is that it draws horses and horsemen from around the country. It is a Mecca, and we are dependent on that. Worse still, those who choose not to stable at Saratoga due to the higher costs could then cherry pick their entries. Because we enter three, four, sometimes five days before a race, horsemen not stabled at Saratoga will be able to enter, handicap, and opt to get on the van only if they look to be 4-1 or less. When horses are not stabled in state, there is not the same commitment or obligation to run at the meet. Neither of those scenarios bodes well for field size and, if field sizes shrink, so does the horseplayer's interest. The projected gain in revenue will disappear. Expanding the Saratoga meet may not be as simple as  $2 + 2 = 4$ .

### **TDN: Is there anything we haven't asked you that you'd like to say?**

**RV:** I tend to wear my heart on my sleeve. I am passionate--passionate about horses and racing, the frontside and the backside. I form opinions slowly, ask lots of questions and get answers from lots of different people. Once they're formed, I'm not afraid to share my opinions. Whether you agree with me or not, you will know it is based on lots of study--and you will know I won't change my opinion to suit whoever might be in the room. I'm hoping that is the kind of transparency the horsemen want.

### **TERRY FINLEY:**

*Terry Finley served eight years as an Airborne Ranger and officer in the US Army after graduating from West Point. He received an MSBA from Boston University and completed a three-year Owner/President Management Program at Harvard Business School in 2014. He has operated West Point Thoroughbreds for 24 years and has spent his adult life promoting horse racing. Under his leadership, West Point has introduced over 2,000 new owners to racing.*

*He has served on the Breeders' Cup Board, the NTRA PAC Board, the NYTHA Board, the TOBA Board, the Jackie Robinson Foundation Board, the Catholic Leadership Institute Board, and the Johnny Mac Soldiers Foundation Board, among others.*

### **TDN: When and why did you decide to run for the NYTHA presidency?**

**TF:** New York racing is prime time. We have world-class horses, jockeys, trainers, and owners. It's time for NYTHA to set the standard in the racing world, and everyone knows it's true. As I learned from my military experience, you either gotta lead, follow, or get out of the way.

This spring I found myself often pondering how I could make a difference in this industry. As the year progressed, I discussed the effectiveness of current NYTHA leadership, staff, and paid consultants with many New York owners and trainers. It became obvious that after more than 20 years under the current leadership, it is time for new energy, ideas, and leaders at NYTHA.

I bring leadership, organizational, communication, and technology skills to the table that NYTHA members desperately need -- and know I can help transform our horsemen's organization from a mediocre one to one that sets the standard worldwide.

I'm excited at the prospect of being part of a new board that can restore integrity, energy and transparency to NYTHA. More collaboration is necessary to develop long-term strategies on how to tackle the economic, health, safety, facility, and integrity issues that will confront the New York racing industry in the coming years.

### **TDN: Why do you feel you will do a better job representing New York horsemen than the incumbent president, Rick Violette, Jr.?**

**TF:** My team and I have built the country's largest public syndicate with more than 500 current clients, and operations in every major jurisdiction in America. I understand the sport and the business side of racing, and I am a realist who grasps the complex political structures that NYTHA must operate in.

My management style and approach to life is collaborative. I learned a long time ago that the best answers come from gaining input from others. You very rarely get everything you want, so the art of negotiating is compromise. Rick has a non-collaborative style which is no longer what the New York horsemen want or need.



**Terry Finley**

Recently, the NYTHA president made a decision that troubled me greatly and only strengthened my resolve to become part of the solution by running for president.

It is the duty of the NYTHA Election Committee to fully supervise the upcoming election. Bypassing more than 5,000 owners and trainers eligible to be named to the Election Committee, Rick appointed three insiders to this important Committee who are not NYTHA members (in clear violation of the Bylaws), nor are they independent.

All three are compensated by NYTHA and serve at the pleasure of Rick Violette. That alone should raise eyebrows, but Rick and these insiders refuse to even acknowledge the undeniable conflict. They have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and New York horsemen deserve better from their leaders.

Also, far too many NYTHA members never have a chance to vote in elections because they don't receive ballots. The organization has a woefully inadequate system of maintaining a member list. So if you don't get a ballot by November 7th, call or email to have one sent--(718) 848-5045 [/Jgallagher@nytha.com](mailto:Jgallagher@nytha.com).

**TDN: There are so many things that are uncertain about the future of New York racing. What are your thoughts on the areas that will have the greatest impact on horsemen in the coming years?**

**TF:** What matters is:

Enhancing our relationship with NYRA and New York State, who will be critical partners in managing the coming franchise restructuring, facilities decisions, racing schedule development, and future of VLT purse contributions.

Controlling the spiraling costs of owning and training--a crisis being led by the crushing costs of workers compensation.

Developing collaborative solutions to issues like race day medication and out of competition testing -- without name-calling or character assassination.

Receiving input on major issues from New York horsemen, and developing and articulating a strategy that produces results.

Expanding the NYTHA PAC Fund. Currently, the PAC raises about \$18,000 a year, which is ridiculously inadequate in today's political climate. NYTHA leadership may declare that New York horsemen have an effective voice in Albany, but is this reality with such meager resources? No, by a wide margin! By the way of comparison, Genting, the Aqueduct VLT operator, spends about \$100,000 a month in Albany. New York horsemen deserve better.

**TDN: The major issue in this election seems to be the use of raceday medication and Lasix in particular. What is your stand? How would you like to see New York racing deal with the raceday medication issue going forward?**

**TF:** Jerry Brown's recent TDN Op-Ed, ([An Immodest Proposal](#), TDN, 10/3/2014) offers up some very interesting concepts. The idea of 2-year-olds running on Lasix while carrying five additional pounds is intriguing -- I've talked to many New York horsemen who agree.

One thing I do know is that there are over 5,000 NYTHA members, and they've never been formally surveyed on their views on raceday medication (or anything else for that matter). If I am elected, that will change.

In the meantime, NYTHA members, send me a note at [terrencefinley86@gmail.com](mailto:terrencefinley86@gmail.com) with ideas on anything and everything that can help our organization. My only request is that if you bring up problems, also include proposed solutions!

I don't have all the answers, but one thing NYTHA members will learn about me is that I listen to all sides.

The current NYTHA leadership has tried to frame this as a single-issue election. I respectfully disagree.

Lasix is an important issue but workers' compensation reform is the major crisis currently faced by almost all horsemen in New York. For eight years, Rick Violette and his team of highly paid consultants have told us progress was being made on this front. Amazingly, one month before the election, NYTHA leadership now says they will issue a Request For Proposal to begin structuring a workers compensation reform plan for New York horsemen. Members see right through this charade. Smart and creative leaders have already implemented reform in California, Louisiana and other states -- why not in New York?

So here's a message for New York horsemen: if you are satisfied with the progress NYTHA leadership has made "addressing" the workers comp crisis in the last eight years, vote for Rick Violette to remain in office.

**TDN: This summer, in a NYTHA statement, Rick Violette said, "A Lasix ban does not benefit the horse, the owner or the horseplayer. Forcing trainers to return to using archaic methods to treat bleeders, whether it is the barbaric practice of taking away water for 24 to 48 hours or trying homeopathic remedies with questionable results, is not progress." Do you agree with that?**

**TF:** Anger is not a strategy. These are not the words of a leader who wants to work together to help move an industry forward and find middle ground. They come off as hostile and partisan. When I first read Rick's response it reminded me a lot of what we see these days in Washington and how dysfunctional partisan fighting can be. Rick has painted himself into a corner on this issue and, as a result, the horsemen suffer.

**TDN: Rick Violette is proud of the fact that he and others have led the fight for national uniform medication programs that would establish the same rules regarding 26 therapeutic medications. Do you agree this is a noteworthy accomplishment or merely addressing the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the drug problems in US racing?**

**TF:** I'll note that there are many "fathers" of the current national uniform medication program, not just Rick, as he would have some believe.

Undeniably, this reform must remain a high priority for all of us. We need to secure more stable funding for racing's drug-testing labs, and dramatically increase out-of-competition testing to create a more level playing field.

We can learn so much from the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) and its CEO Travis Tygart. In Travis, we have access to a world-class leader whose independent organization brought down Lance Armstrong (an athlete who never failed a high-level drug test).

**TDN: You are an owner and your opponent is a trainer. Does that matter? Coming from different areas of the sport, are you equally qualified to lead NYTHA?**

**TF:** The President of NYTHA must represent both owners' and trainers' interests and I'll provide that representation in a fair and equitable manner. More importantly, New York horsemen deserve a president who can get things done, and frankly, it doesn't matter if that leader is an owner or trainer. I'm very confident I possess the skills needed to lead this organization.

**TDN: At one point Rick Violette trained West Point horses. Did your professional relationship end amicably?**

**TF:** It was strictly a business decision on my part, and we remain cordial. Rick Violette is a talented horseman.

**TDN: Is there anything we haven't asked that you would like to address?**

**TF:** I am humbled by the prospect of being elected NYTHA president and having a chance to give back to the industry that has provided me such a fascinating and enjoyable career.

If elected, my immediate goals will be to restore integrity and transparency to NYTHA, and begin the collaboration necessary to develop long-term strategies on the economic, health, safety and integrity issues that will confront the New York racing industry in the coming months and years.

I respectfully ask for your vote in the upcoming NYTHA election.

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