The Fair Hill Bugle

Fair Hill Foundation Newsletter

Summer 2025

Racing is Back!

Tod Marks photo

Amid a backdrop of threatening skies and sweeping views of the lush green turf course and storied Fair Hill landscape, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Secretary Josh Kurtz announced on July 10, "Horse racing is coming back to Fair Hill!"

The event, focused around a podium with the DNR seal in front of enthusiastic onlookers seated in the historic Fair Hill grandstand, began with an exhibition on the course of horses breezing trained by Eclipse Award winner, Keri Brion, Kentucky Derby-winner Graham Motion and others from the Fair Hill Training Center. It concluded with a series of remarks from state and local government leaders.

"Having now been on the Fair Hill turf course working horses for several weeks, I have been super impressed with the condition that it's in and how it has handled the routine workload," Fair Hill Foundation board member Graham Motion said after the event. "We have had several winners come off Fair Hill turf workouts now, including Test Score who most recently won the G1 Belmont Derby at Saratoga," Motion continued. "It is a huge addition to our training program and we are very excited to hear that there will be racing later this year; it's something we have all been striving for."

Heck & Company photo

Fair Hill Foundation Board of Directors on hand for July 10th's announcement were (left to right) Secretary Nancy Simpers, Co-Chair Emeritus Sam Slater, President Charlie Fenwick, Graham Motion and Vice President and Treasurer Tim Gardner.

Charlie Fenwick, President of the Fair Hill Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting equine activities at Fair Hill, said afterward, "The Fair Hill Foundation enthusiastically supports the return of racing to this historic racecourse. First and foremost, the Foundation wants to thank those who have given generously to this project over the past six years. Their patience has been extraordinary and is very much appreciated. We also wish to thank the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, owners of the property, and the Sport and Entertainment Corporation of Maryland, who will manage The Races at Fair Hill going forward, and wish all of those involved as both participants and operators the very best."

Governor Wes Moore, in a press release provided following the event said, "The historic investments we're making to ensure the future of horse racing in Maryland are also promoting work, wages, and wealth in communities across the state. At Fair Hill, we've completed track and venue upgrades to usher in a new era of turf track horse racing in Cecil County. Our multifaceted approach will support Maryland's tourism and agricultural economies, promoting prosperity for years to come."

"The reopening of the turf track is just one part of DNR's goal to promote Maryland's equine heritage and support rural economies," Kurtz added. "It will be great for the community and it will help bring more world-class events to Fair Hill."

Racing at Fair Hill was last held in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic led to a pause for public events at the space, followed by construction and time to allow the new turf to mature, the release states. The sand-based turf track is planted with Kentucky bluegrass, a dense grass with horizontal rhizomes that provides support for racing horses while also recovering quickly after track use. The track is engineered with modern drainage and rootzone systems to support consistency and durability during high-performance use, it continues.

Heck & Company photo

Designed to enable a wide range of equine disciplines to train and compete at Fair Hill, the one-mile course will accommodate flat racing, steeplechasing, and eventing, the release notes.

The "Races at Fair Hill" event, scheduled for Saturday, August 30, will be hosted by the Sport and Entertainment Corporation of Maryland in partnership with the Cecil County Breeders Fair, the organization that managed the Races for 85 years starting in 1934 (visit its new website at www.racesatfairhill.com.) The Races will be sanctioned by the National Steeplechase Association and the Maryland Racing Commission.

Heck & Company photo

Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary Josh Kurtz announces the return of horse racing to Fair Hill Special Event Zone.

The horse industry is culturally and economically important in Maryland, supporting 22,000 direct jobs and driving $713 million in added value to the economy, the DNR release asserts.

Leading turf specialists and contractors – Ruppert Landscaping, Hummer Turfgrass Systems, and Boekholder & Associates – have collaborated with the DNR to ensure optimal track preparation through a customized maintenance program offering a consistent turf surface. Testing the track involved phased reintroduction of horses with strict evaluation periods for galloping, breezing, and eventual racing. Focused on quality and caution, this process was guided by turf response, weather conditions, and input from riders and trainers, according to the release.

"The collaboration between all the significant stakeholders to bring racing back to Fair Hill is a defining moment of our intentions from the onset of pursuing a bid and helping to redefine and reimagine a track and infield for the future of equestrian event competitions," stated Terry Hasseltine, President and Chairman of Sport and Entertainment Corporation of Maryland. "We are thrilled to be the operator of The Races at Fair Hill."

"We're excited to be part of bringing racing back to Cecil County," said Jeff Newman, Senior Vice President of Events for the Sport and Entertainment Corporation of Maryland. "The event on Saturday, August 30 will be a free, family-friendly open house, and we encourage everyone to come out and celebrate the return of live racing to Fair Hill over Labor Day weekend. In addition to support of the key stakeholders including Cecil County Government and the State of Maryland, the enthusiasm from the business community has been outstanding with partners to date from Brown Advisory along with W.L. Gore, Cecil Bank, Ruppert Landscape, the Town of Elkton, Taylor Harris Insurance Services (Equine), MRA GTA, Bohemia Manor Farm, and Horizon Farm Credit."

"Cecil County has a long and storied history with racing at Fair Hill, a longtime community event and cherished tradition that we have missed since the last race event in 2019," County Executive Adam Streight said. "We are excited that our partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Sports Commission brings horse racing back home, where it belongs. This is a huge win for Cecil County!"

"Cecil County is deeply appreciative of Secretary Kurtz's efforts to return racing to Fair Hill," said Delegate Kevin Hornberger, representing District 35B in Cecil County. "At 91 years young, the track's best day lies ahead. With fresh leadership and the newfound turf expertise in the DNR Secretary's office, we are bringing racing back to Fair Hill. Better and bolder than ever before."

Graham Motion watching his horses gallop prior to the dedication.

Heck & Company photo

Trish Brown named DNR Manager of the Fair Hill Special Event Zone

Heck & Company photo

Trish Brown

Trish Brown, an experienced horse person with a business background, has joined the Department of Natural Resources as Manager of the Fair Hill Special Event Zone. She began serving in her new post in January 2025. Her position reports to the DNR Office of Outdoor Recreation in Annapolis.

"Fair Hill has always held a special place in the heart of Maryland's horse community," Brown said. "I'm honored to part of DNR's effort to steward this beautiful space for both its rich history and its exciting future."

With a professional background in Thoroughbred racing, event planning, and equine program development, Brown says she brings a deep understanding of Maryland's equine ecosystem to the role. She says her hands-on experience and regional insight will help her shape Fair Hill's future as a premier multi-use equine venue.

A native of Unionville, Pennsylvania, Trish is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University, where she majored in agricultural science with a minor in animal science. During her junior year, she completed an internship at Delaware Park Race Track – an experience that confirmed Thoroughbred racing would always be a part of her life and career.

"This is a space with enormous potential – from steeplechase to show jumping to trail riding to community gatherings," she added. "I'm excited to be part of a team that makes collaboration and possibility a priority."

"So far, my focus has been on helping the Maryland 5 Star (www.maryland5star.us) and The Races at Fair Hill (www.racesatfairhill.com)," she said, referring to the two events run by the State of Maryland event management organization, the Sport & Entertainment Corporation of Maryland. "But the future of the Special Event Zone includes so many more possibilities. This facility has almost unlimited potential."

To contact Trish, email her at trish.brown@maryland.gov.

MARYLAND 5 STAR AT FAIR HILL

THE RACES at Fair Hill

Presented by BrownADVISORY

Proud Past • Infinite Future

The Campaign for Fair Hill

High Drama Accompanies First Breeders' Cup Steeplechase at Fair Hill

The little track that pulled off a major International race

by Ross Peddicord

Sam Slater photo

Sam Slater, right, and Damon Sinclair, his business partner in HCP Sports, preparing for the 1986 national television coverage of the Breeders' Cup Steeplechase at Fair Hill.

ELKTON, MD – Fair Hill, Willie du Pont's country racecourse, has seen its share of drama over the years and none more so than the first running of the Breeders' Cup Steeplechase.

The 2-3/8 miles race run over natural hurdles was the world's richest jump race at the time. It was contested nearly 40 years ago on November 1, 1986. Live television coverage was provided by NBC Sports during a breakaway from the actual Breeders' Cup World Championship at Santa Anita Park.

NBC sent Don Criqui, one of its top sportscasters, to cover the race along with BBC's Richard Pitman, a champion English jockey turned TV commentator.

Maryland track owners over the years have lobbied hard for a Breeders' Cup World Championship to be run in the state. But it was Cecil County's "little track," as it was termed, "in the middle of nowhere" that actually pulled it off. Not one, but four Breeders' Cup Steeplechases were run at Fair Hill in the late 1980s and early 90s, all conducted by the mostly volunteer-run Cecil County Breeders' Fair and under the auspices of the National Steeplechase Association.

Douglas Lees photo

Longtime steeplechase supporter/organizer/ official Steve Groat, here with wife Jeanie at Monmouth Park in the late 1970s, received the F. Ambrose Clark Award in 2004 for his tireless service to the sport.

It sounds grand, but at the time, it seemed there were almost insurmountable obstacles for it to be a success.

"It could have been a disaster," recalled Sam Slater, whose Hunt Cup Productions video company, was appointed as the liaison between NBC and the jump racing world.

The late Steve Groat from Aiken S.C. was hired by the Cecil County Breeders' Fair folks to organize and run the event. Later, upon his death, establishment of the first Breeders' Cup Steeplechase was listed as one of his proudest accomplishments.

But first there were the obstacles – and accompanying drama – to be overcome.

It took steeplechase enthusiasts several years of lobbying to convince Breeders' Cup officials to actually card a jump race. The BC organization was founded in 1982. The first race card was run at now defunct Hollywood Park in 1984. Then finally two years later in July 1986, the first Breeders' Cup Steeplechase was announced to be run that fall. A lot was at stake for the steeplechase community. It was a big gamble in the eyes of Breeders' Cup officialdom. The format was unique. The race was to be telecast live by NBC Sports as an actual part of the Breeders' Cup 8-race card at Santa Anita, but switched to the Maryland racetrack halfway through the program.

Questions abound.

Would there be enough horses and international interest to fill a competitive race and provide newsworthy and colorful commentary?

How could this little country venue handle live TV coverage and the major network's technical and equipment demands suitable to stage the equivalent of a Triple Crown race?

Would the media cover it, like they do the Preakness?

The Fair Hill stands would be a backdrop for the TV coverage. Could they be filled to show fan enthusiasm for jump racing before a worldwide audience? It was even suggested by one Breeders' Cup board member that Maryland state employees be required to attend as part of their job and buses sent to Annapolis to ferry them to Fair Hill. The stands HAD to be filled!

The Washington Post reported that the state of Maryland contributed $500,000 to refurbish the stands for an estimated crowd of 20,000. Would the state receive a return on its investment? While the majority of the purse and TV time were purchased by the Breeders' Cup, the host track would pay about $150,000 for television production costs. The state and Cecil County helped defray those costs, but who would pull it together?

That's when Steve Groat stepped in and appointed his team. He had the full backing and support of the NSA so racing-wise the national organization, which would eventually move to Fair Hill in 1989, was his major partner. Charlie Colgan was executive vice president and Bill Gallo its director of racing.

Harry Hughes, an Eastern Shoreman, was Maryland governor at the time and Louis Goldstein, state comptroller. Goldstein had been chiefly responsible for the State of Maryland purchasing Fair Hill in 1975, so the state was fully behind the project. The property, and the racecourse, as it is today, was managed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Douglas Lees photo

Census, jockey Jeff Teter, and owner George Chase.

Bill Gallo recalls that the race was run over Willie du Pont's original course, with its tight turns and lack of irrigation, but was in "wonderful shape."

Groat asked me to be director of media relations and to make sure those stands were filled. I was a racing writer for the *Baltimore Evening Sun* at the time. The paper gave me a month's paid sabbatical to do the job, something very unlikely to happen today. It didn't hurt that at the time the paper was owned by the Black family, avid supporters of steeplechasing. The Sun provided numerous sports stories in both the Morning and Evening editions and a full page of coverage in its Evening Features section the day before the race. Previous to the Sun, I had worked in PR at Laurel and Pimlico, handled press relations for the Washington DC International and Preakness races, so knew the national and even international media well.

First the horses.

When nominations came out in September, 45 horses were nominated including 25 U.S. nominees, among them three time Horse of the Year, Flatterer, trained by eventual Hall of Famer Jonathan Sheppard and Flatterer's hard-knocking talented rival, Census, trained by Janet Elliot; 10 French horses, including Gacko, who had been third in the French Champion Hurdle; 4 from Britain and Ireland, including Insular, the Queen Mother's Imperial Cup winner; and 2 from New Zealand.

So that box was checked.

Eventually a field of 11 went postward, with nine betting interests including three stable couplings (Jonathan Sheppard, Charlie Fenwick, Jr. and Burley Cocks) with six horses from the U.S., 2 from France and one each from England, Ireland and New Zealand.

The horses and their colorful array of owners, trainers and jockeys provided NBC with ample pre-race interview material. Sam Slater recalls taking an NBC crew, comprised of television union workers from New York, to Janet Elliot's farm in Andrews Bridge hunt territory for an insider's look at Census. They were in disbelief with the rural, largely Amish countryside and wanted to know "Where do you go shopping?"

Next huge obstacle – Technical logistics.

So what about those union crews, working with DNR and setting up for live (and local) TV coverage?

"Everything was a negotiation," Sam recalled. "NBC was used to covering big events in huge urban stadiums and major racetracks, and not in a state natural resource management area! Camera placement, scaffolding, running electric cables all of this was new to the DNR park ranger. The technological challenges were enormous. Then I also dealt with International Sound, which provided local Maryland racetrack coverage, including video production, graphics, sound, photo finish and timing systems, all coordinated with the pari-mutuel betting operation. In addition to the Breeders' Cup race, there were four other Fair Hill races that day.

Steve Groat wanted a jumbotron set up in the infield so the crowd could watch the other Breeders' Cup races. At that time there were very few jumbotrons. We had to have one shipped from California."

How did it all come together? Sam recalled: "Everyone stepped up to the plate and pulled together. It was incredible, but at the end, I was exhausted. It was a huge success. Technology has changed a lot and it's easier now. But would I do it again, at my age? NO!"

The Race Itself with a Dick Francis-worthy plot twist.

Drama did not end behind the scenes. Prior to the first race, the Fair Hill crowd gasped.

Track announcer Tony Bentley's resonate voice came over the loudspeaker. The American champion and heavy even-money favorite, Flatterer, was scratched. It was a sudden plot twist straight from a Dick Francis-written mystery. Rumors swirled. The crowd was stunned. Flabbergasted might be a better word.

"I just remember, NBC was really annoyed," Sam said. "They thought there was some sort of conspiracy."

"Not at all," said Graham Motion in his even-tempered tone. Motion, the top Kentucky Derby-winning conditioner was at that time an assistant to trainer Jonathan Sheppard and cared for Flatterer himself.

George Harris, a former Fair Hill Foundation board member, owned Flatterer with the late Bill Pape. "Jonathan gave me a call the night before," George recalled. "I'm sure he did Bill too, and said there might be an issue with Flatterer. Danny Marks (renowned veterinarian from the Delaware Equine Center) was worried about something high up in his back. The next morning it became clear he would not run. We knew when we got to the races he was not shipping over from Ashwell (Stables, Jonathan Sheppard's training center). We had been forewarned. We were there when the public announcement was made and heard the oohs and aahs from the crowd. We were disappointed of course, but had to go with Danny Marks' advice."

Janet Elliott

Douglas Lees photo

"It was a soft tissue injury incurred at some point and came up the morning of the race," Graham said. "We couldn't resolve it. So he had to be scratched."

That left the Sheppard entry with Eremite as its lone runner, and opened the door for Flatterer's chief rival Census to have his day in the sun.

But even then, sent off as the 3-2 favorite, trainer Janet Elliot told a reporter afterwards that she had to cover her eyes at the finish, not quite believing her horse had won.

The problem? "Census when he gets to the front too early can get rankled and lose interest," said jockey Jeff Teter. "But that day Janet had him tuned to perfection. He was extremely competitive and strong . He jumped the best he had ever jumped in his career."

He dragged Teter to the lead midway through the race. Was it too soon and would he fold at the end? "He was so keen and sharp. There was no sense in fighting him," Teter recalled. "So we got the lead and just kept going."

The pair set a course record of 4 minutes 27 3/5 seconds. It was a moment for Census's connections to take center stage. After Census sat out the 1985 season with a bowed tendon,

his comeback a year later was nothing short of miraculous. Teter recalled the Flatterer-Census rivalry "was a bit like Affirmed and Alydar – and we were Alydar (generally second best)."

The Charlie Fenwick duo of Kesslin and Pont du Loup finished second and third, respectively. The Breeders' Cup race had opened the door for a major flat racing owner, Cot Campbell's Dogwood Stable, to enter steeplechase racing and chose Fenwick as its trainer. "I remember standing under the locust trees near the scales in the paddock when it was announced Flatterer was scratched," Charlie recalled. "I was in disbelief."

Dogwood had specifically bought Kesslin for $150,000 to run in the Breeders' Cup Steeplechase and had also won with the horse at the Iroquois races in Kentucky. He made a huge run at the end, but couldn't catch Census. Pont du Loup was an Argentine import "and perhaps one of the finest horses I ever trained," Charlie said. He encountered some hard luck during the race, but finished gamely.

Gacko, the French hurdler went off as third choice, vied for the lead, but tired.

Gregg Morris, who later became Fair Hill's director of racing, rode Pont du Loup and followed that up with a second on Dogwood-owned, Fenwick-trained Inlander in 1987. Inlander went on to become Steeplechase Horse of the Year.

So, were the stands filled?

According to the NSA yearbook, Fair Hill established meet records for attendance and handle, which still stand today. A total of 19,185 spectators bet $310,030 on the five live races and the Breeders' Cup simulcasts. No state employees were required to attend!

The crowd stayed to the end. "I was gathering up equipment and the crowd was still there watching the Breeders' Cup Classic in the dark," Sam recalled.

Every large U.S. newspaper from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times* as well as *The* (Baltimore) *Sun*, *Wilmington News Journal* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* carried pre and race day stories. *Sports Illustrated*, then the holy of holies among U.S. sports publications, sent a writer. I made sure he had access to everyone and everywhere he needed to go and was later called to fact check the story. That was before social media and when newspapers/print publications still covered horseracing.

A marketing company in nearby Newark, DE was hired to produce artwork and helped promote the race. The director went on the radio and said celebrities like Tom Cruise would be attending. Folks actually showed up on race day thinking they would see Tom Cruise.

The vibe around the race had been exhilarating. We treated the race like the Preakness. Kathleen Crompton formed a committee and held an elegant party for the owners, trainers and other dignitaries at Longwood Gardens. Jean Goldsmith, the wife of major Maryland Thoroughbred owner, Oliver Goldsmith, used to paint the colors of the Preakness owners on jockey statuettes and hand them out at Pimlico's Alibi Breakfast.

196 FIFTH RACE Fair Hill NOVEMBER 1, 1986

ABOUT 2 ½ MILES. (Hunt, Steeplechase). 1st Running THE BREEDERS' CUP STEEPLECHASE. Purse $250,000. 3-year-olds and upward. Weight, 3-year-olds, 135 lbs. 4-year-olds, 150 lbs. Older, 156 lbs. Winners only. Fillies and mares, allowed 3 lbs. No rider allowances. Purse Distribution: 50% to first; 25% to second; 12% to third; 7% to fourth; 5% to fifth; and 1% to sixth. Nomination and entry fee schedule: Nominations close September 15, 1986. Sire eligible $500; Sire not eligible $2,000; Pre entry on October 20 $2,500; Entry on October 29, $2,500. For the Breeders' Cup Steeplechase a sire is considered eligible if he appears on the official list of Breeders' Cup nominated stallions for the 1983 breeding season, or the list of stallions eligible to the European Breeders' Fund for the 1983 breeding season.
Value of race $250,000; value to winner $125,000; second $62,500; third $30,000; fourth $17,500; fifth $12,500; sixth $2,500.
Mutuel pool $45,644. Exacta Pool $16,074.

Last Raced	Horse	Eqt.	A	Wt	PP	3	6	10	14	16	Fin	Jockey	Odds $1
18Oct86 4Bel1	Census	B	6	156	6	2½	3½	1d	1½	1½	1½	Teter J	1.70
18Oct86 3Gr M1	Kesslin	B	6	156	2	4hd	4hd	4½	3½	2½	2½	White J	b-3.00
11Oct86 5Mor1	Pont du Loup	B	6	156	7	5½	10	6½	6d	3½	3½	Morris G L	b-3.00
18Oct86 4Rd3	Kalankoe	B	5	153	9	10d½	7½	9hd	5½	4½	4d	Day J	c-3.00
18Oct86 3Gr M2	Eremite	B	6	156	4	5½	6½	8½	6½	5½	5d	Guesford B	21.00
80ct86 7Fra1	Gacko	B	5	156	1	1hd	2½	3½	4½	7hd	6d	Duchene R	3.00
18Oct86 4Rd1	Turtle Head	B	8	156	3	1hd	1d	2½	2hd	6½	7hd	Hendriks R	c-3.00
18Oct86 4Rd1	Jobroke	B	6	156	10	8d	8½	7½	7d	8½	8hd	Alcock G	50.00
7Oct86 4Lrc2	Winning Nora	B	7	153	5	6½	5½	5½	9d	9½	9½	O'Brien K	10.00
28Sep86 5Lu7	Palais Rose II	B	5	156	8	11	9½	10	10	10	10	Pommier A	23.00
10Sep86 1NZ1	Mr. Asia	B	7	156	11	3d	—	—	—	—	—	Sloan G	30.00

Mr. Asia, Fell.
b-Coupled: Kesslin and Pont du Loup; c-Kalankoe and Turtle Head.
OFF AT 3:03 Start good from the tape, Won driving. Time, 4:27⅘ Course firm.

$2 Mutuel Prices:

4-CENSUS	5.40	3.80	3.20
2-KESSLIN (b-entry)		4.20	4.20
2-PONT DU LOUP (b-entry)			4.20

$2 EXACTA 4-2 PAID $24.40.

National Steeplechase Association 1986 Yearbook

Graham Motion leading Flatterer at the 1987 Breeders' Cup Steeplechase at Fair Hill.

Jean did the same thing for the Breeders' Cup race. They were presented at the dinner. Passionate Fair Hill board members like Peter Thompson and Iris Coggins helped Steve Groat plan and orchestrate the festivities.

From my end, I thought all bases were covered until Sam recently reminded me that one of his most vivid recollections was standing with me at the top of the stretch. Gacko was still a factor in the race and I murmured, "Sam, I hope Gacko doesn't win!'

Sam said "Why?"

I replied, "I forgot to hire a French translator for the (post race) interviews."

Aftermath

Flatterer came back that year after what had been a minor, but ill-timed injury, won the Colonial Cup by 17 lengths and was named Horse of the Year for the fourth time.

Janet Elliot became the first woman trainer elected to the Racing Hall of Fame in 2009.

Jeff Teter, a two-time champion NSA jockey, eventually retired and for many years was executive director of the Carolina Cup races.

Steve Groat was awarded the prestigious F. Ambrose Clark Award for his contributions to steeplechasing.

Live coverage of the Breeders' Cup Steeplechase was discontinued after the first running. "It was too hard logistically and too expensive to produce, especially paying union wages to the television crew," Sam said. However, the race continued for the next seven years and was shown by tape delay on or before the Breeders' Cup races. Fair Hill hosted the race again in 1987, 1988 and 1991. It was held at Far Hills, NJ in 1989 and then at Belmont Park in 1990, 1992 and 1993. Gregg Morris made a heroic stab at live coverage of the race at Fair Hill in 1991, but the race was pre-empted by the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court hearings. Instead, a tape was shown at 1 PM the next day on a Sunday afternoon. "Not too many viewers," Morris recalled.

Breeders' Cup discontinued the race in 1994. *The* (Baltimore) *Sun* quoted Jonathan Sheppard saying the decision was " like a slap in the face."

Sam Slater went on to become the first chair of the Fair Hill Foundation and helped set the stage for the current resurgence in the next chapter of Fair Hill's history. Charlie Fenwick, Jr. now owns a string of champion steeplechasers here and abroad with his Bruton Street partners and is current Foundation chair. Graham Motion and Sam Slater serve on the board.

There is certainly precedence for staging international racing at Fair Hill. With a newly re-surfaced, irrigated course, wider turns and dedicated, organizational expertise from the State of Maryland and NSA, elements are in place for a return to Fair Hill's illustrious past.

France's Gacko, by the way, came back to Fair Hill in 1987 in the second running of the Breeders' Cup Steeplechase and cruised to victory. Graham Motion served as French translator.

NOTE: Scan or click these QR codes:

1986 NSA Yearbook story

NBC's telecast on YouTube

From the
Clocker's Stand

by Rick Abbott

Robert with Stanley, his wife Mary's Corgi.

Robert Croteau photo

Robert Croteau
Equipped for Success

Sally Goswell has been a fixture at the Fair Hill Training Center since Doc Fisher opened the doors in 1985. She and her husband Mike trained out of a barn owned by one of their clients; they later bought that barn and continued their training business through center's darkest days of near bankruptcy in 1993. After the "reorganization" the triumvirate of Sally, Joan Wakefield and Dr. Kathy Anderson took the helm and steered FHTC back to solvency and legitimacy in the Thoroughbred industry. With Joan busy promoting the Tapeta racing surface and Kathy occupied with her thriving veterinary practice, Sally became the de facto general manager, a position she held until illness, in 2024, forced her to devote her time and energy to her health.

Sally had grown into her role gradually but with her impending retirement the question to be addressed was what are the talents one would look for in a general manager of a large Thoroughbred training center with 750 stalls, two racetracks, grass gallops, miles of trails and 18 barns owned by at least 20 opinionated and demanding horse trainers or their clients? Not to mention the State of Maryland as a landlord.

FHTC has a unique structure in which a condominium association rents the land from the state; the members own their barns and the improvements therein; members share in the cost of upkeep of the remaining common areas including the racetracks. Obviously, the general manager, hired by the association, would have to be half horse trainer, half farmer, half contractor, half farm equipment mechanic, plumber, electrician, carpenter and 100% diplomat.

Enter FHTC's new General Manager, Robert Croteau. The young looking and vital 70 year old boasts well over half a century working in a variety of roles with horses, related to horses or horse adjacent. Robert begins every morning at 4:00AM by communicating with his race track manager Juan Cordova. Cordova is tasked with maintaining the two training surfaces at Fair Hill and his vast experience with both the dirt and Tapeta materials ensures a safe and consistent footing for the 700 plus Thoroughbreds that train every morning. The safety and wellbeing of the trainees is always Croteau's main concern but the job involves a lot more than track maintenance.

Robert Croteau photo

Robert leading Zipcode, one of his family's homebreds by the ISF stallion "Contango" out of our TB mare "Kiskisa" by "Northern Baby."

Like many fine horsemen, Robert grew up, around the racetracks of New England. His father Don Croteau, a Korean War vet, trained a small string of horses that traveled the circuit that included Suffolk Downs, Rockingham Park, and Green Mountain Racetrack as well as the "fair circuit" of Scarborough, Narragansett Park and Lincoln Downs to name a few. Robert was walking hots and grooming horses for as long as he can remember. His family also ran a boarding stable in Hamilton, MA where they catered to everything from foxhunters to polo ponies.

Robert's next move took him to the Middleburg Training Center and eventually to Southern Pines, NC to work for Mickey Walsh. While in Southern Pines he met Jonathan Sheppard who hired him to run his breeding operation at Buttonwood Farm in Unionville in 1984. While in Unionville he helped to design the training track and barn that Jonathan built at his farm adjacent to Buttonwood. A year with Gene Weymouth was more than enough so in 1992 he was hired to manage the sprawling Iron Spring Farm in Cochranville, PA.

Managing Iron Spring for Mary Alice Malone was a gargantuan undertaking and the perfect training to prepare Robert for the Fair Hill position. Composed of a patchwork of farms that Malone had accumulated over a number of years, the farm raised and trained sport horses for dressage and equine pursuits with many barns and arenas and a large workforce of grooms, riders, gardeners, and farm workers spread out over 1,000 acres and 9 barns. Robert was in charge of everything from mowing the pastures to breeding the mares.

After 15 years at Iron Spring, Croteau felt it was time to move on. During his time with Malone, Robert was introduced to a product and company called Game Ready Equine. The product is an "ice machine" for horses that uses no ice or water to provide compression and cold therapy to horses legs and feet and can be used anywhere; and the rapidly growing company was looking for a field representative who knew horses, had contacts in the industry, and believed in the product. Robert Croteau was their man and in 2007 he became the National and International representative for the Game Ready Equine System.

For almost ten years Robert traveled the globe touting the benefits of dry cold therapy. He even demonstrated the system to the Queen of England who purchased one of the devices and to his former employer who bought three. But in 2016, with his daughter Isabelle now a teenager, traveling the world seemed less important than being at home in Christiana, PA with his family. His wife, Mary, was glad to have him home as her job as a vet tech at Unionville Equine Associates, where she works after a 20 year career as a surgical nurse at New Bolton Center, was demanding of her time as well.

During Robert's 15 years at Iron Spring he had worked closely with Dean Stoltzfus of Stoltzfus Feed and Supply, specifically, to develop a broodmare feed ration that produced healthy and sound foals without the OCD lesions that are common to warmblood foals. Dean introduced Robert to Don Kapper from Buckeye Nutrition to help address the nutritional causes of those lesions. Dean, Robert, and Don became friends and when Croteau was ready to come off the road, Dean offered him a job representing Stoltzfus at various racetracks in the tri-state area. Working mainly at Delaware Park, Parx, Penn National, Monmouth, and, of course, the Fair Hill Training Center, Croteau learned the business from another perspective.

In 2004 Robert's life came full circle when several friends from his days with Jonathan Sheppard suggested he apply for the job to succeed the irreplaceable Sally Goswell. Somewhat to his surprise, Robert was offered the position as General Manager of FHTC and he began the next chapter of his varied career when he took up the position at the beginning of 2025.

Robert's Vision

Robert Croteau, the new General Manager of the Fair Hill Training Center envisions a bright future for Fair Hill in general and the Center specifically.

The replacement, this summer, of the Tapeta training surface is, of course, job one. It is the Tapeta material that sets Fair Hill apart from all of its rivals and its reputation for safety and consistency is unparalleled in the industry. Replacement is a huge job that will keep Robert and his staff of ten occupied for the foreseeable future.

The reopening of the grass course across the road at the Fair Hill Race Course, while outside of Robert's immediate purview, has added to his responsibilities as he schedules and coordinates the Fair Hill horses whose trainers want to use the course for works and breezes. This challenge has been going on since April and he tries to witness all of the works in order to monitor the condition of the course and receive trainer input since he is the link between horsemen and the various groups that groom and maintain the course.

Although the barn owners are responsible for the condition of their barns, Robert and his crew are always available to help with carpentry and plumbing repairs that need urgent attention. Improved response time is always high on the list of future improvements.

Fair Hill Training Center photo

Meet Charlie Mann

Fair Hill's Irreplaceable Jack of All Trades

Charlie Mann photo

by Beth Rasin

Charlie Mann has traveled the world with a camera in hand, capturing images of the highest levels of horse sport, but ask him where he feels most at home, and he answers without hesitation: Fair Hill.

"It's the dream job I didn't know I wanted," Mann says with a laugh.

For the past two years, he's been the quiet force keeping things running behind the scenes at Fair Hill International, which is known for hosting world-class competitions like the Maryland 5 Star.

Officially, Mann, of Rising Sun, Maryland, does "a little bit of everything." On any given day, he might be mowing galloping lanes, fixing jumps, repairing tractors, rewiring equipment, or pumping water out of a flooded water jump. He helps set up for show jumping and dressage and tears it all down again after the event.

"We've got events every three or four weeks from April through September, including driving and endurance events," he says. "It's always changing. That's part of what I love."

He loves seeing the rabbit, deer and foxes, enjoying the peaceful natural environment, and solving any puzzle that's thrown at him.

A Fixer With a Photographer's Eye

Mann started working in a hardware store at 14, and the store's owner encouraged him to learn anything about everything – mechanics, plumbing, woodworking, landscaping. That experience laid the foundation for the kind of fix-it-on-the-fly work he does now at Fair Hill. "I accumulated of a little bit of knowledge of everything and use it for my job, as a landscaper, carpenter, plumber, electrician – all the knowledge I brought to this job, and it's coming around almost 50 years since I started at the hardware store," he said.

Mary Coldren, Business and Competition Director for Fair Hill International, said Mann is an invaluable asset to Fair Hill. "He's made things in the areas that Fair Hill International leases look so much better overall," she says. "He's repaired equipment that had been unusable, fixed jumps, kept the footing in great shape. His commitment to FHI is very evident and so appreciated! He's irreplaceable."

Mann's knack for repairing and maintaining aging equipment has saved the nonprofit significant money. "One of the surprises to me was how talented he is with mechanical things," Coldren adds. "And when I think of how he goes above and beyond, there has been more than one occasion that he has come to work on a 'day off' to water grass seed because he takes such ownership of the work he does."

When he does stop by on a day off, he can often be found with his beloved, rescued 5-year-old Golden Retriever, Gibbs.

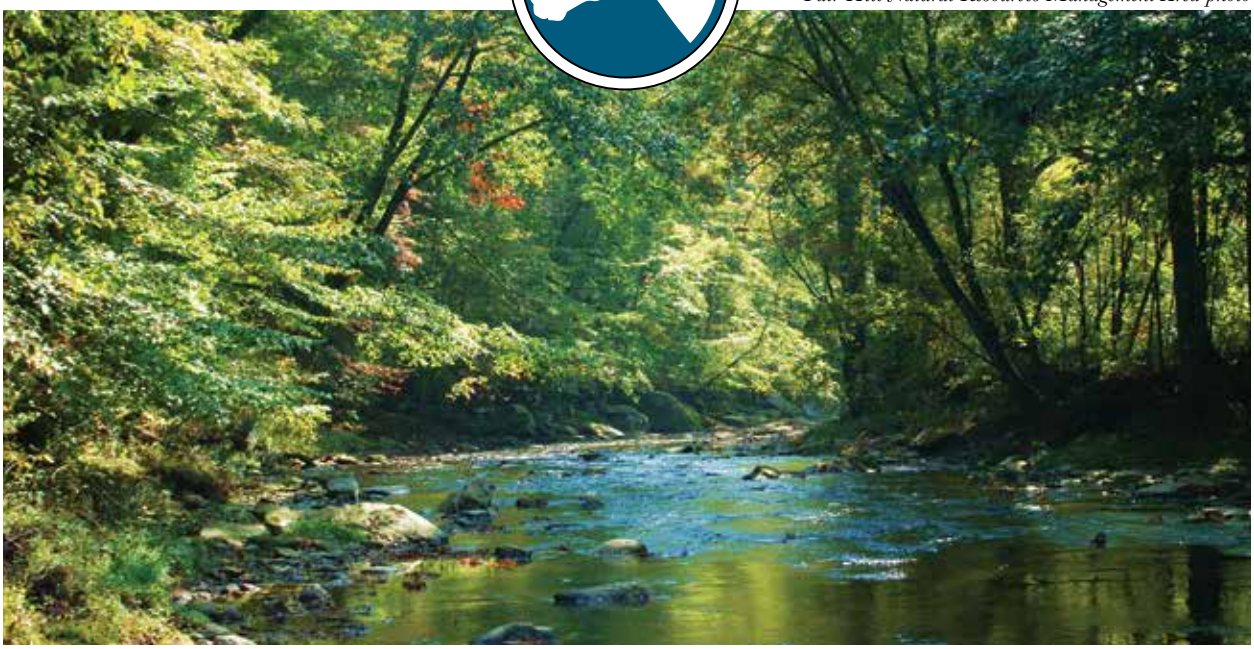
One of Mann's favorite projects has been restoring some donated old log jumps. "It was like Lincoln Logs for adults," he says, laughing.

He's remodeled a few jumps with extra touches, adding shingle-style roofing or reinforcing compromised structures, always with safety and aesthetics in mind. "You find out a lot of jumps were quickly modified before and need a little more structure to be safe," he says.

He credits his attention to course design detail to years spent photographing events. "I started shooting Fair Hill in 1996, and you get to know the grounds and things other people don't know," he says. "Being there all this time, I know how the light goes, and now that I'm photo manager for the five-star, working and seeing courses coming together before anyone else, that's been a real benefit to have all those years of knowledge of the park, and I use that as part of my job as photo manager."

Fellow photographer and friend Amy Dragoo jokes with Mann that when he's dragging an arena or cutting a field he's playing in his own Zen garden.

Amy Dragoo photo



Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area photo

Mann agrees that he does find some Zen in working amidst the beauty of Fair Hill, and he thrives on the job's constant variety. "The flexibility is great. Mary might call me in the middle of something, and I drop what I'm doing to help," he says. "It's the nature of the job. And it keeps me interested because no two days are the same."

Rooted in Pride

Mann's pride in his work shows in everything from perfectly groomed lanes to thoughtfully stored equipment. "He's made our storage areas so organized, which is a huge help for our volunteers," Coldren says. "He makes it easier for everyone to do their jobs."

Charlie Mann

Ultimately, Mann's goal is simple: "I hope the competitors have a good ride, enjoy it and want to come back," he says. "Events like ours are all about the entries, giving them a venue they can compete at, enjoy and not have to worry about footing or jumps breaking. You want them to have a good experience and want to come back and tell friends."

Still, the work isn't always easy. "I'm 63," Mann says, "and some days I just go home, eat, and go straight to bed." But he's not thinking about what's next. "This isn't a steppingstone. If I can keep things running and make Fair Hill look good, I'll be a happy camper."

Mann has a fan club built not just on his skills and dedication but also his easygoing nature and friendliness to everyone. "He is so easy to work with," Coldren says. "Everyone loves Charlie!"

The Fair Hill Foundation wishes to express its appreciation to these visionary philanthropists who have made investments in our exciting public-private partnership with the State of Maryland.

The Foxcatcher Society

The Foxcatcher Society recognizes donors of $250,000 or more to the ***Proud Past*Infinite Future Campaign for Fair Hill***.
The logo draws inspiration from the original Foxcatcher Hounds hunt emblem currently housed among the William du Pont, Jr. papers in the Hagley Museum archives in Wilmington, Delaware.

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Eclipse Sportswire photo

A Message from Charlie Fenwick

Thursday, July 10, 2025 will surely go down as a red-letter day in annals of Fair Hill. That morning, Secretary Josh Kurtz of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, owner of the Fair Hill race course, made history by announcing racing will return to this revitalized venue after a six-year pause. All of us at the Fair Hill Foundation wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to our generous donors as well as the staff of the Department of Natural Resources and the Sport & Entertainment Corporation of Maryland, the Cecil County Breeders Fair, and the many State and local elected officials who have brought us to this moment. By working together, all of us are helping to ensure this storied course, developed by William du Pont, Jr. in the 1930s, takes its rightful place in the global pantheon of equestrian sport.

Ross Peddicord's article tells us it can be done. His account of the 1986 Breeders' Cup race at Fair Hill, broadcast by NBC Sports, on page seven is proof that Fair Hill can compete with the very best, not only in Three-Phase Eventing as the MARS Maryland 5 Star presented by Brown Advisory has proven, but in the steeplechase arena as well. We look forward to working with the National Steeplechase Association and The Races at Fair Hill to do all we can to ensure this new venture is a success.

We are also delighted to welcome Trish Brown as the new Department of Natural Resources manager of the Fair Hill Special Event Zone and we look forward to collaborating with her to do all we can to help fund future improvements to the venue.

And we appreciate Rick Abbott's deep dive into Robert Croteau's work at the Fair Hill Training Center and former *Chronicle of the Horse* Editor Beth Rasin's insight into the dedication and hard work of Charlie Mann, one many of the devoted people who love Fair Hill.

Finally, it gives us great pleasure to thank our generous donors on the previous two pages who helped us write this exciting next chapter in Fair Hill's history. We are immensely grateful.

Charlie Fenwick in the Fair Hill paddock in the 1970s

All the best,

Charles C. Fenwick, Jr.

President, Board of Directors

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