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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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FAIRPLEX TRAINING CENTER GETS ADDITIONAL FUNDS

ALBANY, CA – Fairplex Park will remain open without interruption as a racing and training center at least through October and possibly year-around under a funding agreement announced Thursday at the monthly meeting of the California Horse Racing Board at Golden Gate Fields.

Fairplex attorney Robert Forgnone said the committee that controls the state's stabling and vanning fund has agreed to allocate nearly \$1.9 million to the Pomona facility to cover operations from this April into next year – an increase of \$400,000 from the amount allocated to Fairplex last year for the current 2002-2003 period.

"We're still \$600,000 short of the total amount we require," reported Forgnone, "but we're hopeful that we can be more creative in the job we're doing, possibly spend less, and remain open for the entire year or at least reduce the period that we may need to close."

Fairplex historically has operated as a training center for the 10 months preceding and following its late-summer race meet. However, after the stabling and vanning committee reduced funding to Fairplex last year in order to allocate equal funding to the San Luis Rey Downs Training Center, Fairplex officials said they would be forced to shut down for part of the year. The agreement to restore at least part of the reduced funding means that Fairplex horsemen will continue to train horses for races at the major thoroughbred racetracks without interruption at least through October.

Under strong urging from the CHRB, the parties negotiated an agreement that allocates an additional \$192,000 for the current funding period and \$1.7 million for the upcoming 2003-2004 period. The original figure for 2002-2003 was \$1.5 million.

In a related matter, the Board approved a request by Southern California Off-Track Wagering Inc. to increase the percentage of funds from the takeout for the purpose of stabling and vanning from .94 percent to 1.06 percent. The takeout amount withheld from bettors is unchanged.

In other business, the Board approved a request by Hollywood Park to conduct an experiment during the spring-summer meet wherein horses that are withdrawn from races after the designated scratch deadline will be ineligible to race for a minimum of 10 days unless the State Veterinarian determines that a shorter period is warranted on a case-by-case basis. Currently horses withdrawn from races for medical reasons are placed on the veterinarian's list and cannot be entered back to race for at least five days. The experiment increases the minimum time on the vet's list to 10 days.

Executives from Hollywood Park and other racetracks believe that some trainers cite false medical reasons to scratch horses after the field is set simply because they consider the racing conditions unfavorable to their horses. Track executives feel that extending the period of ineligibility by five additional days might discourage this perceived practice. Six commissioners agreed to the experiment, but Vice Chairman John Harris voted against it, advocating instead that horsemen and tracks work together to find other solutions to the problem.

Medical experts from the University of California at Davis provided an update on the spread of the West Nile Virus and its threat to California. Dr. Ron Jensen, the CHRB equine medical director, said the viral disease is likely to reach here sometime this year, most likely in August or September. The disease, which is sometimes fatal to humans, horses, and other animals, is present in bird populations and transmitted by mosquitoes.

Dr. Gregory Ferraro of the Center for Equine Health at Davis said the principal methods of preventing the spread of the disease are mosquito abatement and vaccination. He advocates vaccinating all horses in California now followed by booster shots later in the year. He said additional information may be obtained from the www.cdfa.ca.gov and www.westnile.ca.gov Websites.

Peter Tunney, representing Magna Entertainment Corp., the owner of Golden Gate Fields, reported that it could be another 90 days before the new equine medical clinic under construction in the stable area will be completed. Several racing commissioners and representatives of the Thoroughbred Owners of California criticized the delay, noting the project has been promised since April of 2000. Commissioner Alan Landsburg cautioned Magna that if substantial progress is not made in the next 30 days, the Board will consider assessing a substantial fine against the company.

Dave Payton, an executive with Autotote, reported there has been little if any progress in the effort to overcome security constraints that prevent tracks from offering bettors the opportunity to designate alternate selections in multiple-race wagers, such as the Pick 6. California was the first state to offer alternate selections in the mid-1990s, but new security software that was introduced last fall to ensure the integrity of the pari-mutuel wagering system forced the elimination of alternate selections. Payton said all of the totalizator companies will be represented at the upcoming annual convention of the Racing Commissioners International, and this subject will be addressed at that gathering. Payton will provide an update to the CHRB after the RCI convention.

The CHRB staff reported that Advance Deposit Wagering handle totaled \$216 million from January 25, 2002, through February 28, 2003, representing 7.8 percent of the \$2.76 billion combined California on-track, off-track, and ADW handle for that same period.

Sherwood Chillingworth, executive vice president of the Oak Tree Racing Association, reported on the success of the Groom Elite program, which had its California introduction at Santa Anita this year. The first group of 50 grooms, hot walkers, and other employees in the California horse-racing industry attended a graduation ceremony Tuesday night at Santa Anita Race Track to receive jackets and certificates after completing four weeks of classes and passing a comprehensive examination.

The Groom Elite program, which began two years ago in Texas and has since expanded into other states, is designed to teach stable area employees horse-handling skills and to insure that they are competent and knowledgeable in equine care. The local program was organized by the California Thoroughbred Trainers and funded in large part by Oak Tree with additional funds provided by the CTT and the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association.

The national program covers such topics as equine anatomy, nutrition, equipment, soundness, and hoof care. The local program included additional information promoting hygiene and cleanliness in the workplace. The Santa Anita classes were conducted on four consecutive Mondays and Tuesdays in the stable area kitchen by Dr. Reid McLellan, a trainer and former professor, with Spanish translation by Deacon Arnaldo Lopez. Angie Carmona administered the classes for the CTT.

A total of 69 workers, mostly grooms and hot walkers, attended the program. Of those, 60 met the minimum requirement of attending 80 percent of the classes, which the employees did on their own time. The 50 employees who passed the final test received certificates of completion along with beige jackets bearing a Groom Elite logo. Ten others received certificates of attendance.

Graduates indicated they participated in the program for self-improvement, including some hot walkers who are seeking promotion and higher pay as grooms.

Other racetracks, including Hollywood Park, have expressed interest in offering the program at their facilities. Chillingworth said Oak Tree is committed to the program and will provide funds for its continuation at other tracks.

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