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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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FAIRS BENEFIT FROM INFUSION OF TALENT

SACRAMENTO, CA – There will be some new faces in the steward stands during the fair season that kicks off Wednesday in Stockton.

Nancy Ury, Paul Nicolo, Violet Smith, and Scott Chaney will team up with longtime stewards Tom Ward, Darrel McHargue, Pam Berg, and Will Meyers, while a fifth veteran, Anne Daftary, will return to the stands after a long absence.

The fairs traditionally provide an opportunity for talented officials – some from other racing jurisdictions, some from other jobs in California racing – to demonstrate their abilities, learn from more established colleagues, and earn long-term assignments at the major racetracks.

Three stewards serve on the panel of stewards at each licensed race meet. Ward, McHargue, Berg, and Meyers will be the presiding stewards at each meet.

Although Ury, Nicolo, Smith, Chaney, and Daftary will be new faces to many fairgoers, they bring with them a variety of experiences and knowledge that should complement the panels on which they will serve.

Ury is first up among the new stewards on the California fair circuit, joining Berg and Meyers for the Stockton meet. Later, she will serve at San Mateo, Pomona, and Fresno.

She comes from a family of jockeys and trainers, but this fourth-generation racetracker opted for the business side of racing when she started out as an entry clerk and placing judge at Birmingham.

Ury logged a lot of road miles in the years that followed as she drove between tracks in Arkansas, Illinois, and California, working as a racing official in various capacities. For the last three years she has been stable superintendent at Hollywood Park, and in her spare time she has worked freelance for TVG as an on-air handicapper and commentator.

“I’m grateful to be getting this opportunity to prove myself,” she said after receiving her first steward assignment.

Daftary is making a comeback of sorts – returning to the steward stands after an 11-year absence. She served as a steward from 1987 to 1994, and at one time or another she worked all of the fairs. Her first new assignment will be the Pleasanton meet beginning June 29. Later, she will be going to Ferndale.

For the last 11 years, Daftary has worked at racetracks in a variety of capacities – as assistant racing secretary, paddock judge, patrol judge, placing judge, and currently clerk of scales at Golden Gate Fields.

“I’m thrilled to be working as a steward again,” said Daftary. “It’s a responsible job, and you’ve got to know what you’re doing. But doing it correctly makes it a rewarding job.”

Chaney was faced with an interesting career choice after he graduated from law school and passed the bar exam. He could either become a lawyer or work with horses. He chose what he considered to be the more interesting profession and went to work as an assistant trainer for Darrell Vienna.

OK...there’s some history behind that decision, dating back to his childhood when his parents owned a few racehorses in Maryland and he took riding lessons. Then when he came west to attend USC, he met someone who knew somebody and, well, he ended up walking hots and grooming horses for Vienna during summer breaks.

“I think my educational background helped me get the job of steward,” said Chaney, whose first assignment will be at Pleasanton, followed by stints at Vallejo and San Mateo. “The job of steward requires more legal expertise today than it did in the past. Even though I never practiced law, I learned things at law school that should help.”

Smith knows her way around the racetrack – literally – because she rode from 1969 to 1988. She guided home about 1,200 winners during those 19 years.

Smith was born to a racing family, and the Seattle native started ponying horses at Longacres at the age of 10, then two years later began galloping horses at Turf Paradise. During her riding career, she competed in Washington, Oregon, Wyoming, New York, Colorado, Arizona, and California.

Smith became a racing official in 1988, initially at the county fairs in Idaho, then Nebraska, and currently in Arizona, where she has served as a steward for 14 years.

“And now, to California...” she said during a telephone conversation between races from the stewards’ stand at Yavapai Downs in Prescott Valley. “I am scheduled to start in Pomona on September 9, then Fresno. We’ll see what California has in store for me after that.”

Nicolo will be filling in a couple of days at Stockton but his first full assignment will be at Santa Rosa beginning July 27, then on to Ferndale. Like Smith, he is a former jockey. He rode for 20 years from 1974 to 1994 until, after winning approximately 1,300 races and suffering through two hip replacements, his knees finally gave out.

Nicolo became a racing official at Golden Gate Fields in 1994, and for the last 11 years has worked the Golden Gate-Bay Meadows circuit as a stewards' aide, entry clerk, patrol judge, film analyst, and for the last nine years, clerk of scales.

"It's been a good career," said Nicolo. "I rode at 52 tracks – just about every track except in the southwest. I rode Special Honor in the 1978 Kentucky Derby. That was the Affirmed-Alydar Derby. I had a good seat to watch the action in front of me.

"It's so different being on the other side of the fence. I've done about everything in racing. I worked for \$100 a month on a farm and I rode in the Derby, and everything in between. Now, as a steward, anybody who comes in front of me, I've walked a mile in their shoes."

Ingrid Fermin, executive director of the California Horse Racing Board, personally interviewed these stewards along with dozens of others who either took the stewards examination this year as new applicants or, like Nicolo, were on the previous list but had never received an assignment.

"Overall, I was very impressed by many of the candidates and encouraged by the fact that so many talent individuals wished to join our team of stewards here in California," said Fermin. "Everyone who has received an assignment has current experience working within the industry, either here in California or elsewhere. They've all been working toward their goal of becoming a steward, and in fact, some of the applicants, such as Violet Smith, already are accomplished stewards in other states.

"The fair season, with the overlapping meets, creates more demand for stewards than at other times of the year, so the fairs provide an opportunity for people to get some days, to get their feet wet, and gain experience in the steward position. And it gives us an opportunity to see them in action. Hopefully, we will be in a position to give other talented people some assignments, so that we can also take a look at them. All of these assignments only go through the end of 2005, then we will evaluate everything and make decisions for 2006."

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