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Palm Beach Post Analyzes Florida Pari-Mutuel Barrel Racing

Pompano Beach, FL (December 22, 2011) – Palm Beach Post writer Dara Kam effectively covered Governor Scott's views on pari-mutuel barrel racing. In addition see the blog link provided below:

Palm Beach Post Delves Into Gretna Pari-Mutuel Barrel Racing Realities; Governor Scott Says Florida Legislature Should Shut Down Unfair Gretna Loophole

Following up on an [interview with Florida Governor Rick Scott yesterday](#), December 21, 2011, in which he stated that Gretna Racing's "Pari-Mutuel Barrel" competitions are "not fair" and should be shut down, the [Palm Beach Post's top political writer, Dara Kam](#), reported more extensively today on the situation. Her [complete article](#) is reprinted below.

Please note that, while Gretna Racing officials describe what would otherwise seem to be a reasonable hire of 170 people at their would-be slot parlor, the grim reality is that the thousands of jobs that normally accompany legitimate racing, and even more in Florida's breeding industry, have been and will be lost because of the "barrel racing" format, which is specifically designed to sharply eliminate the number of competing horses, and thus the jobs that would normally come with lawful Quarter Horse racing. With at least seven (7) full-time jobs generated by each legitimate racehorse, typical full-time employment on a racetrack literally yields thousands (2,000+) of jobs. So why and how is Gretna Racing killing these jobs? Because its entire slate of racing can be accomplished with less than 8 horses a day, many of which race over and over again, versus a normal racing slate of 100 or more horses per day or so that race only once every two weeks at the maximum, the amount of jobs needed to conduct live racing at Gretna's facility is thus sharply--and purposefully--curtailed by design to meet Florida's minimum requirements to hold poker rooms and ultimately secure a license for slot machines.

So while Gretna LLC's "barrel racing" is generating a sea of lost jobs and red ink for Florida with daily handles as low as \$400 and \$500, only 50 in attendance on its opening day and daily average purses of \$172 that do not even adhere to Florida or federal regulation, legitimate Quarter Horse racing at Hialeah Park brought an opening day crowd of 6,000, opening day handle of \$191,000 and overall purse distribution of \$3.8 million for the season. The fact is: [Legitimate horse racing creates jobs.](#)

The members of each faction of Florida's horse industry (Thoroughbred, Quarter Horse and Standardbred) are steadfastly committed to protecting our people and our employment. Allowing regulatory maneuvering through backdoor loopholes like Gretna barrel racing is bad for business, bad for the economy and bad for the 51,700 people employed by Florida horse racing whose livelihoods depend on preserving the integrity of Florida law and proper gambling regulation.

- Click to read Dara Kam's Palm Beach Post Blog: "[Governor Scott says lawmakers need to shut down barrel racing, slots](#)"

[Betting on barrel racing in Panhandle causing rift in Florida Capitol and horse industry](#)

*By Dara Kam, Palm Beach Post Staff Writer
Published Wednesday, Dec. 21, 2011*

The rhinestones sparkled, the belt buckles flashed and the red dirt flew as hundreds of spectators on metal bleachers cheered for the cow girls Saturday as the sun set over a remote race track in this rural community.

It was the grand opening of the Creek Entertainment Casino, and the horsey set, local officials and simply curious were mingling outside, some placing bets and others there just for fun.

But inside, poker players chucking chips were seemingly unaware of the barrel racing that a handful of gambling lawyers and an Indian tribe are doubling down on as an entrée into the lucrative world of slot machines.

The tiny casino, across the street from a field with dried cotton on the vine, is situated less than hour from the state Capitol, where the barrel races have created a furor among lawmakers and spawned an ongoing legal and administrative battle.

Gretna is the only place in the country where gamblers can legally bet on barrel racing, until now a rodeo event typically showcasing young women racing around a cloverleaf obstacle course against the clock.

At Gretna, pairs of women race each other in a series of four elimination races. The winners of each race face off until the eleventh race of the evening when a grand winner

emerges. Bets can be placed on individual races and on various permutations of final winners, but that's not where the big money lies.

The casino operators don't make any bones about it: They're using the barrel races as a venue to run the money-earning poker tables and, they hope, slot machines.

The casino itself was designed for an immediate retrofit with a blow-out wall to accommodate the slot machines, should voters in cash-strapped Gadsden County approve a referendum Jan. 31.

And opening day brought exactly what the casino owners -- the Alabama-based Poarch Band of Creek Indians and gambling lawyers David Romanik and Marc Dunbar -- had gambled on.

"The poker subsidizes the racing. There's no question about that. But this is exactly the model we thought would happen. If you put together the racing that the public wants, the poker players will follow," Dunbar, also a lobbyist for Gulfstream Race Track, said as poker players waited at the bar for a seat at a table to open up. "And that's the Vegas model -- the entertainment drives the gaming activity. Today definitely validates the business model, there's no doubt."

But the races also have led to a turf war within the state's horse industry over what exactly constitutes a bettable horse race under Florida law.

Opponents of the Gretna track say the legislature did not mean to include barrel racing when they passed a law in 2009 expanding pari-mutuel activities to include quarter horse racing. But state regulators, who approved the permit for Gretna, said there is nothing in the law defining what quarter horse races should be.

Gov. Rick Scott said today he doesn't believe lawmakers meant to include barrel racing as a legitimate gambling activity and he wants them to fix the law in January before the Gadsden County vote.

"It doesn't appear to me that it was the intent of the law. They need to clear it up," Scott told The Palm Beach Post this afternoon.

The barrel racing bets have also created a rift in the horse community between those who hope Gretna's barrel racing activities will spread throughout the nation and those who fear it will put a dent in the state's \$5 billion horse breeding and training industry.

"I really think it's a great, great thing to do. There's nothing any different than going to watch horses race on a straight. It's a sport. It's exciting," said Doreen Winterburne, a horse owner from Stuart who is a regional director for the Women's Professional Rodeo Association.

Winterburne, whose horse C Me Frenchie raced in Gretna's grand opening event on Saturday, hopes that betting on barrel racing will boost the sport's popularity and help elevate the riders' fame.

"It's a big, huge, I mean huge thing for the rodeo world," she said.

But others, including barrel racing industry leaders, disagree.

"We're very much against it," said Paul Stanley, Southeast Regional Director of the National Barrel Horse Association.

Linking the rodeo sport with gambling could hurt barrel racing's national reputation as a family-friendly activity where riders from age 4 to age 80 compete for fun.

"We would never, never have a barrel race where there's going to be betting going on," Stanley said.

The Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association and the American Quarter Horse Racing Association are suing the state Department of Business and Professional Regulation, arguing the state did not have the authority to issue the pari-mutuel permit for the Gretna track because barrel racing is not a legally-sanctioned betting sport.

Florida law requires each track to have an agreement with an association representing the horse owners and riders. Dunbar's group created an association, headed by one of the track owners, to represent the barrel riders -- the only association in the state directly linked to the facility's owners. The law also requires that every pari-mutuel permit holder pay a percentage of their revenue to the FQHRA. Dunbar's group is suing the state over that law, saying it is an unconstitutional special law benefitting the association.

Since the state department signed off on the Gretna permit in October, another race track -- Hamilton Downs Horsetrack -- has applied for a barrel racing permit, heightening opponents' fear that other, more lucrative tracks will do away with the more costly thoroughbred races and the jobs that go with them.

Gretna could begin running slot machines in February if voters approve the referendum and the state approves its application.

That timing could violate a 2010 agreement with the Seminole Tribe and cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars. Under the deal, the Seminoles agreed to give the state at least \$1 billion over five years as long as slot machines at pari-mutuels are limited to Broward and Miami-Dade counties. The deal would be void if anyone else offers slots before 2015, when it comes before lawmakers for reauthorization.

"This whole thing blows the Seminole Indian compact out of the water for a ham sandwich," said Florida Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association executive director Kent Stirling. "This will decimate us. Tampa Bay could do this. Gulfstream could do this. How do we stop them? It's not just us sitting here saying, 'Oh we think this is wrong.' This is the whole horse industry coming together realizing this could come to our demise. This is nothing more than a get-rich quick scheme for Mr. Dunbar and Mr. Romanik."

Lawmakers included quarter horse racing in the state's pari-mutuel laws in 2009 after being promised by industry lobbyists that the additional races would bring seven jobs for each horse on the track.

Among those lobbyists was Stephen Fisch, a Tallahassee veterinarian and president of the FQHRA who now feels he was duped by Dunbar and his coalition. Bringing quarter horses to Florida was supposed to "create a massive breeding and racing industry and all the jobs that go with it," Fisch said.

At the time, Fisch said, he had no idea barrel racing was in the works.

At issue for Fisch and his association is the number of horses competing in the races. The Gretna races could operate with a minimum of eight horses -- four pairs for each of the preliminary races that head off against each other for the final rounds -- while hundreds of horses race at traditional tracks like Hialeah Race Track or Calder Race Track in Miami. Hialeah runs up to 10 races over three days that draw up to 600 horses, Fisch said. And the delicate thoroughbred horses usually run only one race every two to four weeks. Barrel racing horses can run several times a day.

Riders at Gretna, who came from as far as Texas and Oklahoma last weekend, truck their horses down for a weekend and go home. The horses at other Florida tracks stay for the racing season, meaning jobs for groomers, trainers, veterinarians and others, Fisch said.

"It's not horse racing versus barrel racing," Fisch said. "What it's about is a facility trying to get by using eight horses instead of having a whole industry involved. And the deal with state was the whole industry."

Leaders in Gretna are banking on the track to bring jobs and money into the city with fewer than 1,800 residents. Investors have put more than 170 people to work and pledged to spend up to \$20 million.

The community is located in Gadsden County, one of the state's poorest locales and the only county in Florida where the majority of the population is black.

"It's going to make it better," said Gretna City Commissioner Anthony Baker. "Lots of people here aren't working and they need jobs."

And even some locals who don't like slot machines are drawn to the pot of gold the casino promises.

"A lot of folks here don't like gambling but it provides a lot of jobs for people," Gretna resident Anthony Tribue, waiting for lunch beside a barbecue wagon a few miles from the casino, said.

He said he visited the casino after it opened on Dec. 1 but didn't bet on the races and won't vote for the slots because he's a Christian.

But, he said, "It's not that I have anything against it."

Find this article at:

<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/state/betting-on-barrel-racing-in-panhandle-causing-rift-2046008.html>

The Florida Standardbred Breeders and Owners Association, Inc. is a non-profit organization responsible for promoting the standardbred horse-breeding and racing industry in Florida. The FSBOA maintains a registry of Florida-bred standardbred horses, manages various Florida-bred stakes events and an annual fall sale featuring FL-bred yearlings. The FSBOA website contains information about stallions standing in Florida, special standardbred events taking place throughout the year, and stake race information (including payment schedules, eligibilities, purses, and results). This website also will publish advertisements relating to standardbred services and articles offered for sale.