

# EQUINE INDUSTRY PROGRAMS

University of  
Louisville

## A BUSINESS-FIRST PROGRAM

University of Louisville's Equine Industry  
Program boasts industry players

BY CHRISTINE OSER

**WHEN BY MY STANDARDS AND WARRIOR'S CHARGE** crossed the finish line first and second, respectively, in the May 2 Oaklawn Handicap (G2)—defeating top handicap runners such as Mr Freeze, Tacitus, Combatant, and Bravazo—the performances made for a 1-2 punch for bloodstock agents who had graduated from the University of Louisville Equine Industry Program.

Josh Stevens, who is behind By My Standards as well as multiple grade 1 winner Divisidero and multiple graded stakes winner Mr. Money; and Liz Crow, who helped privately secure Warrior's Charge and selected champions Monomoy Girl and British Idiom at auction, have made their mark on the bloodstock game.

In the racing industry alone, the EIP has also turned out trainers such as Jack Sisterson, who conditions for Calumet Farm; and Destin

Heath, the trainer at WinStar Farm; and industry leaders such as Michele Fischer, founder of the horse racing consultant firm Darting Star and now an adjunct professor of the EIP; Gary Palmisano, VIP player services manager at Churchill Downs; and Rich Nilsen, a former Brisnet executive and founder of AGameOfSkill.com.

### SCHOOLING SESSION

*In this series BloodHorse will examine a few of the prominent college and community college programs for students thinking about careers in the horse industry. In the coming weeks BloodHorse will profile the University of Kentucky's Equine Science and Management, the University of Arizona's Race Track Industry Program, Texas A&M Equine, and Bluegrass Community and Technical College's North American Racing Academy. It's not intended to be a comprehensive list, but we hope it provides awareness of the educational opportunities available for young—or older—people considering an industry career.*



U of L's Equine Industry Program director Sean Beirne

COURTESY, U OF L EQUINE INDUSTRY PROGRAM

Housed in the University of Louisville's College of Business, the EIP gives students a solid base in business courses—marketing, finance, economics, accounting, and management to name a few—but, also dives deeper into courses such as the organization and administration of equine operations, equine commercial law, equine taxation, equine marketing, and more. It is the only undergraduate equine program in the world located in an Association of Advance Collegiate School of Business-accredited college of business.

Sean Beirne, who began his role as the EIP director in November 2018, was an early graduate of the program, earning his equine business degree in 1990. Prior to the position at UofL, he worked for Roberts Communications Network and served on the Colorado Racing Commission for eight years. Economist Dr. Tom Lambert began with the equine faculty in January, and Dr. Sarah Memmi, who has a background in the show horse world, will be joining the equine and marketing departments.

"I think the people that come out of this program, with the business backgrounds that they have, are going to be industry leaders," Beirne said. "That's what we want; we're building industry leaders. Our graduates are running farms, they're running their own businesses, they're running their own training operations, and they're moving up in racetrack management and operating racetracks. That's what we want to be."

The EIP, which has about 70 students, has not been unaffected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. With universities across the nation closing around spring break, students were sent home to finish the spring semester remotely. UofL currently is slated to begin its fall semester with a hybrid model, mixing in-person classes with online learning, but the EIP is striving to use the changes to its advantage.

Beirne, who likes to bring speakers into his classes, noted the online tools allow him to reach a wider spectrum of equine professionals who might not otherwise be able to drive in for a day to



U of L EIP students in the sale pavilion at Keeneland

speak to students in person.

"By having this online feature, I don't have to bring somebody to campus per se, but I can do an interview with them and it really opens the number of people you can interview. I'm not restricted to somebody driving over from Lexington or down from Indianapolis. I can do an interview with someone in California if I wanted to and record it," he said. "I can do live interviews and give the students a chance to participate. I'm still working through that for the fall, at least for my

class. I'm thinking about having students submit questions in advance so if I do have to interview speakers without the students present, they've all had the opportunity to at least get some questions in ahead of time. We're adapting and changing with everything, just like everybody else is doing."

In terms of a changing industry since his time as an EIP student to now, Beirne has seen the consolidation of horse racing with simulcasting taking off and the growth of casinos. Between that and



At the Galbreath Awards, from left, John Phillips, Beirne, Michael Blowen, and B. Wayne Hughes



Prior to the pandemic, the EIP class tours Montevideo, Uruguay

COURTESY TERRI BURCH

the past year alone—this year’s federal indictments of trainer Jason Servis and Jorge Navarro, the calls for racetrack and surface safety following a rash of breakdowns in 2019 at Santa Anita Park, racetracks closing because of heat waves last year and now because of COVID-19—he said there have been many topics to cover in class. The discussions lead to how will horse racing adapt, and what will the new business model look like as change is implemented.

“I want them to have a pretty good look at the industry. From the racing side of things to all the stakeholders involved, whether it’s the breeding farms, the stallion operations, all the auxiliary pieces that constitute the industry, to aftercare,” he said. “I’ve included a lot of aftercare. That wasn’t a big issue when I was here the first go-around. Aftercare is so important now. One of our recent graduates just took a position with an aftercare company when she graduated. That is so important.”

Although COVID-19 has put a halt to planned student internships at places such as Monmouth Park and (Standardbred track) Hoosier Park as a majority of the country’s racetracks were forced to

close, Beirne aims to build a network of connections to help graduates find positions in the industry once they leave college. A Facebook page for alumni allows graduates to stay in touch, view industry job postings, and offer opportunities to more recent graduates.

EIP students have the chance to engage industry figures through the equine speaker series. Last fall the series hosted the Business of Racetrack Surfaces, which included Racing Surfaces Testing Laboratory executive director Dr. Mick Peterson and Tapeta Footings creator Michael Dickinson; an Evening With Tom Durkin (retired track announcer); and Sports Betting and Horse Racing. The program also offers students a chance at international trips, on which they’ve learned about equine industries in Europe and South America.

The EIP annually presents the John W. Galbreath Award to an individual whose entrepreneurial leadership has had a significant and positive impact on the industry. Recent winners include B. Wayne Hughes of Spendthrift Farm and Michael Blowen of Old Friends Thoroughbred Retirement Facility.

The program will introduce an equine

leadership course this fall that will be offered in an online format, create a business of sport horses class, and work toward launching a certificate program at the graduate level. The certificate program, which would be offered online as either a stand-alone program or hours toward a master of business administration, will focus on the racing industry and include farm and breeding operations, sales companies, racetracks, and aftercare.

As the equine industry continues to evolve, the EIP plans to send out graduates who are capable of showing the way in multiple facets of the industry.

“It’s all about business. I had one student who was working for a trainer on the backside, and he eventually wants to train. We’ve got Jason Barkley and Will VanMeter who are trainers. What do they do most of the time? They’re on their phones conducting business,” Beirne said. “It’s all about business all the time. That’s what makes our program unique. It’s carried me through my entire career, and a lot of the students that I’ve talked to say the same thing about their equine degree, having that business background and that bachelor’s of science.” **BH**