

WASHINGTON RACING HALL OF FAME

Ron Crockett

*The man who kept horse racing
in Washington State*

by Susie Sharp

Thoroughbred racing is about blue-blooded horses, the will to win and speed . . . not to mention glamor and money. Success is neither achieved overnight nor by the faint of heart. To quote Calvin Coolidge, "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence."

Longacres used to be the horse racing track in Washington State. It was built during the Great Depression by Joseph Gottstein – and amazingly he managed to build the track in 28 days! It covered more than 220 acres with a seating capacity of 17,500. The opening day on August 3, 1933, was an exciting affair and gave Renton locals a taste of legalized gambling. In those days, according to Ralph Vacca, retired general manager of Washington Thoroughbred Breeders and Owners Association, the Longacres track was a community and anyone who lived in Renton was involved in some capacity, from hot walkers to cashiers. People thought Longacres would be around forever, but in 1990, much to the dismay and shock of the Washington horse racing community, it was announced that Longacres had been sold to The Boeing Company for an estimated \$90-million.

But, the racing community would not give up easily. A non-profit group called

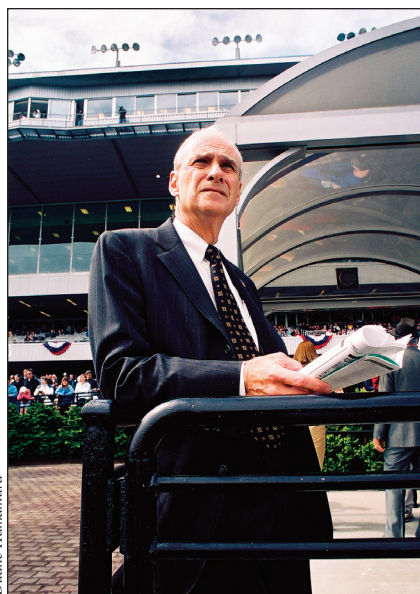
the Emerald Racing Association was promptly established and one of its members was a prominent local businessman named Ron Crockett. The group successfully negotiated an arrangement which enabled horse racing to continue at the newly renamed Longacres Park for a further two years. In 1992, Longacres finally closed its doors. The future of Thoroughbred racing in Western Washington looked bleak, but fortunately a number of committed horse people and investors were determined to build another racetrack to keep the industry alive.

A different type of race began in order to find the right location and secure the high level of financial backing required. Ron Crockett quickly came to the fore in Northwest Racing Associates LP, which in turn caught the attention of the public. In September 1992, the Washington division of the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association voted unanimously to support the Northwest Racing Associates' building of a racetrack in Auburn. To counter the numerous financial challenges, Crockett not only pledged ten million dollars of his own money, he also crafted a proposal which recommended leasing rather than purchasing land for the new track. He arranged a long-term lease with a local landowner named Mario Segale, which enabled the project

to move forward. At that point in time the overall cost of building a new racetrack was budgeted to be \$50-million.

However, a significant challenge remained as there were wetland and environmental concerns associated with the proposed site. Various plans were compiled to mitigate the environmental impact, and then the US Army Corps of Engineers announced that they would require an Environmental Impact Study (EIS). While a weaker and less determined individual might have quaked in the face of such an obstacle, Crockett forged on.

Finally, in April 1995, ground was broken for the new track, which was to be named Emerald Downs. Governor Mike Lowry stated to the happy crowd that, "We're here today because of the courage and commitment of Northwest Racing and Mr.



Ron Crockett, the man behind the building of Emerald Downs. As Emerald president, he led the track and the industry from the time of its opening in 1996 through his retirement in March of 2015.

Duane Hanamura

Susie Sharp

Ron Crockett.” The latter replied in a humble and forthright way: “The thing that kept this project going are the grass-roots folks up here” – by which he meant the trainers, breeders, owners and other horsemen – “You’re the most important people in the industry.”

Emerald Downs’ opening day was June 20, 1996. The new track featured a six-level grandstand with a variety of restaurant and seating options, pari-mutuel windows on every floor for the convenience of guests, a one-mile oval and stalls for 1,400 horses. Situated on 195 acres of land with Mount Rainier in the background, perhaps KIRO radio host Dori Monson put it best, “There just is not a better way to spend a summer evening than out there at Emerald Downs with Mount Rainier looming over it.”

The Local Guy

Who is Ron Crockett? He grew up in Renton and attended the local high school where he would be voted student body president. Intelligent, hardworking and ambitious, he graduated in 1961 with a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Washington.

As a young man, Crockett admired Henry Ford. He once commented that, “When I started to pick a profession, I had always looked at [him] as a guy who had done something en masse, and that would play into my later life.”

After seven years in the aerospace industry, Crockett founded a commercial aircraft maintenance company called Tramco, which was tremendously successful. In 1988, his company was purchased by BF Goodrich. He continued to invest in commercial real estate and was an original investor in Eagle Garden and Hardware.

As an incredibly loyal supporter of his alma mater, Crockett was awarded the University of Washington Alumni Recognition Award in 1997. His commitment to the world of Thoroughbred racing and the University of Washington Huskies is widely acknowledged and he was honored with the Paul Allen Sports Citizen Award in January 2014. When questioned at that ceremony about his success in the building of Emerald Downs he replied, “What happens is you surround yourself with a bunch of competent people, and I think you end up taking credit for the work of others. So I think that although I was the driver behind this, I’ve associated and surrounded myself with a bunch of competent people.”

His mother, Angie Crockett (as in the Angie C. Stakes), enjoyed horse racing, but little did she realize that one day her son would not only become a very good handicapper given his talent with numbers, but that he would build his own racecourse. Given his competitive nature, it was only fitting that Crockett developed a love for horse racing and became an active racehorse

owner and breeder. In 1974, he purchased his first horse, a humble claimer called Topper Blue. One of his most successful horses was Vaudeville, who won more than \$600,000 in his career, including the Grade 1 Secretariat Stakes at Arlington Park in 1994. A picture of Vaudeville from that race hangs in Crockett’s office at Emerald Downs. His early involvement with Emerald Downs also included supporting the Backstretch Clubhouse Daycare Center and a state-of-the-art equine hospital for the racing community and other equine disciplines.

The all-time leading owner by wins and career earnings at Emerald Downs, Crockett continues to race horses today. He is also a regular buyer at the annual WTBOA sale of Thoroughbreds and in 2014 he introduced a new incentive program for WTBOA-sold horses.

Changes in Auburn

Despite numerous challenges which have faced the Thoroughbred industry nationwide, Ron Crockett has persisted with Emerald Downs, living up to his promise to Barbara Shinpoch, former chair of the Washington Horse Racing Commission, that should “she and her committee grant us the license, that in my lifetime I would keep this industry going here in Washington.”

However, on November 13, 2014, there was a major news announcement. The racetrack and the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe reported that the tribe had reached an agreement in principle with Northwest Racing Associates to acquire Emerald Downs. The tribe assumed ownership and operational management on March 13, 2015.

True to form, Ron Crockett is staying involved with his beloved industry. He acted as consultant during the transitional phase to the new owners and continues to be on call as a consultant.

The future of Emerald Downs has now been placed into the capable hands of the Muckleshoot Tribe, which had actually purchased the land back in 2002 and hence were in a prime position to take Emerald Downs to the next level.

Ron Crockett has achieved his goal of making sure that Thoroughbred racing remains in Washington State. In his own words, “My goal has always been to preserve this industry,” said Crockett, “I have accomplished that goal.”

The Future of Racing?

What does the future hold for Thoroughbred racing? Expenses for training have

Right, top to bottom: From the groundbreaking ceremony, through construction, to the day the first horse stepped on track to work, Crockett was there at every call.

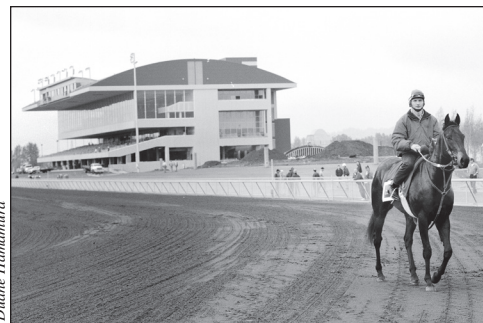
He is shown with former Muckleshoot Tribal Council Chairman John Daniels, in what would turn out to be a portent of future Tribe involvement in the Washington racing scene.



Duane Hamamura



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Palmer Photography



Crockett-raced *Delineator* (above), an early son *Storm Cat*, was a graded stakes winner at two and became an important and successful sire in Washington. Crockett homebred *Harvard Avenue*, by *You and I*, was a two-time graded stakes winner of over a half a million dollars.

increased and arguably purses need to reflect those changes. In an ideal world there would be more incentives for breeders, as without sufficient horses, tracks will be competing to fill their races. Dr. John Stenslie, DVM, commented that he would like to see a greater range of races offered to accommodate the different classes of Thoroughbreds. The industry as a whole

has been experiencing challenging times and reduced crops (numbers) of foals on an annual basis. However, the pageantry of Thoroughbred racing is as colorful as it ever was, not to mention the personalities of the breeders, owners, trainers, vets, jockeys and fans who are still thrilled by the grace and athleticism of the noble Thoroughbred.

Emerald Downs is near the conclusion

of its change-filled 20th season and the chapter for 2016 is yet to be written. In the words of Ralph Vacca, "No one else could have achieved what Ron Crockett has done. Thanks to his love for the Thoroughbred industry, his determination and tenacity in the face of tremendous odds, horse racing in Washington State has survived."

Similarly, Pete von Reichbauer, a

Ron Crockett's Stakes Winners

Name of Runner (YOB)	Biggest Win	Titles/Other
Vaudeville (1991).....	Secretariat S. (G1)	
Harvard Avenue (2001).....	Potrero Grande BC H. (G2).....	Bred by Crockett
Delineator (1991).....	Generous S. (G3).....	Washington sire
Infamous Deed (1988).....	Ascot H. (G3)	
The Great Face (2002).....	Longacres Mile (G3)	Washington horse of the year, Emerald Downs horse of the meet
Casino Lights (1995).....	Angie C. S.....	Washington co-champion 2YO filly
Pleas Write (1992).....	Emerald Downs BC Distaff S.....	Yakima Meadows horse of the meet, Emerald Downs top older filly/mare
Raise the Bluff (2003)	Emerald Downs BC Derby	Emerald Downs top 3YO colt/gelding; Washington sire
Willie the Cat (1999).....	Seattle H. (EmD)	Emerald Downs co-top sprinter; bred by Crockett
Audacious Angie (1985).....	Luella G. H.	
Bouncin' Man (1990).....	Emerald Cup S. (Lga)	
Captain Bash (1991)	Washington Stallion S. (Lga)	
Carrie Can (1992).....	Hayward H.	
Casually Speaking (1983).....	Mercer Girls S.	
Cielator (2008).....	Belle Roberts S. (EmD)	
Crossatyourownrisk (1997)	Washington Oaks	
Fappitass (1990)	Belle Roberts S. (YM)	
Fiery Skies (1991)	Spokane Futurity	
Golden Pine (2002).....	John and Kitty Fletcher S.	
Have'n a Wild Time (2007)	Diane Kem S. (EmD)	
Jaded Pleasure (1990).....	Bay Meadows Lassie S.	
Latter Day Paula (1997).....	King County H.	
Lexington Lear (1989).....	San Carlos S.	
Lunch Bag (1986).....	Lassie S. (EP)	First SW, co-owned with Dave Yoshino
Rewritten (2007).....	Washington's Lottery H.....	Bred by Crockett
Richard of England (1989)	Sunny Slopes S.....	Co-owned with Clover Racing Stable and Carrigan
Saucy Affair (1988)	Tukwila S.	
Sheltered View (1988)	Chapel of Dreams H.	
Unprincipled (1992).....	Mt. Rainier Sprint Championship S.	

Also bred by Crockett

Courageous King (2001)

Crockett runners The Great Face and Raise the Bluff provided an exciting one-two finish in the 2007 Longacres Mile. Ron Crockett Inc. is the all-time leading owner in both wins and earnings at Emerald Downs. A proud grandfather (far right) holds daughter Carrie's children John Henry and Lauren (aka "The Great Face") Slaven.



Crockett and his wife and longtime partner – both at home and in business – Wanda Shaw.



One of the many ways in which Crockett has supported the local industry is through the purchase of yearlings through the WTBOA sales. He is shown with his stable manager Lance Williams as they peruse future racehorses.

representative for Auburn on the King County Council, released a statement saying, "Ron Crockett . . . also saved thousands of family wage jobs for people working at the track, as well as farmers producing the hay and feed for horses."

To paraphrase a famous quote: "Tenaciousness, thy name be racetrack builder (and operator)." ■

Suzie Sharp grew up in Ireland and has been fascinated by all things equine from an early age. She persuaded her parents to allow her to try horse-riding lessons and never looked back. She competed in Pony Club events on a Connemara cross she trained herself. Her favorite authors growing up were Walter Farley, Marguerite Henry, Mary O'Hara and Dick Francis. She attended Trinity College Dublin to study psychology, but her passion for the world of horses, regardless of discipline, has never waned. Her teenage daughters have supported their equine obsessed mother to the point of sending her off to volunteer at the World Equestrian Games in 2010. She is currently pursuing a diploma in Equine Studies at the University of Guelph. Her new passion is for the world of Thoroughbreds and watching the early morning training sessions at Emerald Downs.

Emerald Downs All-Time Leading Owners (1996-2014)

Owner	Wins
1. Ron Crockett Inc.....	243
2. Sue & Tim Spooner	165
3. Larry & Veralene Hillis.....	155
4. Howard Belvoir.....	143
5. Billie Klokstad.....	129
6. Dunn Bar Ranch	120
7. Northwest Farms LLC	108
8. Seawind Stables LLC	102
9. Homestretch Farms Inc.....	100
10. Hern/LePley Racing	97
11. Michael & Amy Feuerborn.....	93
12. Richard T. Beal Jr.	91
13. Mr. & Mrs. Don Munger	85
14. Quadrun Farm LLC	83
15. Oak Crest Farm LLC	77

Owner	Earnings
1. Ron Crockett Inc.....	\$3,750,613
2. Northwest Farms LLC	\$2,262,086
3. Sue & Tim Spooner	\$1,917,097
4. Michael & Amy Feuerborn.....	\$1,687,106
5. Howard Belvoir.....	\$1,460,167
6. Homestretch Farms Inc.....	\$1,397,192
7. Dunn Bar Ranch	\$1,135,780
8. Chris & Diane Randall	\$1,133,429
9. Larry & Veralene Hillis.....	\$1,126,207
10. Elttaes Stable	\$1,121,213
11. Quadrun Farm LLC	\$1,109,203
12. Billie Klokstad	\$1,059,134
13. Richard T. Beal Jr.	\$1,040,928
14. Oak Crest Farm LLC	\$1,013,807
15. Dr. Rodney E. Orr.....	\$935,421