

MEET THE NYTHA BOARD

HORSE SENSE

Rick Schosberg has a simple philosophy when it comes to training racehorses. “Do right by the horse and you will do right by everyone at every level, from the hotwalker, to the jockey, to the owner, to the bettor. But you have to start with the health and well-being of the horse.”

It was a love of horses that brought Schosberg to the track in the first place. Born in New York, he was raised in Virginia’s



Rick Samuels Photo

equine country and took riding lessons while growing up. What started as an after-school activity for Rick and his sister Jill grew into a family hobby. Schosberg’s mother, Jane, had been involved with horses as a kid herself, and began to dabble in the breeding end of the Thoroughbred business.

“We purchased a small farm in Fairfax County, and we bought a filly off the racetrack and made her into a show horse,” Schosberg explained. “She was the base broodmare for our breeding operation.”

At the time, his dad, Paul, was working on Capitol Hill as Chief of Staff for a U.S. Congressman. A job opportunity in Westchester County in 1975 led to a return to New York, where the family settled in the hamlet of Katonah, about 20 miles north of White Plains. Schosberg was one of the few farm kids in his new town.

“We lived in the middle of the suburbs, and most everybody lived on a quarter acre in a subdivision, but we had land, we had a working farm,” the 52-year-old recalled. “I had to get up early to take care of the horses, and before I went out with my friends, I had to run home from school and check on them, muck stalls, feed.

“I was foaling mares when I was at 12, 13 years old—I was out there, arms deep, hoping everything was all right,” he added. “The whole family was learning on the fly.”

In addition to their breeding stock, the Schosbergs had a few horses with wily veteran trainer Walter Kelley. Looking to add to his equine education, Rick Schosberg spent summers as a groom for Kelley. By the time he graduated high school, he knew he wanted to train racehorses, and he had the practical knowledge for a career at the track. But he opted to pursue a college degree that would serve him in his chosen profession.

“I went to Cornell as an agricultural economics major,” Schosberg said. “Midway through my sophomore year, I also decided to take advantage of the many opportunities to learn equine science. I took all of the courses available to undergrads—nutrition, reproduction, everything short of pre-vet.”

Schosberg graduated in 1984 and, the very next day, was back in the Kelley barn. He progressed from groom to assistant trainer for Sid Watters, then served as assistant to Tom Skiffington for two years.

“With Tom, I had the chance to work with some extraordinary athletes,” Schosberg remarked. “He had a strong group of horses—Anka Germania, Fieldy, Mourjane—he’s a great horseman and he taught me a lot about training the good ones.”

The quality of the horses in the Skiffington barn was matched only by the quality of the people, according to Schosberg.

“That’s where I met my wife, Dawn,” he said with a smile.

The two were soon an item, and, in the fall of 1988, together decided the time had come for the young horseman to strike out on his own. Four years after earning his college diploma, Schosberg had a newly minted trainer’s license as well. He won with the very first horse he saddled, 12-1 Three Chopt Road, who captured a \$25,000 claiming event at Belmont Park under jockey Jerry Bailey.

Three Chopt Road remained in the Schosberg barn for six seasons, a period of time that saw a number of milestones for the trainer. He and Dawn were married, and their son, Ryan, was born in 1992. The stable was also growing.

“I got very lucky early in my career,” Schosberg explained. “I



Ryan, Dawn and Rick Schosberg

got a phone call from Lloyd Bensen, who was the father of a very good high school friend of mine. His daughter was the head cheerleader, and his son-in-law was the running back on our state champion football team.

“Mr. Bensen was involved with Dogwood Stable, but he called and said he really wanted to have horses on his own,” he continued. “He had the capital, and told me, ‘I’m going to give it a shot. I’m going to give you a big check, and I want you to buy horses for me. Let’s have some fun.’”

And fun they had. The best of Bensen’s Heatherwood Farm horses was As Indicated, who captured the GII Gotham early in 1993, and went four-for-four in 1994, with a decisive win in the GI Pimlico Special. The chestnut won 10 of 15 starts and earned \$802,212.

Stablemate Sovereign Kitty won the 1993 GIII Tempted, added the GII Cotillion in ‘94 and was third in the GI Acorn, GI Coaching Club American Oaks and GI Alabama. She ended up bankrolling \$458,704.

Schosberg’s standout Affirmed Success rivaled Three Chopt Road in durability. Through seven seasons, the bay steamrolled his way to 10 stakes wins, highlighted by the GI Cigar Mile, GI Vosburgh, GI Carter, GII General George and GII Forego. He missed by a neck when fourth in the 2000 GI Breeders’ Cup Mile, and finally retired with 17 wins and earnings of \$2,285,315.

Horse Sense, cont.

Two of the very best horses trained by Schosberg were geldings. While Affirmed Success headed to the green fields of Old Friends in Kentucky when he was done racing, As Indicated, as well as Three Chopt Road, ended up in Schosberg's back yard.

"When they were ready to retire, Dawn and I bought a small farm on Long Island for them," Schosberg said.



The desire to give back, to the horses and the sport, led to an interest in running for the Board of the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association. Schosberg's dad had long been involved in politics, on a national and state-wide level, and also as two-term president of the New York Thoroughbred Breeders.

Schosberg was invited to serve on NYTHA's Nominating Committee in 2011, but ended up on the ballot instead.

"Mark Hennig was on the Nominating Committee as well; we were at the table, exchanging ideas, and Mark said, 'Why don't you run? Let me nominate you, right now.'

"I said OK, and that was it. Someone took my spot on the Committee, and I was privileged to be elected to the NYTHA Board."

His first term has been yet another chance to learn.

"Our Board has a great make-up, we have people with varied experience, so we can look at the issues from many angles," Schosberg said. "We have trainers with 100 horses, and those with small stables. We have lawyers, businessmen who run big companies—everybody contributes something different. We have stimulating conversation, and that helps come up with the right plan of action. It's gratifying to see what we've been able to get done, and to see how it's done."

Schosberg also praised NYTHA's President. "Rick Violette is dedicated to the horsemen, and he has a passion for the horses," he said. "He works tirelessly. He is a really good leader, and he has done a fantastic job."

Schosberg's focus is on a number of key issues, not the least of which is the backstretch community.

"I like looking after the workers here on the backstretch," he said. "Nick Caras [of the Racetrack Chaplaincy of America-NY] comes to me and David Donk with a lot of projects, and we know the avenues we need to take to get them done. We actually do a lot without needing funds from NYTHA. We got the fitness room at Belmont rebuilt with the help of Glen Kozak and the folks at NYRA. It's completely refurbished, with padded floors and used, but good, equipment donated by a local gym. We are working on something similar for Aqueduct."

Schosberg and his father, Paul, have also attended NYTHA-sponsored events in Albany that give the horsemen's representatives an opportunity to meet with legislators and educate them about the industry and the challenges it faces.

"The trips to Albany to meet with our lawmakers have been good experience," Schosberg said. "I think we've made a real impression on quite a few of them."

"We are their constituents, after all. They are very receptive to our concerns, they listen to us," he added.



Paul and Rick Schosberg at NYTHA event in Albany

"Our industry covers a big part of the state—we are in Queens, in Nassau, upstate. We need to keep on top of the legislative changes, and stay in tune with what is happening in Albany. We need to let our legislators know what is important to us."

Of course, aftercare has always been a high priority in the Schosberg barn. Schosberg was a natural fit as the Chair of the Aftercare Committee, and jumped into NYTHA's TAKE THE LEAD Thoroughbred Retirement Program with both feet.

"Aftercare for our horses—that's my passion," he said. "Finding homes for the retired horses, seeing them get into second careers, and working with the aftercare organizations like Akindale, New Vocations and ReRun has been so rewarding. The van companies, the vets, all put in the time with no compensation—everybody has helped to make the program really successful."

As with his role on the NYTHA Board, Schosberg derives his greatest satisfaction as a trainer in the knowledge that he is doing what's best for his horses. "The best part of my job is seeing a happy healthy horse go out and perform to his potential—and enjoy it," he said. "That's what it is all about."



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