

New Mexico Horse Racing Industry Summit Comes up Positive On all Notes

It was fitting for this industry summit to take place high in the Sierra Blanca Mountains of Southern New Mexico in the town of Ruidoso Downs. At an elevation of approximately 7,000 feet above sea level, the fresh air and pine tree setting was perfect for all racing stakeholders to let out "hot air" concerning the state of racing in New Mexico.

Moderated by the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium (RMTTC) Executive Director, Dr. Dionne Benson, and organized by New Mexico Horse Breeders President Ralph Vincent, the summit showed how all facets of the racing industry can come together to have productive dialogue concerning issues facing horse racing.

When asked what impressed her most about the summit, Benson said, "The fact that everyone came together to discuss what is best for New Mexico racing and the range of very important topics that were covered most impressed me".

To confirm Benson's comment, a variety of topics were not safe from conversation on this day. One major topic discussed was the development of a racing schedule to be agreed upon. New Mexico horsemen and track managements have experienced first-hand how an overlap in race meets impacts the industry in a negative way. Both parties agreed that the New Mexico racing schedule, which is rich in number of race dates and purse money and split amongst six (6) race meets at five (5) different race tracks, needs to be adjusted to benefit the entire industry within these broad borders.

Another important topic included in the discussion was the need to review, evaluate, and change testing protocols. Attendees feel the entire process in New Mexico needs to be dismantled and be rebuilt from scratch. The consensus was that changes must be made from A to Z, including the handling, shipping and the storage of the samples. According to New Mexico state statute, it is mandated that the samples must be shipped and stored at a local laboratory rather than the industry standard of storing the samples at the test barn facilities at the race track. The process is rather unorthodox when compared to standard practices within the industry. All stakeholders present agreed that changes are necessary to ensure the chain of custody stays intact and integrity is paramount in the process.

By the end of the day, most felt that enhancing the integrity and correcting multiple facets of the industry can be quite an overwhelming task, but overall, participants were happy with the outcome of the day long racing summit. It is quite obvious that the New Mexico horsemen, managements, regulators and breeders are ready to roll their sleeves up and get to work and build upon some of the most recent positive changes that have been implemented within New Mexico racing. In closing, Mr. Ralph Vincent summed it up with, "It may be difficult to reach a final compromise on the subjects that were discussed, but at least we are willing to discuss them. We are talking about meeting again in September and then meet quarterly. Perhaps we will meet more often than that due to the expansiveness of the topics we are covering".