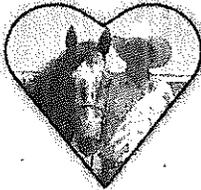


Hey Neighbor



## For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

### Resilient horsemen go forward after horrible loss in fire

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While the uncontrollable blaze destroying the 90-stall barn housing the racehorses at Eureka Downs received headline news coverage, it is the death of so many horses that in reality is most stunning.

"This could be one of the largest losses of horses to fire in modern times," said Ralston. The deceased animals were Quarter Horses and Thoroughbreds being trained to race at the Eureka track.

"The barn can be replaced, but it's impossible to replace the horses. It's devastating and makes you cry," said Richard Clasen, editor of the Eureka Her-

ald and one of the first persons on the scene of the early Sunday morning, Feb. 5, fire.

Cause of the blaze is still under investigation, and neither Ralston or Clasen nor Lee Smith, Eureka Downs general manager, would speculate on the fire's origin.

"The wiring was just redone three years ago," Ralston pointed out. "The wood structure was built in 1989, so it was a modern facility."

"They brought in sniffing dogs to the fire scene, but didn't find any evidence, so they aren't ruling out anything," said Clasen, who also serves as secretary-treasurer of the Greenwood County Fair Association, which owns Eureka Downs.

"The Kansas Fire Marshall has not released any

information either," said Ralston, from his Topeka law office last Wednesday.

Questions have been asked why the fire couldn't be controlled and why some of the horses weren't saved. "It evidently had

been smoldering for a long time, and with the strong north wind, there was no way to slow down the blaze by the time the report came in at about 5:30," replied Smith.

"These were valuable racehorses, and their trainers make sure they're securely stalled, so there was just no physical way for them to get out," Smith said.

However, one horse was found alive later in the morning on the east side of the race track, but it had burns over 25 percent of its body. "We really don't know the circumstances of how it survived," said Smith, who

expects the horse to recover from its injuries over an extended period.

Due to the many hazards at the scene, cleanup was started three days after the fire. "We have the site all cleared off now, and we'll be hauling in base rock to form a sound surface," Smith explained.

Calculating the loss is virtually impossible, with estimates ranging up to a million dollars. "It would have to be at least \$500,000," Smith calculated.

"Replacement of the barn would for sure be in six figures, probably a couple hundred thousand now," evaluated Ralston.

"The loss really all depends on how valuable the horses were," Clasen said. "With one exception, these were all racehorses in training, and there can be such a wide variation in their valuation."

Estimates of the individual horse value could be from as low as maybe \$1,000

*Continued on page 7*



Fire had already completely engulfed the 90-stall race horse barn at Eureka Downs early Sunday morning, Feb. 5, when firefighters arrived. Forty-three horses lost their lives in the destroyed structure. (photo by Richard Clasen, Eureka Herald)

up to \$50,000 or more. One horse lost in the fire was not a race horse and was owned by a young girl, who has been given another horse by a generous donor.

The Greenwood County community and horse affiliates over a wide area have come forward to offer assistance and condolences to those who suffered loss from the fire. "Everybody is doing what they can. It's just hard to know what to do," Clasen said.

How many horse owners suffered losses wasn't readily known, but there were five trainers who had horses destroyed in the blaze. One trainer lost 24 head.

Moreover, the trainers lost all of their equipment, including tack, feed and other essentials. Cost of that replacement would be difficult to calculate too, but it would be quite high, Clasen pointed out. Little or none of that was covered by insurance.

Donations are being accepted to assist the trainers and can be sent to P.O. Box 228, Eureka KS 67045. Already, the trainers had several new horses under their tutorship last week.

"Insurance coverage on the barn was inadequate," Smith indicated. "There are several factors involved, but the insurance

going to head up my breeding program," said Bob Farrar, Reading race horse breeder and former Eureka Downs steward.

Despite trauma of the fire, plans are positive that races will go on at Eureka Downs. "We're set for a 20-day race season opening May 6, and running each weekend through the fourth of July," Smith said.

A new barn will be constructed, although not completed by the first race date. "We will put up a new structure," Ralston insisted. "I don't know exactly how it's going to be funded."

There are about 300 stalls remaining at the track, and the possibility of bringing in temporary portable stalls is a probability.

Other financial concerns weigh heavy on Eureka Downs management, which survived and rebounded after a bankruptcy dilemma a decade and a half ago. The track, owned by the fair group, is leased by the Kansas Quarter Horse Racing Association, which oversees all operations.

Smith, as track manager, is hired by a management board, including members

from both the race and fair associations. All race functions are guided by the Kansas Racing Commission.

Despite attracting top horses and sizable spectator-betting crowds, profitability has been difficult. "We depend on funds from the simulcasts at the major pari-mutual race tracks, and we've taken a major cut the last three years," Clasen said. Final appropriations for this race season were being determined last week.

"Race horse owners are a resilient group," Ralston said. "Even with the horri-

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In conclusion, Ralston emphasized, "The Kansas Quarter Horse Racing Association is very concerned about the loss of so many fine racehorses and expresses sympathy to all of the owners."

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