



Keeneland's  
Milestone Vase was  
unveiled last fall.

KEENELAND/SARAH JANE SANDERS

# CREATING MILESTONES

**Keeneland's commissioning of Tiffany for a trophy series  
deepens the ties between two distinguished brands**

**By Vickie Mitchell**

**I**n the past five years a winning relationship has unfolded between Keeneland and Tiffany & Co. Keeneland, one of the country's most-respected racetracks, has turned to Tiffany, one of the country's best-known jewelers and silversmiths, to design and craft its Milestone Trophy Program for graded stakes race winners.

The alliance is a natural, say two Thoroughbred owners who have won the Milestone Bowl and now have their sights set on the program's new top award, the Tiffany-made Milestone Vase, unveiled last fall during Keeneland's 80th anniversary race meet.

"When you hear Tiffany, you think of top-of-the-line in the jewelry business. It only makes sense it would be tied to Keeneland, which is top-of-the-line in the Thoroughbred business," said Walker Hancock, president of Claiborne Farm.

"Keeneland does everything it can to produce the best trophies in the country, and Tiffany is one of the best in that field," said Will Farish, owner of Lane's End Farm and a Keeneland Association trustee.

Vicky Reynolds, senior director, high jewelry, for Tiffany & Co., agrees. She says that shared values are at the heart of the successful partnership.

"Keeneland saw the synergies of quality, timelessness, and craftsmanship that Tiffany stood for, and we saw the same things in Keeneland."

## Trophy business rooted in horse racing

The Keeneland-Tiffany connection is fitting, considering that the jewelry maker's sports trophy business is rooted in Kentucky horse racing. In 1860 the now-defunct Woodlawn Racing Association in Louisville commissioned Tiffany & Co. to create the Woodlawn Vase, now the official award of the Preakness Stakes and considered racing's most valuable trophy. Today Tiffany & Co. makes trophies for many major professional sports championships. (See sidebar, p. 76)

In the mid-1800s though, horse racing was the obvious sport to launch Tiffany & Co.'s sports trophy business. "If you think about it, yachting and horse racing were sort of the football and basketball of that time," Reynolds said. "I always tell people that while it seems so unusual now that we would be so prominently featured in these amazing horse racing trophies, it was very much in keeping with the times."

Charles Lewis Tiffany, who had founded the company in 1837, also was a fan of horse racing. "It also went back to his fascination with nature," said Reynolds, "and certainly the beauty that was instilled in horse racing was evident in trophies Tiffany made that featured the magnificence of those animals."

Tiffany & Co. would later design and craft the trophies for both the Belmont and Travers stakes, among others.

## A friendship forms; a business alliance grows

Like many other business alliances, the one between Keeneland and Tiffany & Co. began with a personal connection. John Petterson, a senior vice president for Tiffany, had met Nick Nicholson, then-president of Keeneland, when Peterson was in town to check on the Tiffany & Co. satellite manufacturing facility that opened in Lexington in 2011. (See sidebar, p. 74)



Lane's End Farm's Will Farish was delighted to win the Milestone Bowl in October 2016. Below, Tiffany designed the Woodlawn Vase, trophy for the Preakness Stakes.

As a friendship developed, the pair realized there were ways their organizations could work together. Tiffany was commissioned to make commemorative gifts for Keeneland's 75th anniversary.

Both Nicholson and Petterson have since retired, and the relationship between Tiffany and Keeneland has not only continued but also has grown with Keeneland commissioning Tiffany to redesign and craft its Milestone Trophies and to design and craft a new pinnacle award for the program, the Milestone Vase.

## Milestone Trophy Program recognizes loyalty

Keeneland realized decades ago the value of a loyal following, and its Milestone Trophy Program is perhaps its most visible expression of appreciation for the Thoroughbred owners who support it by racing their horses at Keeneland.

The program, introduced in 1952, rewards winners of graded stakes races at Keeneland with a gold julep cup. When owners win eight cups, they are awarded a "Milestone" trophy. The first Milestone is a gold tray; the second, received after 16 graded stakes wins, is a pitcher; the third, after 24 wins, is a bowl. Details of the eight wins that earned the Milestone are engraved on each Milestone trophy. Only Claiborne and Lane's End have amassed enough wins to earn a Milestone Bowl, and Claiborne has





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Keeneland's Milestone trophies, top right, mark a continuum of the Tiffany ethos. In addition to embracing high standards of craft and quality, Tiffany founder Charles Lewis Tiffany enjoyed horse racing and its associated beauty.

two wins toward the Milestone Vase.

"The Milestone program acknowledges all the special people who are a part of this business and are passionate about it," said Keeneland President and CEO Bill Thomason. "When you see the reaction of the owners when they have won one of these trophies, it is so moving. They understand how hard it is to win a graded stakes race here."

### Remaking the trophies

Tiffany & Co.'s biggest assignment for Keeneland to date is a redesign of the Milestone trophies and creation of the Milestone Vase. The new vase is now the top award for the program, which initially included only julep cups and a tray. As owners won more and more stakes races, the Milestone pitcher and bowl were added.

Tiffany spent several years on each of the two projects, bringing in teams from its various specialty areas — sales, custom design, hollowware, and hand engraving — to meet with Keeneland

officials. Tiffany posed many questions about what "Keeneland loved about the trophies and what they would change," said Reynolds.

Two priorities were preserving the legacy of the existing trophies and ensuring that the new trophies blended with the old, in size and appearance, as the bulk of existing Milestone collections at farms such as Claiborne and Lane's End were earned before Tiffany began designing and making the trophies.

Tiffany's charge, Reynolds said, was "keeping that rich DNA that Keeneland has, but



KEENELAND

The Milestone Bowl is awarded for the 24th graded stakes victory.

## MANUFACTURED IN THE BLUEGRASS

For most of its 180 years, Tiffany & Co. has made its jewelry in and around New York City, venturing only as far afield as Rhode Island, where in 2001 it opened a plant to make high-fashion jewelry.

But in September 2011, the famous jewelry maker opened a 26,000-square-foot manufacturing facility some 700 miles southwest of the Big Apple on Innovation Drive in Lexington, off Georgetown Road.

"We were looking to expand our high-quality and engagement jewelry manufacturing outside of New York because we needed more capacity," said Andy Hart, senior vice president of diamond and jewelry supply. "We wanted to stay in the U.S., and so we looked at a lot of different communities."

What sold Tiffany & Co. on Lexington was the city's business environment, an ample, trainable workforce, and state grants from Kentucky to train that workforce.

Training assistance was a significant selling point because in Lexington, Tiffany would, for the first time in its history, be training people to make jewelry.

"At our facilities here in New York," said Hart, "we hire already skilled people because there is quite a jewelry manufacturing industry in the area." In contrast, almost none of the 100 people hired in Lexington had ever made jewelry.

Training is done in-house, in a dedicated training room, another first for Tiffany & Co. In addition to jewelers' work benches, the room is equipped with a camera that is used to film the intricate work a trainer is doing so it can be projected on a large-screen television, for easy viewing by trainees.

Workers in Lexington put the finishing touches on hundreds of different styles of gold and platinum rings and other pieces that are part of the Tiffany & Co. fine and engagement jewelry line. "Our Rhode Island operation is where the casting and metal-forming happen; then the pieces come to Lexington," said Hart. Here, employees assemble the jewelry, place gems in settings, and give pieces a final polishing.

Nearly six years after its foray into the Bluegrass, Tiffany is pleased with its Lexington operation, Hart said. "Crafting Tiffany jewelry is a demanding skill, and the employees we have been able to attract and train in Lexington are committed to our craftsmanship and quality standards."



At the Tiffany operation in Lexington, workers trained in-house put the finishing touches on rings and other pieces in the company's fine and engagement jewelry line.



LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER PHOTOS



COURTESY OF TIFFANY & CO.

Tiffany & Co.'s flagship store in Manhattan is recognized the world over.

adding on to that."

The Milestone Vase is a good example of how the new trophies are tied to the existing collection. Its design began with sketches made by the Keeneland staff and handed over to the Tiffany designers.

"You just didn't want a bigger bowl or some other object not representative," said Thomason. "We started thinking as you go from the tray to the pitcher to the bowl what could you have that would be special enough to be displayed in a way that would fit in with all of those pieces in a trophy case."

Two years later the new vase emerged, incorporating details of pieces in the existing Milestone collection: the shape of the neck from the julep cup, beading from the tray, shape and handle from the pitcher, and a base inspired by the bowl. Like all of the previous Milestones, the vase includes eight cartouches, ovals surrounded by laurels, an eagle, and a wreath — all elements from Keeneland's signature gate post. Each oval is engraved with details of the stakes races won by the owner.

Another priority was to retain the trophies' gold color without making them from pure gold as had been done in the past. The new trophies are gold vermeil,





Claiborne Farm recorded a historic milestone in 2003 when the Hancock family won the first gold bowl. The farm is Keeneland's leading stakes-winning owner.

a decorative process that results in a gold appearance. "It is a process where you take 22- to 24-karat gold and apply it atop sterling silver," said Reynolds. The gold is then polished. "We use gold vermeil quite frequently with our hollowware [metal tableware other than flatware] and trophy pieces."

The Tiffany team made the new pieces not only artful but also functional. "We wanted them to be something that you could use, and in their use, talk about them," said Reynolds.

A proud horse owner could set the dining table with gold vermeil julep cups and as a crowning touch, fill the Milestone vase with flowers and use it as a centerpiece. Using the collection would create a conversation about the horses, the trainers, the jockeys, and others who made them possible, said Reynolds. The table setting "would, at the

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## TIFFANY'S TIES TO MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS

As professional sports have grown, so has the Tiffany & Co. trophy business. Tiffany has created many of the iconic trophies awarded at major sporting events, including the Super Bowl, the World Series, the NASCAR Nextel Cup, the New York Marathon, the U.S. Open Tennis Championship, and the NBA championship.

Tiffany & Co.'s first sports trophy commission, the Woodlawn Vase, is now the official trophy of Thoroughbred racing's Preakness Stakes. Made in 1860, the nearly three-foot tall, 30-pound, highly decorated sterling silver trophy is displayed at the Baltimore Museum of Art. The trophy does travel to the Preakness Stakes each year, but the winner walks away with a replica that is one-third the size of the original, and the original returns to the museum, under the protection of the Maryland National Guard.

The trophy requires such protection because it and other early Tiffany designs, such as the Belmont Stakes trophy, would be nearly impossible to replace today, said Vicky Reynolds, senior director for high jewelry at Tiffany & Co. "The time it would take and the man hours it would require make these pieces absolutely priceless."

Despite the Woodlawn Vase's history and beauty, it is not Tiffany & Co.'s most widely recognized sports trophy. That would be the Super Bowl Trophy, seen by the more than 100 million viewers of the annual NFL championship. The trophy, a regulation-size sterling silver football poised on a silver kicking tee, is as sleek and streamlined as the Woodlawn Vase is intricate and ornate.

The two trophies, Reynolds said, are the "two very, very different bookends" that show Tiffany & Co.'s creativity and its ability to craft trophies that are appropriate symbols of a sport's history and tradition.

"Every organization that we work with has a story they want to tell," she said. "All of the trophies are different, for the sport and the organization."

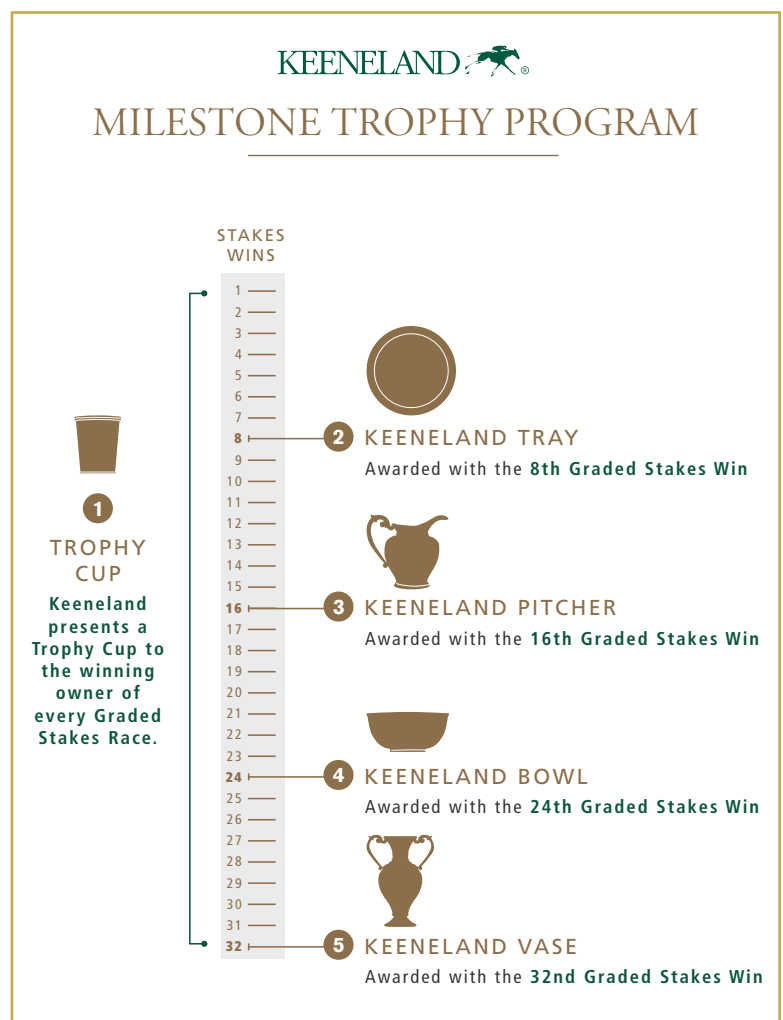
heart of it, tell a wonderful story."

But owners hold their Milestone trophies in such high esteem that it could take some convincing to get them to pull the Tiffany-made cups and trophies off their shelves and out of their trophy cases and actually use them.

Dell Hancock of Claiborne Farm has never used any of the farm's solid gold Milestone julep cups although sterling silver ones awarded for other Keeneland races are used at Derby time.

Like her late father, A.B. "Bull" Hancock Jr., Dell and the other Hancock descendants place a high value on the Milestone trophies. "My father said he would rather win the pitcher [Milestone Pitcher] than the Kentucky Derby," she said. "Keeneland is dear to our hearts."

The trophies are cherished because they aren't easily earned. Dell Hancock remembers the "seven seconds" before Claiborne got the win needed to earn its Milestone Bowl in 2003. Her mother, Waddell, had to be begged and cajoled to attend the race where Claiborne finally earned its bowl. "She had gotten so sick of seeing that bowl carried back into





the clubhouse,” said Dell Hancock.


And that is, in part, what makes the trophy division of Tiffany & Co.’s business special, says Reynolds. Anyone with enough money can buy a piece of Tiffany jewelry; only victors walk away with one of its hand-crafted trophies.

“We always talk about what is amazing about the trophies is that they can’t be purchased,” said Reynolds. “You have to win one and so the trophy embodies all that hard work. These owners and trainers spend years of their life to win these trophies. When you turn to Tiffany & Co. to commemorate something like that, it is a very proud moment for us. We are now a part of that wonderful legacy that is Keeneland.” **KM**



Keeneland President Bill Thomason presented the Milestone Bowl to Will Farish after Lane's End achieved its 24th graded stakes victory last fall.

A photograph of a modern house at night, illuminated by warm outdoor lighting. The house has large windows and a stone facade. The landscaping includes trees and shrubs, some of which are also lit up. The overall scene is dark, with the lights creating a warm and inviting atmosphere.

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