



A black dog is sitting on a light-colored patio in the foreground. Behind it is a large orange planter filled with purple and yellow flowers. In the background, there is a garden with green hedges, a statue of a person on a horse, and a brick house with a white roofline. The scene is set in a sunny, outdoor environment.

Country LIFE

By Alexandra Beckstett | Photos by Lee Thomas

*Settling at Shawnee
Farm Allows Sally and
Watts Humphrey to
Indulge Their Passion for
Horses Full-Time*

George Watts Humphrey Jr. has an immeasurable love for horses. He heads several successful companies and serves on numerous boards, but at 68 there's nowhere he'd rather be than at the track watching a horse train or in the foaling barn while his next potential stakes winner takes its first breath.

“As a girl, I used to pray I would marry someone who loved horses as much as I did. But I married someone who loves horses more than me.”

– Sally Humphrey



Watts Humphrey enjoys all aspects of breeding and raising Thoroughbreds.

And while the congenial Humphrey and his wife, Sally, are well known among Thoroughbred enthusiasts as breeders of the 1980 Kentucky Derby winner Genuine Risk, 1985 Belmont Stakes winner Crème Fraiche, and other champions, Watts will be the first to say “Every horse is special.”

Like most breeders, Humphrey’s end goal is to produce and race high-caliber horses, but watching his homebreds transform from foals to athletes is one of his biggest thrills.

“We love to be there when they foal, and we love to see them develop,” he said.

As a third-generation horseman, Humphrey has Thoroughbreds in his blood. Sally, on the other hand, cultivated her equine interest by joining the 4-H club and attending The Orme School, a 26,000-acre working ranch in central Arizona, growing up.

“As a girl, I used to pray I would marry someone who loved horses as much as I did. But I married someone who loves horses more than me,” Sally said fondly. “I think I’m No. 2. The horses are Watts’ first love.”

Sally and Watts met while she was enrolled at Briarcliff College in New York; he was studying at Yale before serving in the

U.S. Marine Corps for three and a half years. The two married shortly after graduation and honeymooned, naturally, in the Bluegrass.

"I swear I stepped off that plane, looked around at this land, and said I'd be happy if I never left," said Sally.

And so, 46 years later, the Humphreys have relocated permanently from their Sewickley, Pa., residence to the house they built 12 years ago on the sprawling 1,100-acre Shawnee Farm near Harrodsburg. Although Watts continues to commute to Pennsylvania monthly for business, being based in Kentucky allows him and his wife to indulge their passion for horses full-time.



Everything Horses

Born and raised in a little town called Chagrin Falls, Ohio, Humphrey was on horseback by the time he could walk. At age 4 he was foxhunting, and later he rode polo ponies and show hunters bought off the track or at the yearling sales. "We always did everything on horses as kids growing up," he recalled. "My mom and dad were not involved with racing per se, but my paternal grandfather, George Humphrey, was, and he had Whileaway Farm here in Lexington."

Humphrey's aunt Pansy Poe also was a racing devotee — although more so in Ireland than in the States — and in 1939 she purchased the first 350 acres of Shawnee Farm. Humphrey worked on the farm during summers between semesters at Yale University in the '60s, and after graduating with his master's degree from Harvard Business School in 1970, he returned to Kentucky to help manage the property as his aunt's health declined.

The Humphreys built the main house at Shawnee 12 years ago and now make it their permanent residence. Shawnee's barns, such as the one at left, have yielded many top horses.



That same year, Humphrey's grandfather willed him his first broodmare, jumpstarting his journey into racehorse ownership. When Pansy passed in 1979, Humphrey bought Shawnee Farm from her estate and began assembling his bloodstock — both individually and in partnership with another aunt, Pamela Firman; his mother, Louise Humphrey; Will Farish of Lane's End Farm; and Brereton Jones of Airdrie Stud. He has since refined an elite broodmare band, with some mares representing families he has cultivated for as many as seven generations.

One broodmare family particularly sentimental to Humphrey stems from *Strange Device*, a mare his grandfather bought. Her great granddaughter, graded stakes winner *Likely Exchange*, won 23 races and still holds the record for allowance races won at Keeneland.

"Likely Exchange is probably one of our absolute favorite horses," said Humphrey of the iron mare. He recalled her last start in



The Humphreys, with jockey Frederic Lenclud, celebrate a win at Keeneland. Sally Humphrey bred Kentucky Derby winner *Genuine Risk*, who is commemorated with her dam *Virtuous* in a portrait, left, by Richard Stone Reeves.



Keeneland's *Bewitch Stakes*, a week after she had been bred to *Rich Cream*. The foal she was carrying at the time of the *Bewitch*, in which she finished second, was *Crème Fraiche*, winner of seven grade I races.

"Mark Sellers was [supposed to be] riding her, but he fell in the fourth race, and the stable jockey rode her instead," Sally explained. "She got beat [by a neck] by *Bold 'n Determined*, who, coincidentally, was the first to beat *Genuine Risk*. When she was galloping back after the race, the crowd gave her a bigger hand than they did *Bold 'n Determined*. I was in tears."

Likely Exchange went on to produce another grade I winner, *Dream Deal*, who produced grade I winner *Clear Mandate*, who has also produced two stakes winners. "Now we have their daughters," said Humphrey. "It has been a very special family to us."

Today the Humphreys maintain a broodmare band of 50 and at any given time have about 45 foals and 35 to 40 year-



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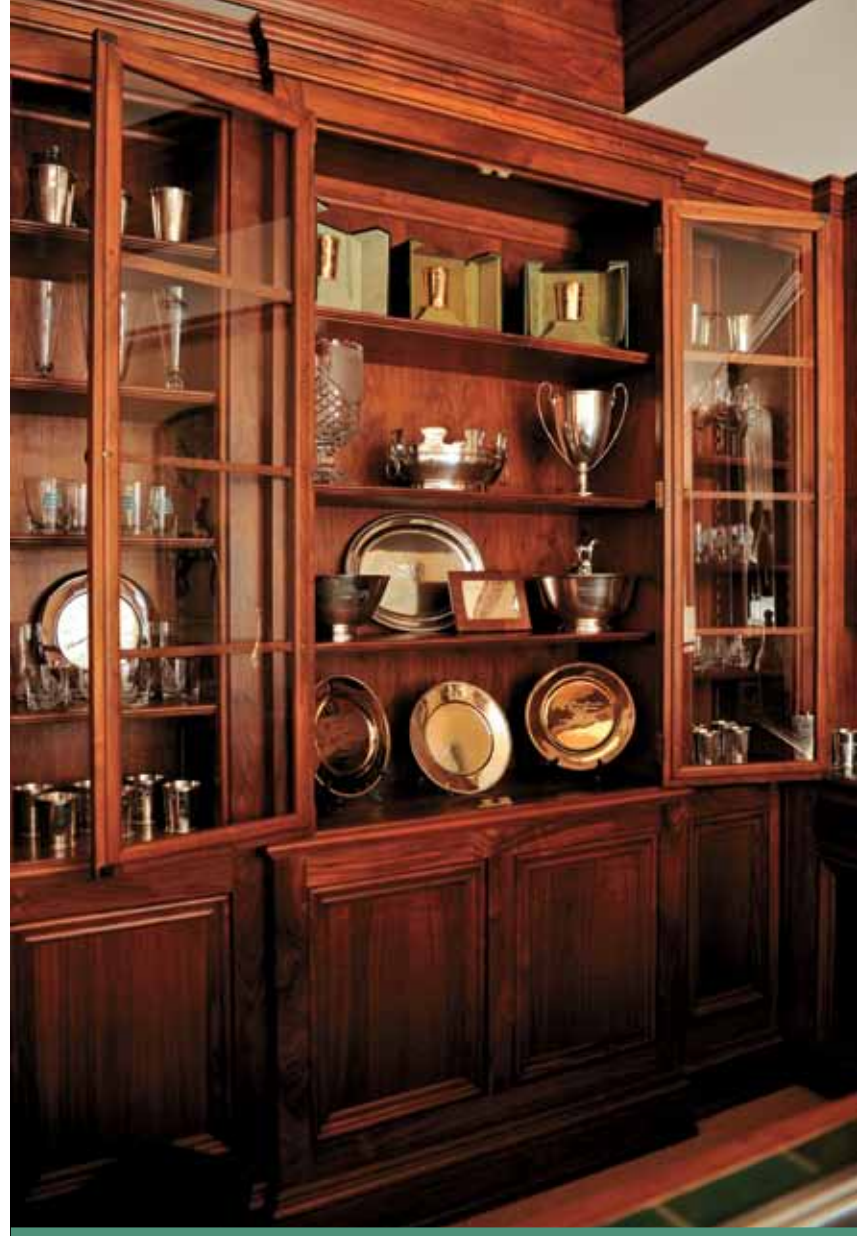
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The Humphreys' trophy case contains evidence of their racing triumphs, including numerous Keeneland julep cups, opposite.

lings. They also house horses coming back from the track in their recently constructed training barn, bringing their barn tally to seven.

Humphrey's racing strategy is to put between 20 and 25 2-year-olds into training each year — the majority of which are homebreds and the remainder fillies he has purchased to freshen the Shawnee Farm gene pool.

"I try to make sure we stay diversified," he explained. "Mr. [Paul] Mellon taught me a long, long time ago that all of a sudden you can wake up in the morning and find yourself with granddaughters that are maidens of one really good mare."

Hence, he sells about six or seven fillies each year and uses those profits to buy into other bloodlines.

Humphrey's 60 or so horses in training are split between his daughter, Vicki Oliver, in Pennsylvania and Florida, and



Lexington-based Rusty Arnold. The Humphreys' home base is Keeneland, where they have been leading owners seven times, and they structure their entire racing program around the track's two meets.

"Rusty is a hands-on horseman," Humphrey said of the trainer who has worked for him since 1991. "He's with his horses, he loves his horses, and he knows all his horses." And to the Humphreys, this dedication and love for the animals are top priority.

"Sally and Watts think of one thing first and that's the horse," said Arnold. "I talk to Mr. Humphrey every day, whether it's Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Year's, Sunday. He is extremely involved."

So involved, in fact, that he doesn't miss a morning at the track or an afternoon at the barns when he's in town and his horses are training. "If he's in range," said Arnold, "he'll be there."

And during race meets the Humphreys make Keeneland outings a family affair. "When we are racing here at Keeneland, they are constantly bringing people to introduce them to our industry," said Rogers Beasley, Keeneland vice president of racing.

The Humphrey Lifestyle

Clearly the horses are far more than a hobby or a business to the Humphreys — they're a passion. And it's a passion their entire family shares. "The good news is all three of our children [who are now grown with families of their own] love the horses," said Humphrey. The Humphreys' five grandchildren seem to have caught the bug as well. They love going to the races, accompanying their grandfather to the track in the mornings, and riding around the farm.

But the Humphreys ensure more than horses fill their family's time. Shawnee Farm is complete with swimming pool, gardens, putting green, and quail hunting fields, as one of the family's other pastimes is bird hunting. They breed their own Labradors and pointers, both for hunting and companionship.

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And on Humphrey's north Florida family plantation live hardy mules and swift shooting ponies rather than sleek Thoroughbreds. This love for the hunt is how Humphrey and Arnold met initially, while on a dove hunt through Lane's End Farm. Now they accompany each other on annual hunting trips and golf outings during the rare breaks from horse training.

"I'd venture to say if I wasn't their trainer, I'd be their friend," said Arnold of the Humphreys. "They are just the most down-to-earth, friendly, and nice couple you'll ever be around. They are extremely proud of what they have done with their home, horses, and farm and love to share it with other people."

Not only do the Humphreys love to entertain (they are known for the elaborate Halloween party, among others, they

throw annually), but they also enjoy having a hand in causes close to their heart. Sally, for instance, is still involved with



In addition to Thoroughbreds, the Humphreys breed sporting dogs. Above, Watts Humphrey and two Labradors enjoy a sunny spot in the house.



A BIT OF SHAWNEE LORE

Long before Shawnee Farm found its way into Humphrey hands, the land belonged to Col. J.P. Chinn, owner of 1883 Kentucky Derby winner Leonatus. One of the many apocryphal tales surrounding the colorful horseman is that he used to sell his horses by the railroad car to Mexican Revolutionary general Pancho Villa. Pancho Villa would travel to Kentucky and stay as a guest at the old Chinn house still standing on the property today.

At the turn of the century, one of Pancho Villa's adversaries told Chinn he would buy a railroad car full of his best horses at a higher rate than Pancho Villa's. Chinn, so the story goes, agreed, took an average lot of horses to the track, moved the quarter pole about 30 yards closer to the finish line, and clocked them all in record time. He sold that railroad car of horses and kept the better ones to sell to Pancho Villa, who happily cleaned his adversary out in every race.

"Whether it's true, I don't know," Humphrey said with a grin.

The Orme School, serves as chair of the Markey Cancer Foundation board in Lexington, and supports the Fayette Alliance for sustainable growth. Humphrey serves on the Keeneland, Breeders' Cup, Blood-Horse Publications, and Churchill Downs Inc. boards and has held past positions with The Jockey Club, American Graded Stakes Committee, and other horse-related organizations.

"They epitomize the best of Thoroughbred racing, and we are lucky to have them here in Central Kentucky," said Beasley.

So why such dedication to the racing industry at a time in their lives when most couples are enjoying an easygoing retirement? "It all starts with the love of horses; that's the whole reason," said Humphrey. "It gets in our blood." 🐾



Shawnee yearlings have plenty of running room on the farm's 1,100 acres.

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