



Cody Dorman of Richmond enjoys a close-up view of horses on their way to the post with his parents Leslie, left, and Kelly and sister Kylie.

# ONE SPECIAL DAY

*Keeneland  
Make-A-Wish Day  
builds lasting,  
happy memories for  
Bluegrass families*

By Robin Roenker

# making a difference

KEENELAND MAKE-A-WISH DAY

**L**ast October, Cade Slone and his family were one of the VIP attendees at Keeneland's 10th annual Make-A-Wish Day. As a Make-A-Wish recipient, Cade, along with his parents and younger brother, got to enjoy a private, pre-race tour of a horse farm, take in a full day of races, and feel the thrill of being in the winner's circle at Keeneland.

After months of treatment to fight Ewing sarcoma, a type of bone cancer, the day offered the perfect way for Cade to celebrate being in remission.

"Just to see him out and playing and being with other people ... He needed to get away," Cade's dad said in a video about the impact of Keeneland's Make-A-Wish Day. "It was something that he needed. It was real nice for him."

## Helping raise awareness

Since the event launched 11 years ago, Keeneland's Make-A-Wish Day has raised more than \$615,000 to help grant more than 92 wishes to Lexington-area children dealing with chronic illness.

"Our office grants about 150 wishes a year, and the average wish costs around \$8,000-\$10,000," said Cassidy Hyde, a development officer for the regional Make-A-Wish office serving Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. "Right now we have around 362 children across Kentucky waiting on a wish. They're needing community support to make it happen, which is why we rely on events like Keeneland's Make-A-Wish Day to help raise awareness."

Make-A-Wish grants wishes to children who are dealing with — or who have recovered from



Bailey Smith receives an encouraging hug from Keeneland President and CEO Bill Thomason during her day at the races.





MARK KAHAN

Destiny Jagers takes in the races from a special vantage point.



PHOTOS BY Z

Jaeden Simpson gets the inside scoop from jockey Julien Leparoux.

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McKenzy Gray talks with jockey Brian J. Hernandez Jr. in the paddock.

— a critical medical condition. But the range of issues these kids are facing varies widely, from cancer and cystic fibrosis to heart conditions, seizure disorders, and more.

Not all Make-A-Wish recipients are dealing with terminal illnesses, and “80 percent of our kids go on to lead happy, healthy, normal lives,” Hyde said. Recipients can be recommended for the program through their medical care

team or through self-referral.

Popular wishes include trips to Disney World or other vacation destinations. Keeneland’s Make-A-Wish Day has helped send children to Disney as well as to Hawaii, Australia, the Bahamas, Switzerland, and even a cross-country RV trip.

The camping trip was granted to 3-year-old Grayce Windels, a 2017 Make-A-Wish Day recipient, before



The 11th annual Keeneland Make-A-Wish Day was held Oct. 11, 2018.

There’s still time to support this year’s Make-A-Wish Day and the accompanying “Wishes for the Win” campaign.



Donate online at [site.wish.org/goto/Keeneland](http://site.wish.org/goto/Keeneland)



To learn more about the regional office of Make-A-Wish, go to <http://oki.wish.org/>



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she passed away from complications of hydranencephaly, a neurological condition.

"The trip allowed her to meet her great-grandparents in Oregon for the first and only time," said Meaghan Prouty, Grayce's mother, who works as a receptionist at Lane's End Farm, a longtime Make-A-Wish Day sponsor. As a former "wish mom," Prouty serves on the newly formed Keeneland Make-A-Wish Day committee, a group recently organized by Hyde to help further the scope and success of the day.

"We got to stay on the beach in California, and she got to see the ocean," Prouty said. "It was just a really nice trip."

## Turning point

During Make-A-Wish Day at Keeneland,

partnering farms and Thoroughbred businesses pay to sponsor each race, agreeing to cover the cost of their assigned child's wish. This year, for the first time, Make-A-Wish set a goal of raising funds for two additional wishes via donations from Keeneland employees and patrons, who contributed through donation barrels at the track and an online donation portal.

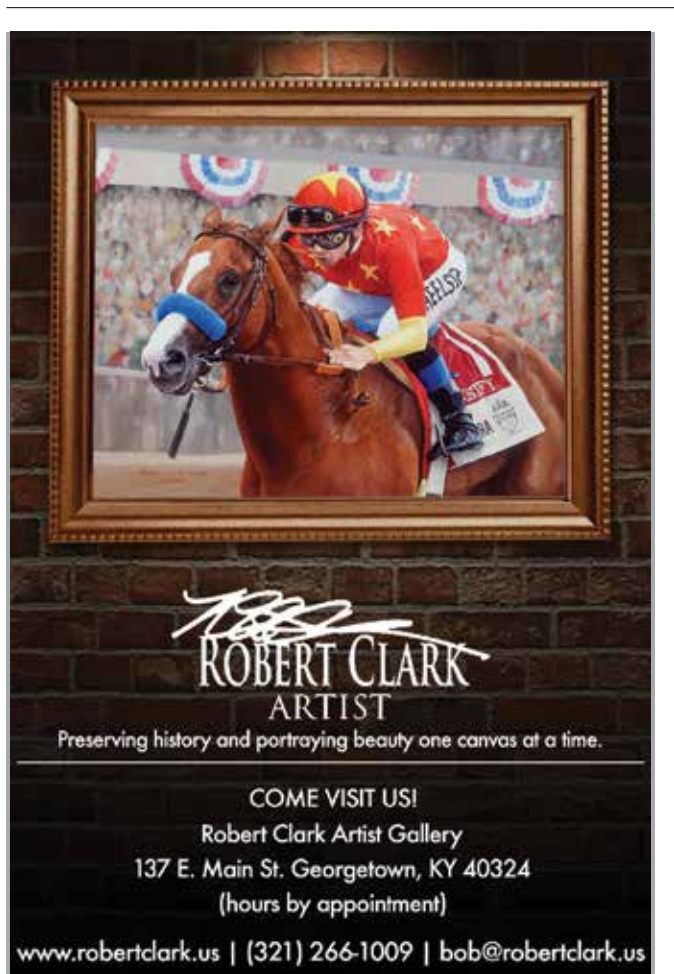
Wish recipients get to visit their sponsoring farm before the race day starts, a special one-on-one experience that often leads to lasting relationships between the farms and the children they've sponsored.

"It's just so special to meet the families because a lot of them don't have horse backgrounds or know much about Keeneland per se. But they get to see some horses,



MARK MAHAN

Keeneland's Kara Heissenbittel says track personnel do their best to ensure a special day.



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PHOTOS BY Z

Decorations and gifts add to the VIP treatment the children receive.

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PHOTOS BY Z

Jack Wells examines a pair of goggles as jockey Declan Cannon explains his racing equipment.

learn about what we do, and then we turn around and introduce them to racing. The end goal, of course, is to grant their wish,” said Carrie Gilbert, a racing and sales coordinator with Flaxman Holdings Ltd., whose Frizzy Foundation has sponsored a wish for at least the past six years. “We’ve kept in touch with many of our wish kids over the years. It’s so special to make that connection and then watch them grow.”

Year in and year out, area farms and Thoroughbred industry partners are al-

ways eager to support the event, as are Keeneland staff.

“Of all the things that Keeneland does ... this is by far the most special day that we get to experience as a Keeneland team,” said Bill Thomason, Keeneland’s president and CEO, in a video highlighting the success of the Make-A-Wish Day event.

Keeneland staff does its best to make sure the Make-A-Wish Day wish recipients and their families leave the races with memories to last a lifetime. “They get a

nice private lunch here at Keeneland. They get to meet the jockeys, who greet them and autograph their goggles. They get to follow the horses out on the track and watch the race from the winner’s circle, and then present the trophy for that race,” said Kara Heissenbittel, Keeneland’s director of employee and patron experience.

Organizers hope the VIP treatment at the track — along with receiving their wishes — can help give a very special group of kids a very special reason to smile.





Destiny Jaggars hands jockey C.J. McMahon a julep cup in a winner's circle ceremony.



Cassidy Hyde is a development officer for the regional Make-A-Wish office.

"This is more than just a warm and fuzzy, nice thing to do," explained Hyde. "The majority of our recipients' families mark the wish experience as the turning point in their child's battle [with their illness]. We often actually see physical benefits from the wish experience — whether it's something to look forward to during their treatment, or something that can help celebrate a treatment success. And in that way the wish really becomes a necessary part of the overall treatment plan that's been put in place for these kids." **KM**

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