

 **making
a difference**

— LRF CARES



*LRF Cares
helps find new
homes and
second careers
for its former
racehorses*

—
By Tracy Gantz
Photos by Wally Skalij



GOING THE



Little Red Feather's Billy Koch, with Marckie's Water before the Eddie Read Stakes, strongly believes in aftercare.

EXTRA STEP

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When Meredith Gibbs joined a Little Red Feather racing partnership in the ownership of Bobby Z Man, she didn't intend to fall in love with the horse.

"When he was out on layup not too far from Santa Anita, I used to go out and visit him all the time," said Gibbs, who lives in Palos Verdes, California. "He was a sweet, sweet horse, and I took a liking to him."

Once Bobby Z Man returned to racing, Little Red Feather lost him in a claiming race. But Gibbs never forgot about him, and once he finished racing she gave Bobby Z Man a home for the rest of his life.

Billy Koch, founder and managing partner of Little Red Feather, and Gary Fenton, also a managing partner, strongly believe in Thoroughbred aftercare. They wanted to create a channel through which people in their racing partnerships could easily help find homes and second careers for the horses that gave them victories and so much fun.

"We've owned a lot of horses over the years, and we felt that we really needed to be responsible to these horses," said Koch.

Like many other racing partnerships that don't extend into the breeding industry, Little Red Feather, which is based in California but races all across the country, often sells horses as breeding prospects once their racing careers end. Some horses do not have residual breeding value, however, and geldings cannot be bred. Koch and Fenton think those horses deserve good homes as well.

"We wanted to put together a charitable organization that made sure that every Little Red Feather horse would always have a place to go," said Koch.

Koch and Fenton created LRF Cares in 2016 as a way to do that. A 501c3-sponsored organization, LRF Cares provides a way for partners to contribute funds to aftercare. It also can raise money through events — a win-win setup because one of Little Red Feather's primary missions is to create a fun atmosphere for its partners.

"It opened up so many things," said Fenton. "When I talk to a potential new partner, they always ask about aftercare. They ask how we care for our horses when they retire. It's important to a lot of people."

To ensure a horse has the best opportunity for a new ca-



Little Red Feather's many partners support the mission of LRF Cares.



Water Trough is an example of a former partnership runner that has gone on to a second career.

reer, Little Red Feather works with organizations that place former racehorses. LRF Cares can provide funds that might be necessary for retraining should the horse go on to something like a hunter/jumper career. Funds also can go toward placing horses at one of the many retired Thoroughbred facilities throughout the U.S.

Renee and Bryan Parcell are Little Red Feather partners who live in Phoenix. Renee became interested in Thoroughbred aftercare and now volunteers her time to help administer LRF Cares.

"I've always been involved in philanthropy, and I asked about

how the horses are placed after they retire," said Renee. "Billy and Gary asked me if I wanted to be a part of LRF Cares, and I said yes."

Koch and Fenton say that Renee helps tremendously with LRF Cares. She does some of the event planning and fundraising, as well as working on the website and accounting.

"Billy and Gary are really good about when horses do retire from racing, they will try to find a home for them," said Renee.

LRF Cares also works with the California Retirement Management Account (CARMA), which has pro-

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Croix Darwin is aiming Water Trough for the Thoroughbred Makeover in October.



PAULA SEBISCH PHOTOGRAPHY

"He has a lot of natural ability," Darwin says.

vided funding and placement programs for Thoroughbred aftercare since 2007. Koch serves as treasurer of CARMA.

"We have had horses that have been successful having an active second career," said Renee. "It is a challenge for us to track them all, but we do have a tracking system for the majority of the horses that have been with LRF."

That system not only tracks horses as they pursue their second careers, Little Red Feather tries to monitor horses it has owned and then sold or lost via a claim. Ideally, the new owners would make arrangements for the horse's retirement when the time comes, but Koch, Fenton, and Parcell stand ready to step in if needed.

"It's making sure these horses are taken care of in their second career," said Koch. "There are so many avenues for these horses. We just have to make sure we put them in the right spot."

Many former Little Red Feather runners, such as Water Trough and McLovin, have found that right spot.

Croix Darwin, a hunter/jumper instructor who lives in Canton, Georgia, adopted Water Trough, who only started twice, at Aqueduct in New York, and never won. He has a thriving new career as a hunter.

"I love Thoroughbreds, and I think they are one of the best breeds out there," said Darwin. "Water Trough has the calmest demeanor. He's quiet and steady, and he has a really big step. He has a really good brain too, so he learns fast."

Darwin has entered Water Trough in this year's Retired Racehorse Project Thoroughbred Makeover. Scheduled for Oct. 2-5 at the Kentucky Horse Park, the Thoroughbred Makeover is for off-track Thoroughbreds with 10 months or less of retraining. The Makeover offers \$100,000 in total prize money for three days of competition in 10 different disciplines.

Water Trough will qualify — Darwin didn't get him until Jan. 15 of this year, just in time to celebrate the gelding's fifth birthday Feb. 18. Water Trough has adapted to his new career so quickly that after only a few months Darwin was using him as a lesson horse for her students.

"He's got one of the most expressive faces," Darwin said. "You always know what he's thinking."

Darwin was able to take Water Trough to hunter/jumper shows fairly quickly because he learns so readily.

"He has a lot of natural ability," she said. "Within the first two rides, I was already jumping verticals."

Darwin obtained Water Trough through ReRun in East Greenbush, New York. Little Red Feather regularly works with several farms in California and New York to find homes for their horses.

Another former Little Red Feather runner enjoying success in the hunter/jumper ranks is McLovin. Little Red Feather bought McLovin at a sale of 2-year-olds in 2007, and he broke his maiden for the partnership in his third start at Aqueduct in 2008. McLovin won a few more races before he was claimed

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at Finger Lakes later that year.

McLovin raced for another year before finding a second career. His accomplishments include winning the Charlie Weaver Memorial Trophy at the 2017 Ox Ridge Hunt Club Charity Horse Show in Connecticut while ridden by Adrienne Iverson.

When a Little Red Feather horse retires and needs a home, all Little Red Feather partners are notified so that, if they desire, they can contribute funds for the horse through LRF Cares. Fenton noted that Little Red Feather partners are enthusiastic donors in these situations.

LRF Cares also conducts fundraising events, usually a major one each year. "This gave us a chance to do things that our partners really like, such as social events," said Fenton. "We had a nice event on Pacific Classic day at Del Mar one year. Another year we did something on Santa Anita Derby day."

For 2019, LRF Cares, Del Mar, and TVG hosted a charity handicapping contest July 20, the first Saturday of the Del Mar meeting. A portion of the proceeds benefited LRF Cares. Handicappers were not only competing for prize money, the winner received an \$8,000 entry to the Del Mar Handicapping Challenge, and second and third received entries into the 2020 National Horseplayers Championship.

"When I talk to a lot of horseplayers, they feel that they would like to do something more in the aftercare world," said Fenton. "They are a big part of the business, gambling on the horses. They are the ones who fuel the industry. I'm so glad to hear from them that they want to be more involved and want to help."

With Koch, Fenton, and Parcell at the helm of LRF Cares, horses racing for Little

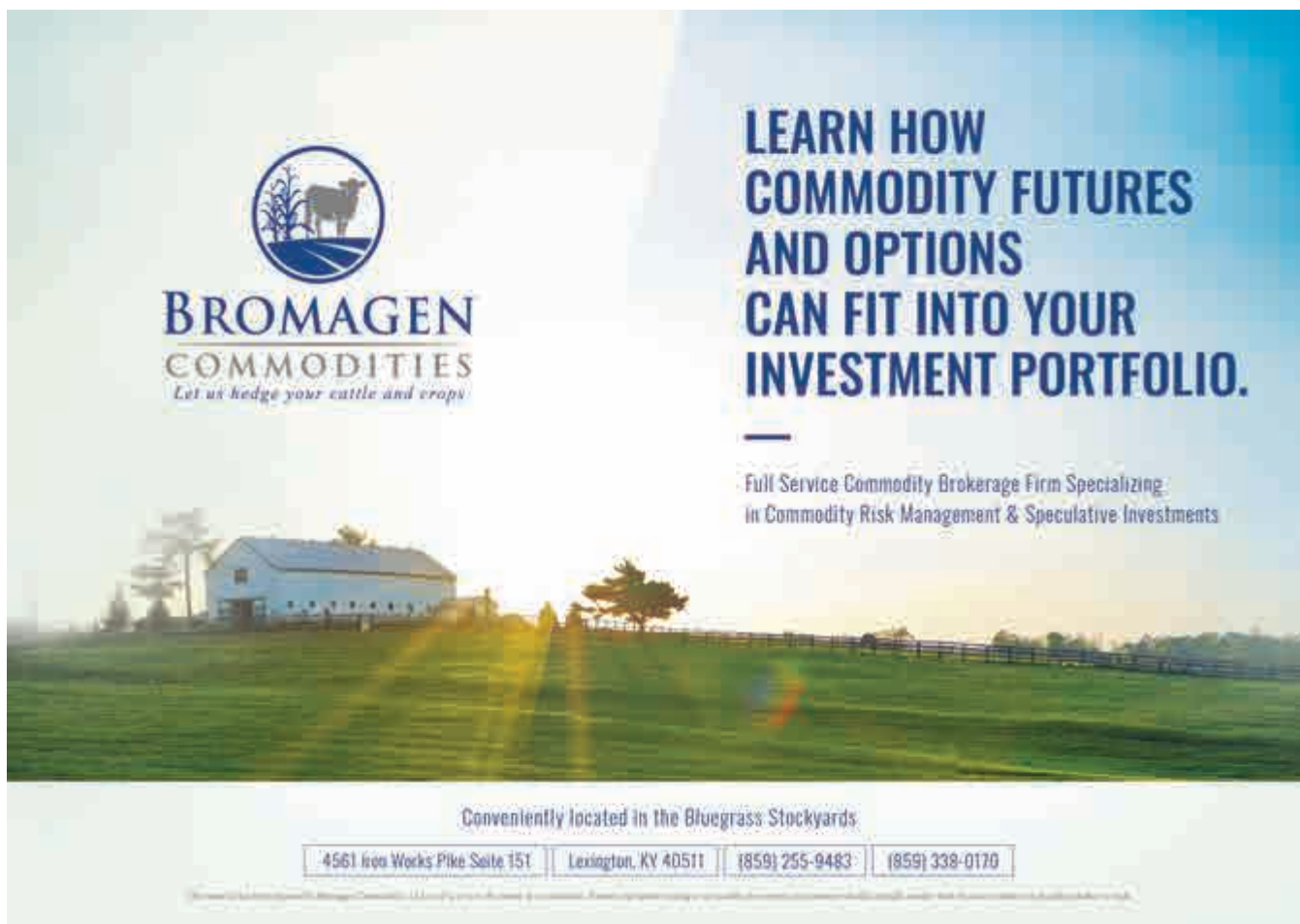



Gary Fenton and Billy Koch have a tracking system to follow horses that raced for them.

Red Feather can find happy second careers once their racing days are completed.

"Our horses become part of the LRF family," said Koch, who has also developed a Little Red Feather podcast that always includes Aftercare Corner to keep partners apprised of what the horses are doing. "I think we have a fiduciary responsibility to make sure that these horses are cared for. When they are done racing, that doesn't mean that their life is over."

Added Parcell, "These horses work really hard for us during the races. There's a potential second career for all these horses. So let's continue to help them." **KM**




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