



FUTURE FANS

Keeneland Kids Club is nurturing tomorrow's racing enthusiasts

By Robin Roenker | Photos by Mathea Kelley

If you're a little girl named Derby Rose, you simply have to love horses. And Derby Rose Pritchard, age 4, of Lexington, does. On a Saturday at Keeneland last fall, Derby Rose was all smiles as she sashayed over to Buckles, the affable mascot of the new Keeneland Kids Club. Derby posed for pictures in her pink cowboy boots, proudly flashing her personalized Kids Club name badge — which kids can wear around their necks like a press pass.

Her mom, Brandi Pritchard, works in the horse industry and read about the Keeneland Kids Club last spring in the

Keeneland newsletter. She signed up Derby Rose as soon as it launched.

"She loves Buckles. She can't wait

to come and see Buckles," said Brandi Pritchard. "When I tell her we're going to Keeneland, she'll say, 'I need my [Kids Club] badge, Mom. Where's my badge?'"

In addition to the visit with Buckles, Derby Rose found lots of other fun at the track, too. After a hot egg-and-sausage breakfast, there were bingo games and a "cake" walk, face painting, crafts, and even the chance to dress like a jockey.



Elin Foley takes in the morning action along the rail and (inset) colors jockey silks.

And when the inside fun was done, kids could wander outside to get an up-close glimpse of the horses' morning workout right from the rail.

It's all part of the fun of a Saturday morning during race season, thanks to the Keeneland Kids Club.

Launched last spring, Keeneland Kids Club already has more than 2,000 members, said Christa Marrillia, Keeneland's director of marketing.

"It's grown faster than we expected. It's exciting," Marrillia said. "The quick growth of the club really shows that we have such a wonderful fan base, filled with young fans that are excited about Keeneland and the horse industry. And we are looking forward to growing the program and continuing to add new offerings and amenities to the Kids Club in the months ahead."

Children ages 12 and under can join the Keeneland Kids Club for free. Members receive a personalized membership badge, invitations to special Kids Club-only events, and a birthday card from Buckles the horse. (Don't miss Buckles showing off his signature dance move, "Hoofin' It," at <http://www.keeneland.com/discover/hoofin-it-buckles>.)

Many of the Saturday morning live race season activities, including the Breakfast with the Works hot breakfast, served from 7-8:30 a.m. in the Equestrian Dining Room, as well as the kids games and activities following, have been a



Left, Derby Rose Pritchard meets mascot Buckles; above, Mickayla Fox has her face painted.

Keeneland tradition for at least 15 years, Marrillia explained.

But the addition of Buckles and the Kids Club brand allows Keeneland to expand those activities and connect better with the track's youngest fans.

"The Kids Club is just one way that Keeneland is working to build upon our family-friendly atmosphere and promote all the great ways that families can enjoy Keeneland, both during the racing season and during the off season," said Keeneland president and CEO Bill Thomason.

In addition to the free Kids Club crafts, games, and activities geared toward the youngest fans, Keeneland also has begun adding family-friendly activities suitable for all ages following the Saturday morning breakfasts during the race season, as part of its "Sunrise Trackside" offerings. These include informational paddock demonstrations on horse care and training beginning at 8:45 a.m., guided walking tours of Keeneland from 8:30-10:30 a.m., a handicapping seminar at 11:30 a.m., and a jockey Q&A session at 12:05 p.m.

They are all part of a line-up that keeps kids and adults alike entertained from breakfast all the way through post time.

For Love of Horses

As the Thoroughbreds thundered

around the far turn in the new-dawn light, 2½-year-old Elin Foley pressed against Keeneland's iconic green rail, sticking her face between the spindles to get as close a view as possible.

Decked out in a pink "Keeneland" sweatshirt with a smile as wide as her face, Elin was clearly in her element. After 10 minutes or so, Elin's mom, Shana Foley of Lexington, announced it was time to go. "Not yet!" Elin pleaded, grabbing hold of the rail.

"We usually try to come at least once per meet," said Shana Foley. "Watching the horses is her favorite part."

The same morning, the Zimmerman family of Lexington came for Breakfast with the Works and the free kids activities and learned about the Kids Club for the first time. They signed their three children — Uma, 7; Shailen, 6; and Deven, 4 — up on the spot, and the kids

beamed as they received their personalized name badges to wear that day.

"It's always nice with three kids for them to feel like they have something of their own, something with their own name on it that they don't have to share," said their mom, Falguni Zimmerman. "They are loving that."

Later, as the family of five ventured out to watch the horses' workouts, their dad said making the trip to Keeneland's morning activities at least once during each racing season is a family tradition.

"They look forward to it. Their favorite thing is seeing the horses, but they love all the games, too."

Connecting with Young Fans

Amid the hustle and bustle of the Keeneland Kids Club game area last fall, children everywhere sported elaborate face paintings, none more beautiful than the sparkly, light-blue horse drawn across the entire cheek of 2-year-old Makenna Fox of Nicholasville.

While the face painting stand was a popular draw, another long line gathered near the jockey costume table, where kids — and even parents who were game — could try on colorful jockey silks and caps and have their pictures made with a stick pony.

Three-year-old Dalton Henderson of Corbin looked dashing in his bright or-

Have children or grandchildren ages 12 or younger?
Sign them up for the free Keeneland Kids Club at www.Keeneland.com/Discover/Join



Above, decked in jockey silks a young guest at the Kids Club Christmas party pets Buckles. Inset, Dalton Henderson displays his Kids Club badge. Right, Makenna Fox learns how to draw horses.

ange silks, as his mother, Victoria, looked on and snapped photos.

The entire Corse family — parents Barry and Dianne, and daughters Caroline, 5, and Ella Kate, 2, of Lexington — posed for their photo in the jockey uniforms, making for a fun and memorable start to the family’s Saturday.

“We are regulars at Keeneland, but this is our first time coming to the morning activities,” said Dianne. “We love racing. We love the atmosphere of Keeneland. And we just enjoy getting out and finding new things for our girls to experience. It’s been a fun day for all of us.”

Offering fun activities where families can bond and enjoy being at Keeneland is what the Kids Club is all about, according to Marrillia.

While the club is still new and focused primarily on the Saturday morning race-season activities, eventually Marrillia hopes to see it expand to offer even more events during Keeneland’s off-season. One such event was last year’s inaugural Kids Club Christmas Party, which welcomed some 200 children and their parents to Keeneland’s Lower Clubhouse. There, kids could make Christmas cookies, take part in a Christmas-themed bingo or “cake” walk game, and get their pictures with Buckles, who was dressed like Santa Claus.

The Kids Club also sponsors many crafts, games, and activities for children during Keeneland’s popular Derby Day racing simulcast in May, and last year the Kids Club even had a float in Lexington’s Fourth of July parade.

“We’ve found that the Kids Club allows us to extend our reach into the community and have a presence at family-friendly events throughout the year,” Marrillia said. “We’ve participated in many community events, like Lexington’s Fourth of July Festival and MayFest, among others, which have allowed us to increase our family outreach.”

Even during the track’s popular fifth-



Jason and Falguni Zimmerman and their three children enjoy a Keeneland morning.

grade field trip program, going into its third year this August — when thousands of Fayette County fifth-graders come to Keeneland to learn more about the equine industry and its economic impact in Kentucky — a highlight for many is the chance to have their class photos taken at the starting gate with Buckles.

“We have a very young demographic of fans at Keeneland who attend our rac-

es. And a lot of these fans include young families,” Thomason said. “So we want to continue to find fun and inviting ways to engage those families and excite children about the horse industry. And the Keeneland Kids Club is the perfect way to do it.” 🐾