

# For the Good of California



by DOUG BURGE

The year 2004 began with much hope and promise, but ended with some questions and uncertainty. The early optimism for the potential of slot revenues faded with the suspension of the Proposition 68 campaign and its defeat in the November election. Tribal gaming in California and the threat of its expansion, particularly in the North, continues to jeopardize the long-term viability of racing in California. Also, other racing jurisdictions have favorably positioned themselves through the addition of purse supplements with slot revenues.

It is indeed vital that the racing industry in the state continues to work vigorously together and pursue the various avenues necessary in order to secure the resources needed to compete. Obviously, this will again be a high priority for the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association (CTBA) for the upcoming year.

Another promising venture at the beginning of the year was the CTBA Sales' Del Mar Yearling Sale. This select venue was to catalogue fewer horses with stronger emphasis on conformation and pedigree. This more select group of yearlings, coupled with the move back to the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, was expected to yield extremely favorable results.

While the average was the highest in the proud 60-year history of the auction, the overall results were disappointing as the buy back rate was over 45 percent and the total number of listed buyers were few.

Many questions, suggestions and ideas have emerged regarding the future of this important venue, and we are exploring the various options available. One thing for certain, is that the CTBA will continue to have a strong presence in the yearling marketplace to assure that California breeders have ample opportunities to showcase their top youngsters. As national sales companies continue to catalogue more select yearlings bred in the state, it is necessary that we provide a strong market in California that will yield similar returns. As breeders, we want our horses to eventually race in the state because the lucrative incentive awards program is geared toward successfully competing in local races. As most will agree, selling in the Golden State contributes to the probability that these yearlings will race here.

We have had some very good discussions with Barretts Equine Ltd. and the Los Angeles County Fair regarding a potential pooling of resources in order to provide a better

marketplace for California breeders. Both organizations are working toward a plan that would allow us to work together for the benefit of the industry. We are hopeful that a final decision and announcement will take place around the beginning of the New Year.

On a final note, our 15th California Cup Day, held in mid-October at Santa Anita Park during the Oak Tree Racing Association meet, and featured substantially in this edition of the magazine beginning on page 19, was once again a successful showcase of the top horses bred in the Golden State. An on-track crowd of 24,450 witnessed full fields and quality racing with total all-source handle at nearly \$16 million. The handle and attendance for the event, while good, were still somewhat disappointing. Both the CTBA and Oak Tree were hoping for 30,000 patrons on-track and higher handle numbers.

The good news is that the attendance was up nearly 40 percent over the previous year and that California-breds received the national recognition they deserve. The planning for next year's Cal Cup will begin soon with the event most likely taking place at the end of the 2005 Oak Tree meet, one week after Breeders' Cup. Historically, this placement on the calendar has yielded the best results.

Happy Holidays, and let's continue to work together to make 2005 the year that places Thoroughbred breeding and racing in California back where it belongs, at the top.

