

McDynamo is crowned 'King of Far Hills'

The Far Hills Race Meeting held its 88th running at Moorland Farms Saturday, Oct. 18, in Far Hills. With 50,000 spectators on-hand, this year's race day benefit The Steeplechase Cancer Center at Somerset Medical Center. More than \$17 million has been raised to benefit Somerset Medical Center in Somerville from this event since the 1950s.

Steeplechase racing in the Somerset Hills is a tradition rooted in local fox hunting at the turn of the last century, and the early days of the Essex Hunt. The origin of what has now become the Far Hills Race Meeting date well before the sport of steeplechase racing first graced the Somerset Hills.

This year's Far Hills Race Meeting purses equaled more than \$500,000; its six races offer the highest purses on the National Steeplechase Association circuit.

With many attendees arriving as early as 8 a.m., the races began at 1 p.m. with Class Shadow's victory in the \$50,000 Peapack hurdle stakes for fillies and mares. First

Diana Tuorto

HUNTERDON HORSE BEAT



The writer, a resident of Stanhope, owns a Morgan mare. She is also the author of several children's novels, most recently Janie's New Legs and Luck of the Draw, which benefit local charities. She runs the Horse Welfare Organizations website at <http://horsewelfare.8k.com> and can be reached at lunar_aradia@yahoo.com.

and second year hurdlers entered the second race, the Foxbrook, where Swagger Stick overtook the field, winning a purse of \$100,000. The third race, the \$50,000 Charles Appleton, attracted some of the second-level stakes horses, or horses not quite ready for the top level, and Rare Bush romped to victory.

The day's highlight was clearly the fourth race, the Grand National, which awarded a prestigious \$250,000 purse. At two 5/8 miles over 14 hurdles, the Grand National is the richest jump race in North America. Crowd favorite Good Night Shirt took his fifth Grade I consecutive victory, bringing his total career earnings to \$844,000. He is now the third top earner in North America.

The highest level for three years old was the \$50,000 Gladstone, won by Class Real Rock. The day's last race, the \$50,000 New Jersey Hunt Cup timber stakes, is the only timber race featured at the Far Hills Race Meeting (run over wooden fences as opposed to the hurdles) and covered three 1/4 miles. This race's emphasis was on stamina and jumping ability and Erin Go Bragh conquered the field.

An Elegant Affair

During and between races, attendees of the Far Hills Race Meeting hosted their own parties and events, marking the day with elaborate feasts, family and college reunions, and business networking opportunities.

More than 40 major corporations reserve tent locations each year. In the reserved spaces, many attendees created unique and extravagant fall picnics, complete with floral centerpieces, hay bale seating, and ice carvings.



Photo By Diana Tuorto

Kim and Bob Basco of West Amwell Township have attended races at Far Hills for more than 20 years.

Two of Far Hills' most recognized race day attendees are Bob and Kim Basco of West Amwell Township. After relocating to their new home in 2003, they were surprised to find that they had more boxes of decorations labeled "Far Hills Race Meeting" than those marked "Christmas."

Over the past 20 years since the Bacsos first came to the races, they have collected stuffed ani-

mals, figurines, vases, blankets, and other items related to steeplechase horse racing and its close ancestor, the fox hunt. Some of their pieces include a Limoge vase featuring a fox hunt scene and a two-foot ceramic figurine of a fox dressed in a traditional red riding outfit, black boots, and hat, which the couple bought at the Philadelphia Flower Show.

One of their favorite race day decorations is a silver wine cooler in the shape of a fox's head. "We love it so much we use it throughout the year, whenever we entertain guests," Kim said.

The couple always arrives at Moorland Farms as soon as the gates open—about 8 a.m.—to start decorating. Hay bales are stacked to form a border around their race day spots, located on the hill near the course's last jump. The hay bale border creates a mini outdoor café, with round tables covered in colorful tablecloths. Fox and horse decorations, mums, pumpkins, and gourds are propped up along the hay bales at the spot's entrance and buffet table, making the space stand out.

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among the other reserved spots.

This year, the Bacsos dressed up a family of fox statues to reflect the 2008 presidential race. "My husband and I are backing different candidates, and to avoid any controversy among other race day attendees, we decided to dress our foxes in patriotic attire to encourage people to vote without backing a specific candidate," Kim said.

The 2008 Far Hills Race Meeting will hardly be the Bacsos' last. "We do a lot of entertaining throughout the year, especially during the holidays," Kim added. "But the Far Hills Race is

by far our favorite. It's just a fun day to be outdoors and spend with friends."

The King Of Far Hills

Prior to the running of the Grand National, event chairmen John von Stade of Bernardsville, and Guy Torsilieri of the Whitehouse Station section of Readington Township, presented recently retired Far Hills champion, McDynamo, as the "King of Far Hills." This year marked the first time since 2001 that the 11 year-old gelding has not competed at the Far Hills event.

With earnings of more than \$1.3 million and three Eclipse Awards as Champion Steeplechaser, the Kentucky-bred son of Dynaformer (also Barbaro's

sire) has a perfect 7-for-7 record at Far Hills. McDynamo first ran to victory in 2001 in a maiden hurdle race, then returned to take the 2002 Foxbrook before winning the next five consecutive Breeders' Cup Grand Nationals.

"He (McDynamo) deserves some kind of send-off and our fans deserve to see him again," said Torsilieri. "He was such a part of our race meet for so long that people recognize his name and know what he accomplished."

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