

BARRY IRWIN'S REMARKS AT THE 4TH ANNUAL STAN BERGSTEIN AWARD TEAM VALOR REACHED OUT FOR STUDENTS TO HEAR IMPORTANT TOPICS

Horse is racing unique. Unlike other major sports, ours encompasses creating, birthing, nurturing, training and racing its athletes. It's an all-encompassing industry.



Barry Irwin thought “big” this year after the Stan Bergstein Award started small in a space at the Thoroughbred Club of America across from Keeneland that barely held 25 people. About 150 attended last night at Fasig-Tipton.

Breeders create our product. Trainers condition our athletes. Farm managers care for our mares. Stallion managers develop our sires. And this circle of equine life is supported by sales companies and racetracks and veterinarians.

For the initial 150 years, organized horse racing, and breeding, and selling in America were chronicled by a free and vigorous press. In the last decade all that has changed.

Today, a young woman named Alycia Wincze Hughes—who covers racing for our local newspaper, the *Lexington Herald Leader*—as of November 1 stands alone as the last remaining beat writer for a daily paper in the whole of America.

It doesn't take a crystal ball to figure out that if our sport and supporting elements of the industry, do not have a thriving presence of writers able to ply their trade, our entire enterprise will not be long for this world.

internet sites that cover racing and provide turf writers with an outlet for their stories. The recently developed *Thoroughbred Racing Commentary* springs to mind.

Replacing the dailies, thankfully, have been some

However, there are not nearly enough places where an appetite exists for investigative stories or OP-ED pieces.

When Stanley Bergstein died 4 years ago, I started a writing award not only to honor him, but to encourage other outlets and writers to generate hard hitting stories. I feared *Daily Racing Form* would never hire another writer to take Mr. Bergstein's place. Alas, they have not.

No sport or sports-related industry that interacts with its fans and supporters as much as horse racing, can hope to grow and thrive—or hold their own for that matter—until it is covered and analyzed by serious journalists.

I had hoped when starting the Bergstein award that the \$25,000 first prize would encourage writers to submit more hard hitting pieces. Over the past four years, we have encountered some marvelous pieces of racing-related journalism.

Most of the stories have come from three sources—basically all of them available on line—from *The Paulick Report*, the *Thoroughbred Daily News* and *The Blood-Horse*. Two writers have risen to the fore—ex-*Blood-Horse* editor Ray Paulick of the *Paulick Report* and Frank Angst of *The Blood-Horse*.

If the Bergstein Award has caused more hard-hitting piece to be written, the evidence of it had eluded me. Eight stories received nominations this year. I will say this about the 8 stories—each one is a gem and each one, seriously, is deserving of an award. That old canard we hear every spring about it being an honor just to be nominated for an Academy Award—well, in the instance of the 2015 Stanley Bergstein Writing Award—it's actually true!

The quality brought to the enterprise this year in the nominated pieces is truly inspiring. I am awed by each one of them. And I will let you in on a little inside secret—the 5 judges had a nearly impossible task in picking a winner. It went right down to the wire.

We have seen recently the emergence of some new on-line publications, blogs and websites that promise to fill the void left by the demise of traditional publications.

Racing exists today because a lot of old white-haired guys—not unlike me—have maintained a life-long passion for the Sport of Kings and have used their energy and capital to support and, in some instances, prop up the game, and flat out simply refuse to let it die.



Members of the University of Louisville Racing Club who traveled to Lexington for last night's event on a coach Team Valor arranged.

Tonight, we purposely invited a lot of young people to attend our award ceremony, to send them the message that if they want to see our great sport continue to be a presence on the national scene, they are going to have to use their creativity and energy to get involved.

We need more stories and more platforms to make them available to readers. Racetrack publicity and promotion alone cannot move the enterprise forward. Only journalism can stimulate the intellect and jump-start the heart of

its followers.

We need thinkers and enthusiasts to write stories on-line, on websites that have not even been initiated yet. We need to generate some written dialog between those who follow the sport and those responsible for putting on the show.

What would Broadway or the movies be without critics and interaction?

I remain hopeful that young folks with passion and ideas will fill the void left by Stan Bergstein, the Thoroughbred Times, and Daily Racing Form's editorial pages, by adding to the already existing outlets in our industry.