

# South Florida Sun-Sentinel

## Vote on Sumter horse track with gambling is Tuesday

By Christine Show  
South Florida Sun-Sentinel  
June 15, 2008

The developer of a proposed quarter-horse racetrack in Sumter County picked a location near thousands of retirees with plenty of money to drop \$2 bets: residents of The Villages retirement community.

"That's where the population is," said 25-year-old Michael Goldstein, vice president of the Green Bridge Co., based in Bettendorf, Iowa. "These are the people who have the most time to come."

Residents in Sumter -- which includes parts of The Villages -- will go to the polls Tuesday to decide the fate of the gambling proposal that calls for a 100-acre quarter-horse racetrack and card-club room.

Goldstein approached the Sumter County Commission in April, and under state law the commission must allow voters to decide the proposal, County Administrator Bradley Arnold said. Early voting began June 9.

The proposed \$20 million Oxford Horse Park -- on the west side of U.S. Highway 301 near the Sumter and Marion county lines just north of County Road 466 -- would host quarter-horse races six to seven weekends in the first year.

This isn't Goldstein's only plan for quarter-horse racing. He submitted plans for a track in DeBary, and City Council members there have the power to squash the project.

Separate from Goldstein, another race-track project is in the works in Melbourne.

Not everyone, however, is champing at the bit to place a bet.

### PROS

\*REVENUE: Goldstein and his campaign, Vote Yes for Horse Park, say the facility will bring additional revenue, family entertainment and jobs to the rural county. In the first year, Goldstein projects, \$200,000 in taxes from the card-club room will come into the county, with \$200,000 more from real-estate taxes.

\*JOBS: The campaign also expects 100 jobs will be created as a result of the park, scheduled to be built July 9, 2009.

### \*POSITIVE VIEWS FROM HORSE PEOPLE:

Don McDuffee, a breeder who owns McDuffee's Quarter Horses in Ocala, said he would support such a facility. There would be no harm to the horses and it could only boost the area's economy, he said. "I think it would be great," McDuffee said. "Any time you bring people into the area is an economic boost."

Connie Hearn, a horse trainer, welcomes the facility as a neighboring homeowner who prefers a horse track over possible alternatives such as residential or big commercial properties. The facility also will provide her a place to train

her quarter horses for barrel races, she said. "With the price of gas, we can go out in our backyard and barrel race," said Hearn, who decided to help the campaign. "I can use their arenas to train."

## CONS

### \*FEARS OF NEGATIVE IMPACTS:

Opponents fear crime, traffic and negative social effects such as gambling addictions. Craig Attaway, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wildwood, said the negative effects of gambling would threaten area residents. Attaway voiced his concerns in a town-hall meeting in late May that 200 people attended. "The idea that it will bring increased revenue to Sumter County is a lot more of wishful thinking," Attaway said. "The long-term costs of gambling addictions and crime rates offset any economic gain we could have."

\*CONFUSION OVER NAME: "Oxford Horse Park" may mislead horse enthusiasts familiar with horse parks where gambling does not occur, said Shelley Lambert, director of events for the Florida Horse Park in Ocala. "We think with both places in such close proximity, the usage of 'horse park' confuses the general public of the purpose of the facility," she said. "We do absolutely no horse racing at all."

\*WILL IT WORK? Former quarter-horse racer Carol Harris of Reddick likes the idea of racing but is skeptical that the track would be successful. "I just don't understand how they think it's going to go," Harris said. "In a rural area or with a bunch of retirees with a limited income, you don't have money to support a racetrack. If they do, it's all new to me. This is good, old plain horse sense."

## RESIDENTS

Several members of the Property Owners Association in The Villages expressed concern about the horse-facility idea, president Joe Gorman said. Residents worry the facility will bring increased crime, traffic and outside influences that may change the feel of the community, Gorman said.

"I could say that all the comments from POA members are negative," he said.

But Gorman said he is keeping an open mind.

"Personally I feel that if the operation were managed properly to minimize negative influences," he said, "it could be a worthwhile thing for Sumter County."

## BETTING

Two bucks is the typical wager for an individual race. Eight races would be held on a given day. On days without live races, other equestrian sports can be played with no wagering. These include barrel racing, pole bending and dressage. A separate, year-round card room is proposed alongside the track where people could play poker and wager on games. There would also be a restaurant and sports bar at the facility, which would hold 1,000 to 1,500 people, Goldstein said.

## WHAT IT IS

A quarter-horse race lasts about 21 seconds. A row of horses runs a short distance, usually a quarter of a mile in a straight strip on the track. Quarter horses are known for their ability to run quickly in a short space. This type of racing differs from other horse races, such as with thoroughbreds, because quarter horses don't race completely around the track.