

The Villages Daily Sun

Horse club leaders see benefits in quarter-horse facility

By Meta Minton
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THE VILLAGES — Central Florida has a long history with horses.

The Villages Horse 'N' Around Club has enabled Villagers to continue bonds or reconnect with their equestrian friends. The club has been a runaway success. The Horse 'N' Around Club has grown from 50 members just a couple of years ago to more than 200 today.

“Many of us have had a lifelong love of horses. Many club members just want to be close to horses again,” said Tony DePasqual, a Villager and one of the club’s officials.

The club indulges its love of horses with regular trail rides, barbecues and visits to local horse farms.

So it’s no surprise that Horse 'N' Around Club members have been keeping a keen eye on the proposed vote slated for Tuesday in Sumter County on a proposed quarter-horse racing facility that would be located on 117 acres approximately two miles north of County Road 466 and west of U.S. Highway 301 in Oxford.

Officials with the company backing the project, Sumter Real Estate Holdings LLC, have announced a fall 2009 grand opening for the gaming operation that would include a racetrack of about five-eighths of a mile in

length, if the vote is successful and government approval is received. Company officials have indicated that the facility would include operating a card room 12 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

DePasqual and fellow club official Leslie Kalwara said the gambling aspect of the horse-racing facility has overshadowed the benefits the facility could offer to the local horse community.

The planned facility would be one of the most unique facilities of its kind and would host year-round equestrian events and many youth-related events, said Kalwara, who owns property in The Villages and fulfills her passion for horses at her horse farm on Gray’s Airport Road outside Lady Lake.

The proposed facility would potentially host a number of equestrian events including cutting, team penning, barrel racing and dressage, just to name a few.

“I think it will give the residents a chance to get closer to horses,” DePasqual said.

The Villages Horse 'N' Around Club has not taken an official position on the quarter-horse racing facility and is not instructing club members on how they should vote.

Meta Minton is a managing editor with the

Daily Sun. She can be reached at 753-1119,
ext. 9332, or at
meta.minton@thevillagesmedia.com.