

PA Thoroughbred REPORT

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Jim CoCue

Bold Curlin represents labor of love

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It's a business of ups and downs, as all involved know. And it's often the downs that pile up quicker than the ups. But it's a business with an asterisk, and that asterisk is horses. If you love them, as Rush does, then that prevails over all.

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Rising sprint star Falling Sky in Florida



Barbara D. Livingston

No "coulda, woulda, shoulda" for Alina Muther, who sold rising sprint start Falling Sky, winner of the Grade 3 Gulfstream Park Sprint Stakes as a weanling.

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PA News Briefs: Smarty Jones & Jump Start Return To PA

Top Pennsylvania sires Jump Start and Smarty Jones have safely returned home after spending the past six months in the Southern Hemisphere and are ready for the upcoming breeding season at Northview PA.

PA-bred Norman Asbjornson enters stud at Pin Oak Lane



Thomas McClay and Harry Nye's Norman Asbjornson, a multiple stakes winner of \$536,600 by dual classic-winning champion Real Quiet out of stakes winner Merryland Missy, is Pennsylvania's newest stallion.

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PA-breds on Experimental Free Handicap

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Gracer retired after third straight stakes score

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Bullsbay El Padrino Fairbanks Jump Start Medallist Smarty Jones

Bold Curlin represents labor of love for Two Sisters' Farm

Deborah Rush went into the horse business because she loves horses. She's stayed in it for the same reason, but her staying power has weakened.

It's a business of ups and downs, as all involved know. And it's often the downs that pile up quicker than the ups. But it's a business with an asterisk, and that asterisk is horses. If you love them, as Rush does, then that prevails over all.

Rush breeds horses at her Two Sisters' Farm in East Fallowfield Township, although she usually just tells people it's in Coatesville. She recently experienced an "up" when a horse she bred won a stakes in Maryland. Bold Curlin, a 4-year-old son of Curlin and her mare To the Brim, won the Native Dancer Stakes on Jan. 25 at Laurel Park for his fourth victory in 11 starts. Michael Trombetta trains him at Fair Hill.

Rush bought To the Brim in foal to Curlin for \$125,000 in 2009 at Keeneland. Two years later she sold the yearling foal, Bold Curlin, for \$130,000, also at Keeneland. Last month she sold another To the Brim foal, this one by Gio Ponti, for \$200,000, again at Keeneland.

To the Brim is one of five broodmares Rush owns. She's never owned more than six at a time after starting Two Sisters' Farm in 1999. Her plan was to sell all the foals, but she ended up racing the ones that no one wanted; she thought they deserved a chance.

"I wanted a business where I could be around horses," she says. "But I really don't do it for the business. That's kind of the problem. For small breeders like me, it's one good year, one bad year, one good year, two bad years. It's been a huge education. You have to get the horse out of the mare, get the horse standing and be correct, get the horse to the sales ring and be popular. It's a long run and a lot of variables nobody can control."

Rush entered the business after suffering an injury while show jumping. A horse flipped over on top of her and crushed her



JIM MCCOUE

leg. She named the operation Two Sisters' Farm because the first two horses she bought for jumping were sisters, and because her sister, the Philadelphia playwright Catherine Rush, has been a "support partner." She's not involved financially, Deborah says.

The finances came from family money, she says. "But as my father said, 'The best way to make a small fortune with horses is to start with a large one.' Unfortunately," Rush says, "that has run a little too true."

She has sold yearlings for \$400,000 and \$475,000. But she has also had a foal born with half a brain, another with Down syndrome, another with a hole in a cannon bone. Another broke a sesamoid when a month old. The first really good horse she bred, Lovely Afternoon, won the Arlington Breeders' Cup Oaks-G3 at 3 in 2004 at Arlington Park and then underwent routine surgery for removal of a bone fragment. She never woke up from the anesthesia.

"Overall I do love it," she says, giving credit to her farm workers Antonio Rubio Palacios and Alfonso Rubio Olvera. "But I do the farm work in the winter, and this winter has been exceedingly trying. Plus, I'm the single mom of a 13-year-old daughter."

She's planning to downsize, she says, hoping to wind up with two or three mares.

"Certainly I'm very excited when the horses do well, when they sell well, when they go to good homes, when they're successful," she says. "But you have no control over that. I've sold horses who haven't been treated well. And no matter how many phone calls you make to a trainer to say, 'I'll take the horse back when it's finished its racing career,' sometimes the horse just disappears."

"I would say I am definitely getting more discouraged, because I really care about the animals. It's exceedingly hard to think that some aren't having at least a decent life, because I feel responsible for them being here." ★

Rise of Falling Sky leaves breeder with no regrets

When Falling Sky was born four years ago at Northview Stallion Station's Pennsylvania division in Peach Bottom, a worker at the farm called Alina Muther to tell her that the colt, by Lion Heart, had a heart-shaped star on his forehead. When Falling Sky sped to a 5½-length victory Feb. 8 in the Grade 3 Gulfstream Park Sprint Stakes, Muther focused on that star as he drew away down the stretch.

And that prompted another round of coulda, woulda, shoulda.

Muther, who lives in Fort Washington but spends winters in Marco Island, Fla., bred Falling Star and then sold him as a weanling for \$16,000. He later sold as a 3-year-old for \$425,000 and raced in the Kentucky Derby. At the same sale where Muther sold Falling Sky—2010 Keeneland November breeding stock—she also sold his mother, Sea Dragoness, whom she bought four years earlier for \$48,000, for \$9,000.

But the second-guessing never lasts long.

"When I sold Falling Sky, that was another mouth I didn't have to feed," she says. "That's how you have to look at it. I try to sell them as weanlings, because, frankly, you just never know; a horse can run into a fence. You get a little bit more for them as a yearling, but you take more risk. I've been pretty fortunate selling the weanlings for decent money."

As for selling Sea Dragoness, she says, "You have to cull. You have to have a lot of money to keep a mare all through her life—and hope that maybe when she's 16 she'll produce a Triple Crown winner or something. You have to look at this as a business."

Muther calls hers Copper Penny Stables. She was 25 when her mother died, and as she contemplated getting into the breeding business, she says, "Every time I looked down I kept seeing heads-up pen-



Barbara D. Livingston

nies. I laughed to myself and said, 'Mom, are you trying to tell me something?'

She bought her first mares in 2006, and by 2013 she had more than 30 horses—broodmares in Kentucky, New York, Maryland and Pennsylvania, as well as weanlings, yearlings and racehorses. She sold several broodmares last year to keep her small enterprise from getting out of hand, but her philosophy remains the same: For the most part, keep her best mares in Kentucky and sell the weanlings, and keep the foals from her less-commercial mares and race them—whenever possible race the Pennsylvania-breds in Pennsylvania.

"Pennsylvania breeding, it's been very good to me," she says. "We love getting those breeders/owner awards. Those checks are really wonderful."

Her biggest sale was a Tapit colt—this one she sold as a yearling—out of her mare Victory Road, which she purchased for

\$75,000. The colt, named Tritap, sold for \$450,000 at the 2010 Keeneland September yearling sale.

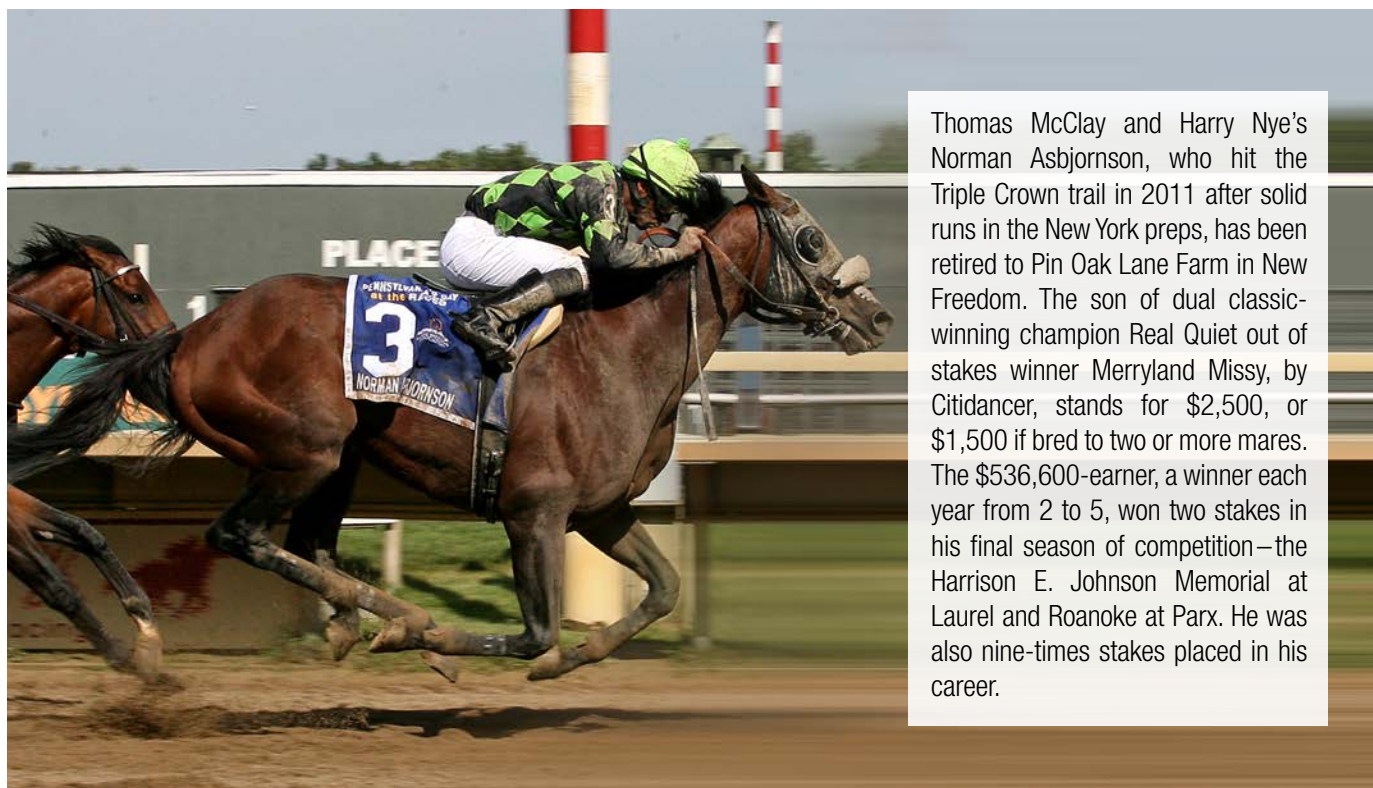
But the horse she's watching closest is Falling Sky. After his adventure last year on the Derby trail (from winning the Sam F. Davis Stakes to finishing last in the Kentucky Derby), he seems to have found his niche as a sprinter for the trainer George Weaver. Muther owns Falling Sky's half-sister, a 6-year-old daughter of Lemon Drop Kid named Lemon Splash, whom she bred and raced. Lemon Splash is booked to Scat Daddy.

"Let's face it, anything that Falling Sky does adds to her value," Muther says. "But mainly, I just hope that Falling Sky does as well as he can possibly do, and that his owners and his trainer have the best of luck. It's just a wonderful thing when a horse you bred ends up doing what he's doing." ★



Pennsylvania News Briefs

PA-bred stakes star Norman Asbjornson enters stud at Pin Oak



Thomas McClay and Harry Nye's Norman Asbjornson, who hit the Triple Crown trail in 2011 after solid runs in the New York preps, has been retired to Pin Oak Lane Farm in New Freedom. The son of dual classic-winning champion Real Quiet out of stakes winner Merryland Missy, by Citidancer, stands for \$2,500, or \$1,500 if bred to two or more mares. The \$536,600-earner, a winner each year from 2 to 5, won two stakes in his final season of competition—the Harrison E. Johnson Memorial at Laurel and Roanoke at Parx. He was also nine-times stakes placed in his career.

WELCOME HOME SMARTY JONES AND JUMP START

Seemingly worlds away, top Pennsylvania sires Jump Start and Smarty Jones returned safely home to the Keystone State in February after spending the past six months in the Southern Hemisphere. Smarty Jones arrived back to Northview PA in Peach Bottom the first week of the month after standing his third season in Uruguay. Jump Start joined him in the

Northview stallion barn two weeks later upon his return from Argentina. Ranked in the top five among active sires in the Mid-Atlantic region by progeny earnings in 2013, Smarty Jones and Jump Start were also the region's leading active sires of stakes winners. Jump Start's first Pennsylvania-sired crop came to the races in 2013, and has yielded

graded stakes winner Miss Behaviour and eye-catching 3-year-old Just Call Kenny. Smarty Jones' first Pennsylvania-sired runners are 2-year-olds this year. In 2013, Jump Start was the busiest stallion in the region when he covered 78 mares. Smarty Jones was bred to 47 mares. ★



Pennsylvania News Briefs

2013 EXPERIMENTAL FREE HANDICAP

STORMIN INTI TOP PA-BRED COLT . . . MISS BEHAVIOUR HIGHWEIGHTED FILLY

Six Pennsylvania-bred juvenile stakes horses were weighted on the 2013 Experimental Free Handicap, which attempts to assess that year's 2-year-olds for a hypothetical 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ -mile race on dirt. The top-weighted Pennsylvania-bred was Miss Behaviour, at 114. The daughter of Jump Start, bred by Cal MacWilliam and Teitelbaum and Associates, was weighted three pounds higher than Brushwood Stable-bred Storming Inti, the leader among state-bred colts. Also listed were colts/geldings Extrasexyhippzster (107 pounds) and Hollywood Talent (104), and fillies Gracer (105) and Pure Lady Like (104).

NINE PENNSYLVANIA STALLIONS REPRESENTED

Twelve juveniles of 2013, representing nine Pennsylvania stallions, were weighted on the Experimental. Pin Oak Lane's late sire Rockport Harbor led the state with three on the list, headed by Ria Antonia, who was weighted equal to Eclipse Award winner She's a Tiger as top filly, with 123 pounds. Rockport Harbor also sired graded stakes-winning colt Rise Up (114) and stakes-winning gelding Cloud Harbor (102).

Other Pennsylvania sires were: Any Given Saturday—Smart Cover (111); Richies Party Girl (f) (113); Fairbanks—Synapse (f) (100); Jump Start—Miss Behaviour (f) (114); Offlee Wild—She's Offlee Good (f) (110); Pure Precision—Pure Lady Like (f) (104); Silver Train—Silver Valley (f) (104); Smarty Jones—Smarty's Echo (111); Talent Search—Hollywood Talent (104).

Fairbanks, Jump Start and Talent Search stood in Pennsylvania when the crop of 2011 was conceived.

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Pennsylvania News Briefs

GRACER'S UNEXPECTED RETIREMENT

The dazzling 3-year-old filly Gracer, a winner of three straight stakes, the last a dominating 10¼-length performance in the \$100,000 Dearly Precious at Aqueduct on Feb. 8, has been retired. The filly exited the race with a fractured sesamoid in her left front ankle, according to her trainer and co-owner Tony Dutrow.

"It was a spectacular performance, and now it's over," said Dutrow. The injury didn't require surgery, and the filly is recuperating at Three Chimneys in Kentucky. Plans are to breed her this spring and offer her at the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky sale in November. Dutrow said no decision has been made on a stallion. "I'll defer to Three Chimneys on making the mating decision," he added.

The eye-catching roan filly bred by Russell B. Jones Jr. was purchased by Dutrow at the Keeneland September Yearling sale for \$150,000. Three Chimneys Racing LLC bought into Gracer prior to her first start of the new year, the Marshua Stakes on Jan. 4 at Laurel which she won by three lengths. In the Dearly Precious, she recorded a Beyer Speed Figure of 96, the highest of any 3-year-old filly this year to date.

Gracer finished in the top three in all four of her starts at 2, culminating with a win in the Blue Mountain Juvenile Fillies by nearly four lengths. She also finished third in the Grade 2 Matron at Belmont and retires with a record of 6-4-1-1 and earnings of \$243,000.

UNION RAGS' FIRST PA-BRED FOAL



Phyllis Wyeth's Belmont Stakes winner Union Rags got his first Pennsylvania-bred foal when Wyeth's own mare Sapphire n' Silk delivered a colt on Feb. 11 at Valery McNeely's Equivine Farm. A half-brother to graded winner Shaniko, the classically-bred bay is "quite a good foal, very bright, alert and good size," reported Russell Jones.



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Calendar of Events

PHBA EVENTS

- March 1** Pennsylvania Nursery Stakes at Parx
- May 21** PHBA Annual Meeting, Kennett Square Country Club, Kennett Square
- May 30** PHBA Awards Banquet, Penn National Race Course

SALES

- March 10-11** Ocala Breeders' Sales Company Selected Sale of Two-Year-Olds in Training
- March 24** Fasig-Tipton Florida Two-Year-Old Sale
- April 7** Keeneland April Two-Year-Olds in Training Sale
- April 21-24** Ocala Breeders' Sales Company Spring Sale of Two-Year-Olds in Training



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Notable PA-Bred Stakes Winners



ZEEWAT →

c, 4, Harlan's Holiday - Delizia
Won - LOST IN THE FOG S., \$50,000, 6 fur., 4YO/
UP F, Golden Gate Fields, Feb. 17.



ON THE BACKSTREETS →

f, 3, Street Boss - Mutakaway
Won - SWEET LIFE S., \$75,000, 6.5 fur, 3YO, Turf
Fillies, Santa Anita Park, Feb. 15.



GRACER →

f, 3, Exchange Rate - Tina's Goal
Won - DEARLY PRECIOUS S., \$100,000, 6 fur.,
3YO, Fillies, Aqueduct, Feb. 8.



ELEVATED →

f, 3, Jump Start - We Wak Harbor
Won - CHRISTOPHER ELSEMER MEMORIAL S.,
\$75,000, 6.5 fur., 3YO, Parx, Feb. 8.

BOLD CURLIN →

c, 4, Exchange Rate - Tina's Goal
Won - NATIVE DANCER S., \$100,000, 1 1/16 mi.,
4YO/UP, Fillies, Laurel Park, Jan. 25.



Click Horse's Name
To View Race Video