

Joe Thomson to receive Bergstein-Proximity Award; heads list of USHWA human award winners

from the U.S. Harness Writers Association

Harrisburg, PA --- The United States Harness Writers Association today released the majority of their 2013 human award winners for excellence in the Standardbred industry. Heading the list is **Joe Thomson**, winner of the **Stanley F. Bergstein-Proximity Achievement Award**.

The award, originally named for the great trotting mare, Proximity, is considered the second-most-prestigious honor in harness racing, after the Hall of Fame.

In 2012, the name of the award was altered to honor harness racing's only double Hall of Famer, the Stanley F. Bergstein, and is now referred to as the Bergstein-Proximity award. It is presented annually to a person or organization for outstanding contributions to harness racing.

In 1991, Joe Thomson and his wife JoAnn founded Winbak Farm on the site of Winfield Farm, where the great Thoroughbred Northern Dancer was foaled. They employed the Win from Winfield with the initials of their children -- Bradley, Ashlee and Kimberly -- to form the name Winbak.

Their main farm is located on more than 2,000 acres near Chesapeake City, Md. Winbak Farms has been named Breeder of the Year by USHWA three times. This past July, two horses owned by Winbak Farm, [Bettor's Delight](#) and Lady Ashlee Ann, were inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Over the last 10 years, Thomson's Winbak Farm bred, raised and sold three Horses of the Year -- No Pan Intended in 2003, Rainbow Blue in 2004 and [Muscle Hill](#) in 2009. [Muscle Hill](#) and Vivid Photo were both Hambletonian winners bred by Winbak, which also produced 2011 3-year-old colt pacer of the Year [Roll With Joe](#).

Thomson, one of four partners in the ownership of Lexington's Red Mile, is involved in many aspects of the Standardbred industry. He is a director of the Hambletonian Society, Breeders Association of Delaware, Lexington Trots Breeders Association, and the Harness Racing Museum and Hall of Fame.

He was elected president of the Standardbred Breeders Association of Pennsylvania in 2012. Other honors he has received include 2001 *Sports Eye* Breeder of the Year, 2001 *times: In Harness* Owner of the Year, 2009 Little Brown Jug Wall of Fame inductee, and 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Monticello-Goshen Chapter of USHWA.

All of the award winners will be honored at the annual Dan Patch Awards Banquet hosted by USHWA on Sunday (Feb. 23) at Dover Downs.

The **Norman Woolworth Owner of the Year award** goes to the team of **Burke Racing Stable and Weaver Brusceci**. Burke Racing Stable (trainer [Ron Burke](#) and his mom Sylvia) and Mark Weaver and Michael Brusceci (Weaver Brusceci LLC) have been racing partners for years. Together, the partnership raced more than 220 horses over the course

of a year and according to the U.S. Trotting Association, they have together owned nearly 1,000 horses.

The stable reads like a "Who's Who" of harness racing with stars such as Foiled Again (\$1.4 million earned this season), Quillen Memorial champion Clear Vision (\$596,103), multiple-stakes-winner Charisma Hanover (\$555,729), Pennsylvania Sire Stakes champion Southwind Silence (\$375,581), American-National winner Southwind Spirit (\$370,295), Monument Circle winner Dedi's Dragon (\$368,342), Meadowlands Maturity champ Sweet Lou (\$330,138) and Garnsey Memorial division winner Carols Desire (\$260,099).

In 2013, Foiled Again became the richest Standardbred in North American history (with more than \$6 million in lifetime earnings) and the oldest to win a Breeders Crown.

This group is dedicated to the sport and is invested in it for the long run. Burke, Weaver and Brusceci -- along with their many other ownership partners -- have been an asset to the sport by keeping their stars at the tracks where fans are able to see, enjoy and connect with them. Burke and Weaver Brusceci have been the leading owners in terms of both races and money won every year this decade, racing mostly overnight stock.

The Rising Star award goes to a "younger" driver in the industry who has achieved above and beyond the norm in racing ability and this year's recipient is long overdue.

[Corey Callahan](#) did not find his way into the harness world until 2005, but his rise has not been of the meteoric variety. Callahan began as a full-time driver at 29 and almost immediately accorded himself as a top 20 driver in both wins and earnings. From 2007-2012 he ranked 13th, 11th, 11th, seventh and eighth nationally in wins, and 21st, 14th, 19th, 18th and 13th in earnings.

While his statistics were strong, he plied his trade mostly out of the spotlight until making a decision to focus on major stakes races in 2013. That choice has paid off in leaps and bounds for Callahan, who currently ranks fourth in wins (608) and sixth in earnings (\$9.6 million). Both numbers are career bests.

Callahan picked up drives on some of the best horses in the country in 2013, including those from top trainers Jonas Czernyson and Tony Alagna. He has won the driving title at Dover Downs for four consecutive years and he ranks among the leaders at Harrah's Philadelphia. He finished second at the Meadowlands with 99 wins, behind only [Yannick Gingras](#).

It is no surprise that the **Breeder of the Year** in 2013 is none other than **White Birch Farm** for the second straight year. The farm bred both 3-year-old colt pacer Captaintreacherous and the 3-year-old trotting filly Bee A Magician.

Into the final month of racing in 2013, White Birch progeny have accounted for more than 390 trips to the winner's circle and \$8.3 million in 2013 earnings.

Other White Birch Farm standouts in 2013 includes free for all trotter Sevruga, who earned \$484,575 of his \$800,000 lifetime purse money this year, \$500,000 winner Wake Up Peter, and six-figure earners Ali Blue, Proclaiming April, I Fought Dalaw, She's Da Bomb and Ideal Champ.

The late Joe and Marie Parisi started building White Birch Farm's breeding operation more than 35 years ago as Jo-Mar Farm, where they stood New Jersey Sire Stakes stallion Adios Ronnie. Their son, Michael Parisi, now runs the 800-acre facility that is home to nearly 100 broodmares and also serves as one of the premier training centers in Central New Jersey, accommodating 300 horses in training.

The Lew Barasch Breakthrough Award goes to a "non-racing" individual who has excelled beyond the scope of their job profile during the year. This year's winner is **Heather Wilder**, who is the Director of Public Relations and Marketing for the Meadows Standardbred Owners Association at the Meadows Racetrack in Washington, Pa.

Heather had background doing publicity and racing support work in the Columbus area (Scioto, Delaware) while still in her teens. After staying home with two children in her twenties, Wilder decided to pursue training horses. It was because of this unique marriage of talents that she was thought to be an ideal person by the board of the Meadows Standardbred Owners Association to fill their newly-created role of Director of Public Relations and Marketing.

With her extensive backstretch knowledge, Heather has been the liaison to introducing countless area fans, both individuals and groups, to the "hands-on" side of racing, through backstretch tours, time in the jog cart and the starting gate, and even reaching out to the local business community through the area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism.

A big night of racing always finds the MSOA and Wilder with several outreach programs for fans and casino patrons. Wilder also promotes The Meadows and MSOA through social media efforts which help extend their reach.

While wearing her 'Bet help' button and walking the grandstand assisting patrons with any questions about making wagers on the races, Wilder is dynamic and approachable. Always willing to support harness racing and USHWA, she is slated to be one of the emcees for the national awards dinner in 2014.

There is no more legitimate "Good Guy" in the sport than trainer **George Ducharme**, who will be honored with the **W. R. Haughton Good Guy Award**.

He totally embraced the spotlight this year with his outstanding 3-year-old colt trotter, Royalty For Life, while always representing the sport in a classy manner to the media and to the public.

The hard working 51-year-old native of Norfolk, Mass., was catapulted into the spotlight in 2013 after a 25-plus year racing career that saw him toil mostly in anonymity in New England. But Ducharme's work ethic and commitment to his trade and his great attitude towards both the fans and media have always been there despite the immensely rocky road to his Hambletonian victory with the horse of a lifetime.

Along with all the glory of guiding the career of a Hambletonian champion, Ducharme also faced a lot of difficult situations during the year. An early year quarantine at his home base, a tiring off-track at Lexington, hard trips from difficult draws and a season-ending scratch from the Breeders Crown all had to be dealt with.

Through the tough times, Ducharme never ducked the media and took the good with the bad while offering the best analysis of any situation he could. He looked for his next positive move forward and remained accessible while dealing with every twist and turn with class and dignity.

Ducharme was asked to be part of the autograph session on Hambletonian Day (clearly the biggest day of his career) and never hesitated to accept. He even arrived early to spend as much time with the fans as possible. And all year long he did every interview and answered every question from anyone who approached him.

Ducharme is universally liked. From his days in New England, to campaigning his first "good horse" Donttellymywife, to his Grand Circuit success this year, you would be hard pressed to find anyone who doesn't respect the man. And through it all, he has always been affable and approachable to any media member and fan alike.

Dedicated to the industry, Ducharme also toils as a USTA Director for District 9. He is truly one of harness racing's good guys in many ways.

The 2013 Leanne Pooler Unsung Hero award goes annually to someone who has gone beyond the scope of helping the harness racing industry and that person is **Sam Landy**.

In 2012 horse owner Sam Landy and a committee of volunteers created an event called the Open Space Pace Day at Freehold Raceway.

The concept arose from Landy's determination to find a way to illustrate the importance of harness racing to the state and local economy in New Jersey's horse country.

The inaugural event included a parade, celebrity appearances, under saddle races and a Southside Johnny concert -- but primarily showcased harness racing in one of the most populous counties (Monmouth) in New Jersey.

The event was valuable as a public relations vehicle, both raising the awareness of harness racing as well as bringing out legislators and public officials to see the importance of racing to the county and state economy.

In September of 2013, despite the expense (much of it personal) and countless hours of work involved, Landy and his Open Space Pace committee presented the second annual festival, employing it as a tool to connect the agri-business of harness racing in the minds of legislators and the public.

Several thousand people were drawn to the borough of Freehold and the raceway within its borders for the renewal of the event. Grants totaling \$10,000 were distributed to harness racing and agricultural-related charities and programs.

There are also two additional equine awards announced today by USHWA. Two outstanding "moms" will be honored as **the 2013 Broodmares of the Year**. They are **Beehive** and **Worldly Treasure**.

The lightly-raced trotting mare Beehive 3,Q1:57.3f (\$8,791) is the dam of the undefeated 3-year-old Bee A Magician (by Kadabra), a winner of 26 races in her career (17 of them this year) and \$2,313,956. She is owned by White Birch Farm of Allentown, N.J.

She is also the dam of the [Explosive Matter](#) freshman filly Dynamite Honey 2,2:00.3f (\$17,400).

This season Bee A Magician has swept her division, winning the \$500,000 Breeders Crown at Pocono; the \$500,000 Hambletonian Oaks at the Meadowlands; the \$356,981 Elegance at Mohawk; the \$253,000 Moni Maker at the Meadowlands; the \$205,608 Simcoe at Mohawk; the \$265,600 Delvin Miller Memorial at the Meadowlands; and the \$118,500 American-National at Balmoral.

The pacing broodmare of the year, Worldly Treasure, is the dam of world champion Captaintreacherous p,3,1:47.1 (\$2,973,286). Worldly Treasure herself was no slouch on the track, taking a 2-year-old mark of 1:53.1 en route to earning \$97,923. She hails from a strong maternal family, as her full sister is the outstanding pacing mare Worldly Beauty, who was a two-time Dan Patch Award winner with nearly \$2 million in career earnings.

They are both out of World Order p,3,1:53 (\$267,205), whose dam was Rodine Hanover p,2,1:54 (\$231,630) -- the dam of [Real Artist](#) p,3,Q1:51 (\$424,947) and the grand-dam of [Art Major](#) p,4,1:48.4 (\$2,727,224), [Perfect Art](#) p,3,1:51 (\$629,122) and [Panspacificflight](#) p,3,1:50.3 (\$368,843). She is also owned by White Birch Farm of Allentown, N.J.