

Vernon Downs optimistic after meeting with legislative officials in Albany

Saturday, April 29, 2017 - by Vernon Downs Media Relations

Vernon, N.Y. --- Jeff Gural, Chairman of American Racing and Entertainment, announced today that he has decided to open the 2017 racing season next Friday (May 5) following a productive meeting in Albany on Wednesday (April 26).

New York State Senator Joseph Griffo, representing the 47th District, New York State Senator John Bonacic, Chair of the Senate Racing Gaming and Wagering Committee, New York State Assemblyman J Gary Pretlow, Chair of the Assembly Racing and Wagering Committee, and Beth Garvey, top counsel to the Senate Republicans, were among the top political officials in attendance for Wednesday's meeting in Albany. In addition, Gural met on Thursday (April 27) with Jamie Rubin on the governor's staff who also seemed to understand the issues and the importance to the community of keeping Vernon Downs open.

Two weeks ago, Gural announced that Vernon Downs would be delaying the opening day of racing amid significant financial losses due to the added competition from Yellow Brick Road, Lago and Rivers Casinos. Final preparations were underway at Vernon Downs to open the 64th season of live harness racing, which was set for Friday (April 21).

However, increased competition from the addition of these three casinos with table games has taken revenue away from the property and caused Vernon to be losing on average about \$150,000 per month since November. Gural indicated that tax relief requested from New York State, is necessary and would still allow Vernon to continue to employ approximately 300 local workers, preserve horse racing jobs and still allow approximately \$10 million dollars to go to education.

"We were extremely disappointed to postpone the opening day of racing at Vernon Downs, however we feel very optimistic that necessary tax relief will come our way," Gural said. "I would like to thank Senator Griffo, Senator Bonacic, Assemblyman Pretlow and Ms. Garvey for their productive discussion at Wednesday's meeting in Albany. Since reopening Vernon as a racino in 2006, we have given close to \$150 million to the state for education, yet Vernon Downs has the highest tax rate of its competitors. We look forward to getting this rectified expeditiously, which is why we decided to open the new racing season next week, which we know will benefit the region as well as the State of New York."

The racino is hopeful that local officials will continue to weigh in and convince the legislature to act quickly to help save the hundreds of jobs currently at risk at Vernon Downs. The horsemen also agree to support legislation that would lower the tax rate that would enable Vernon to have a solid long term future.

Final preparations are underway at Vernon Downs to open the 64th season of live harness racing on Friday (May 5).

Other highlights of opening night include a race date t-shirt and wall calendar giveaway while supplies last, plus a spectacular fireworks display following the evening's final race.

Join us Saturday (May 6) to watch and wager on the Kentucky Derby. Derby post time is scheduled for 6:46 p.m. Live racing will take place with a doubleheader with post times at

2:35 p.m. and 7:05 p.m. The Derby hat contest and our Food Truck Rodeo Festival will take place from 2 p.m.- 8p.m. on the apron.

On the track, Vernon Downs will host live racing Thursday through Saturday with several Sundays and the usual holiday Monday matinee races included. Several top-class stakes races including the Empire Breeders Classic, Zweig Memorial and Kindergarten Classic round out the 2017 racing calendar.