

THE LEGACY OF Ocala Stud

By JOANN GUIDRY

Call it a milestone purchase in Florida thoroughbred history. On Jan. 16, 1956, Maryland horseman Joe O'Farrell and his brother, Tom, were part of a nine-person syndicate headed by Bruce Campbell that paid \$700,000 for 800 acres of what had been Ocala-based Dickey Stables. Included in the deal were the farm's 16 broodmares, two of which were Noodle Soup and Iltis. Those two broodmares would play key roles in the newly-christened Ocala Stud's quick start to historic success.

That May, Needles, out of the aforementioned Noodle Soup, became the first Florida-bred to win the Kentucky Derby. Bred by William Leach, who had owned Dickey Stables, and raced by D & H Stable, the son of Ponder finished second in the Preakness Stakes and won the Belmont Stakes. In 1955, Needles had become the champion 2-year-old male and the first Florida-bred to be named a national champion. When Needles was named the 1956 champion 3-year-old male, the spotlight shone brightly on Ocala as a viable thoroughbred industry center. At



Bearing the mantle of the oldest active Florida thoroughbred operation, Ocala Stud celebrates its 60th anniversary.

From Left:
Ocala Stud's
David, Michael
and Joe O'Farrell

the time of Needles’ Kentucky Derby win, there were only four thoroughbred farms in the Ocala area. But that was soon to change as the Ocala farm rush was on.

Joe O’Farrell, in his role as the Ocala Stud’s managing partner, wasted little time in taking advantage of Ocala’s newly-found fame. With Needles’ dam Noodle Soup as a centerpiece, he quickly built up a broodmare band and filled the training barns with young horses. The stallion barn was soon anchored by Rough’n Tumble, who had stood at the O’Farrells’ Maryland farm. By Free For All out of Roused, by *Bull Dog, Rough’n Tumble would go on to become one of the foundation stallions of the Florida thoroughbred industry. With 14 crops of racing age, Rough’n Tumble had lifetime progeny earnings of \$6.2 million, siring 24 stakes winners and 20 stakes-placed runners. Among his stakes winners were Florida-bred national champions My Dear Girl and Dr. Fager.

While waiting for the first Ocala Stud-bred crop, O’Farrell took a proactive approach on another front. On Feb. 25, 1957, O’Farrell staged the first-ever 2-year-olds in training sale in the Hialeah Park paddock. Conducted by Fasig-Tipton, a total of 37 head sold with most of them coming from the Ocala Stud consignment. Included in that latter group was Maryland-bred Ragtime Cowboy, by Rough’n Tumble, who went on to win the 1958 L.E. Stoddard Jr. Steeplechase Stakes. That victory earned the O-Farrell Brothers-bred Ragtime Cowboy the distinction of becoming the

first stakes-winning graduate of a juvenile sale.

The majority of the horses in that initial Ocala Stud consignment had been Maryland-breds brought to Florida from the previous O’Farrell farm. But in 1958, the first juvenile crop of horses foaled and raised at Ocala Stud were sold at public auction. That crop went on to record a national best mark of 12 winners which won 27 races. Part of that Ocala Stud consignment included Wedlock, by Rough’n Tumble, who sold for \$4,500. Wedlock became the first registered Florida-bred filly to win a classic race when she won the 1959 Kentucky Oaks. Just that quickly, Ocala Stud’s reputation as a leading juvenile consignor was established. O’Farrell would go on to become one of the founding members of the Florida Breeders’ Sales Company (1958) and later the Ocala Breeders’ Sales Company (1974). And Florida was on its way to becoming the country’s prime 2-year-olds in training market.

Remember Iltis, one of the broodmares that had been part of the original land purchase? When bred to Rough’n Tumble, she produced Florida-bred My Dear Girl, the 1959 champion 2-year-old filly and the first national champion bred by Ocala Stud. By 1960, Ocala Stud had bred or sold winners of more than \$1 million. Already considered the leading commercial breeder in the country by that time, Ocala Stud finished 10th that year on the list of leading breeders in North America. Adding to the farm’s accomplishments, Ocala Stud

bred and sold Roman Brother, who in 1965 became the first Florida-bred to be named North American Horse of the Year.

SOLID FOUNDATION

That phenomenal early success laid the foundation for Ocala Stud becoming not only the oldest active thoroughbred operation in the state, but also one of its perennial leaders for six decades. In fact, Ocala Stud has been represented by at least one Florida-bred stakes winner every year since 1959. Additionally, Ocala Stud has been named the Florida Breeder of the Year four times. At this writing, that honor includes three consecutive years, 2010-2012 and then again in 2014. In 2012, Ocala Stud was named the TOBA National Breeder of the Year.

To date, the farm has bred solely and/or with partners 146 Florida-bred stakes winners, including Florida-bred millionaires Musical Romance, Asia Express, Shake You Down, Turbulent Descent, Bolshoi Boy, Shadowbdancing and Gourmet Dinner (with William J. Terrill). New York-bred millionaire Queen Alexandra was also bred by Ocala Stud. Office Queen (1970 Champion 3-Year-Old Filly) and Musical Romance (2011 Champion Female Sprinter) have since joined My Dear Girl and Roman Brother as Ocala Stud-bred national champions. Musical Romance also became the first Ocala Stud-bred/sold runner to win a Breeders’ Cup race when she captured the 2011 BC Filly & Mare Sprint (G1).

Ocala Stud also has connections to three Kentucky Derby winners. That trio includes Florida-breds Carry Back (1961 Kentucky Derby) and Unbridled (1990 Kentucky Derby), as well as Street Sense (2007 Kentucky Derby). Carry Back, bred, owned and trained by Jack Price, was foaled, raised, broken and trained at Ocala Stud. Unbridled, bred by Tartan Farms and owned by Mrs. Frances Genter, and Street Sense, bred/owned by James Tafel, were broken and trained at Ocala Stud.

Rough’n Tumble, who was the dominant Florida sire from 1959-1968, has been since followed by a long list of leading sires to stand at Ocala Stud. Included on that roster are Distinctive, Explodent, Sovereign Dancer, On to Glory, Mighty Appealing, Pentelicus, Saint Ballado, Notebook, Montbrook, Concerto, Trippi, High Cotton and Kantharos.

WITNESSING HISTORY

Joseph Michael O’Farrell Jr. was eight years old when his father Joe moved the family from Maryland to Ocala. At 22, and just a semester away from an agriculture busi-

ness degree from the University of Florida, the younger O’Farrell was thrust into a leadership role. Following his father’s heart attack and the farm’s financial reorganization in 1971, he took over the day-to-day operations of Ocala Stud. The two men worked together to rebuild Ocala Stud until the elder O’Farrell’s death in December, 1982.

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“I was raised in the thoroughbred business and never had any intentions or desire to do anything else,” says O’Farrell, 68, who has now served as Ocala Stud’s president and general manager for more than three decades. “I had to step in a little sooner than anticipated. But my father and I got to work together for 11 years. There were some tough times along the way over the decades. But with the help of a lot of good people, perseverance and luck, we’ve managed to still be here today.”

According to O’Farrell, the toughest time was 1971 and its aftermath.

“After my father’s heart attack, the farm’s syndicate partnership dissolved and the farm was foreclosed on by the bank,” recalls O’Farrell. “Then we sold all the horses



Brought to Florida from the O’Farrells’ Maryland farm, Rough’n Tumble would go on to be one of the foundation stallions in the Florida thoroughbred industry.



Ocala
STUD

1958
KENTUCKY OAKS WINNER
WEDLOCK

1961
TOUGH STAKES WINNER
ROUGH NOTE

1964
TOP RACE MARE
TREASURE CHEST

1959
WINNER OVER \$225,000
CONESTOGA

1962
NATIONAL STALLION S. WINNER
OCALAWAY

1965
QUEEN OF THE TURF
SWINGING MOOD

1960
CHAMPAGNE WINNER
ROVING MINSTREL

1963
HORSE OF THE YEAR
ROMAN BROTHER

1966
RECORD BREAKING S. W.
RING FRANCIS

1967
SANTA ANITA DERBY WINNER
ALLEY FIGHTER

1968
SALES PLATE WINNER
ROYAL SAXON

in October and November dispersals. It was a stressful time for all of us and we weren’t sure how we were going to move forward.”

But Ocala Stud, albeit in a different version, did move forward.

“Roy Kennedy, who was a banker and a horseman, helped us buy back the main 185 acres of the farm,” said O’Farrell. “Then Herbert Allen, who had been one of our longtime clients, sold us a package of 10 broodmares, seven yearlings and sent the stallion Distinctive

Ocala Stud 60 Years

to stand at the farm. He let us pay him back over time. From there, we started over. That whole experience taught me that things don't stay good forever and things don't stay bad forever. I've never forgotten that lesson."

Now a solely family-owned operation, today O'Farrell shares Ocala Stud ownership with sisters Susan Greiner and Anna O'Farrell, brother-in-law James Lewis and nieces Claire and Meghan Lewis, the husband and daughters of O'Farrell's late sister Margaret.

O'Farrell's sons Joe and David are now the third generation of O'Farrells involved in the management of Ocala Stud. Joe, 38, is the farm's financial manager and David, 35, is its farm manager.

"We've raised and sold a lot of good horses over all these years on Ocala Stud," said O'Farrell, who has been married to wife Judy for 44 years. "But the truth is that a lot of O'Farrells have been raised on and provided for by Ocala Stud. With Joe and David's children, we're into our fourth generation."

THE THIRD GENERATION

Despite their heritage, it was not a given that Joe and David O'Farrell would become involved in the family business of Ocala Stud.

"Judy and I decided it was best to allow our sons to know there were other opportunities out there. Growing up, the boys spent more time playing sports than being

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around the horses," said O'Farrell. "I didn't want to force them into the thoroughbred business. I wanted them to want to be in the thoroughbred business. I was very fortunate to work with my father and I consider myself very fortunate to now be able to work with my sons."

First Joe then David went to Erskine College in Due West, S.C.; both graduated with business degrees. After graduating in 1999, Joe became an accountant with a bank in South Carolina. David graduated in May 2003 and by July was working at Ocala Stud. By 2004, Joe joined him and immediately became involved in the financial end of the farm's operation. David meanwhile worked his way through the broodmare, stallion, training and sales divisions on his way to becoming assistant farm manager. When longtime Ocala Stud farm manager Bob Noble retired in July 2012, David transitioned

into that position.

"Until I became the financial manager, I really didn't grasp what it takes to run an operation like Ocala Stud," said Joe. "We have about 60 year-round employees and 100 during peak breeding, training and sales seasons. There's about 90 broodmares between ours and clients' with another 150 sales and training horses. It's a big operation."

In addition to his Ocala Stud position, Joe was elected to the Florida Breeders' and Owners' Association's board of directors in 2012. He is currently the board's first vice president, a position his father served in for many years.

"I'm very honored be on the FTBOA board," said Joe, who with wife Alicia, has a 7-year-old son named



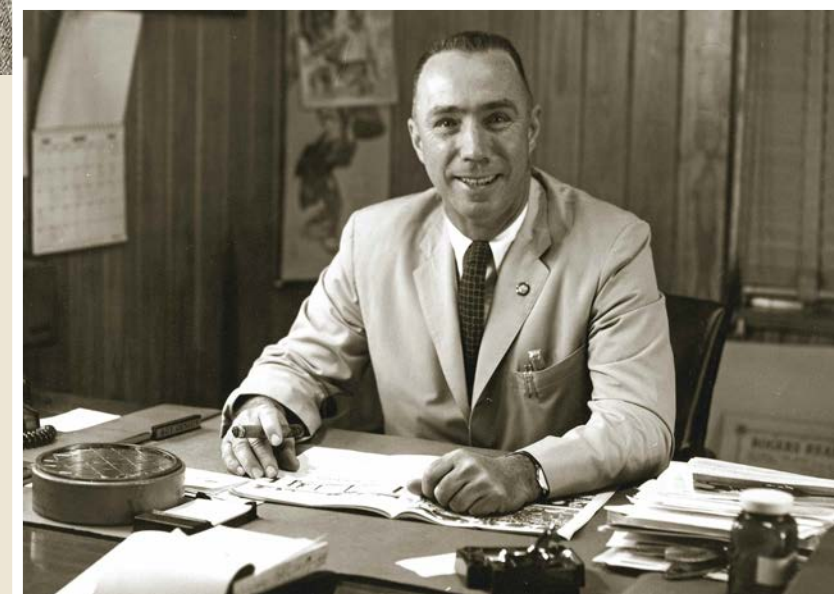
JIM JERNIGAN PHOTO

Mr and Mrs. Joe O'Farrell and Michael (at left) Joe O'Farrell in the Ocala Stud office (below)

Joseph Michael O'Farrell IV. "I feel it's important to take a leadership role in the Florida thoroughbred industry just like my grandfather and my father did. Now that I'm involved to the degree that I am, I find it amazing what they accomplished. And I want to be part of Ocala Stud's present and future."

David echoes his brother's sentiments.

"I love being involved in all aspects of the farm," he said. "Working with and learning from all the great longtime employees of the farm has been an invaluable experience. And I'm very fortunate to be able to work with my family. Over the past 12 years, I've gotten such a different perspective on what my grandfather and my father managed to do. To be celebrating 60 years in a



FILE PHOTO

Ocala Stud
60 Years

very difficult business is definitely something extremely special.”
Part of that fourth generation of O’Farrells includes David and wife Allison’s three children. The trio includes Maggie (7), Annie (5) and John David Jr. (3).

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SERTAHLIT PHOTO

velopments have overtaken the land where there were once thoroughbred farms.
“I remember being able to ride my horse on dirt roads from farm to farm when I was growing up,” recalled O’Farrell. “But nothing stays the same. That’s just how life is.”
It was that inevitable development encroachment that brought a new chapter to Ocala Stud’s history. In 2011, the O’Farrell family sold the 185-acre original main site of the farm on Shady Road (SW 27th Avenue) for \$9 million to developer and thoroughbred horseman John Brunetti. The terms of the sale provided the O’Farrells with a lease through 2016 with a possible option to renew after that time.

TODAY’S OCALA STUD

Over the decades, the landscape around Ocala Stud has changed. Ocala Stud, Glen Hill Farm and Red Oak Farm are the only three remaining major thoroughbred operations in the Shady Road area that was once the epicenter of the industry in Ocala. A mall, a community college, medical offices, restaurants, shopping strips, car dealerships, a high school, apartments and housing de-

velopments have overtaken the land where there were once thoroughbred farms.
“It’s was a financial decision made by the family to sell the property,” said O’Farrell. “We didn’t sell the Ocala Stud name and we will continue to operate as we have for 60 years. When the time comes where renewing our lease is not an option, we will just move the operation to our other properties.”
The original 185-acre site includes the business office, training division and stallion barn. The other

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SERTAHLIT PHOTO

properties alluded to by O’Farrell include the 120-acre Shady Lane broodmare division, located a half-mile south of the main farm, and the 240-acre Ocala Stud Annex, 12 miles northeast of the main farm, which serves as the weanling/yearling division. The Shady Lane property was originally bought in partnership with Jerry Parks and Ed Wiest in 1981; the latter two were bought out in 1999. The Ocala Stud Annex was bought in 1980.

“On the Shady Lane property, there is a barn that was previously a stud barn. In fact, it’s where Jack Price stood Carry Back when it was his Dorchester Farm,” said O’Farrell. “So if we have to, we can always move our stallions there. At the Ocala Stud Annex, there is a racetrack that we never had to use. So we’ll just refurbish that and move the training division there.”

In the meantime, it’s business as usual at Ocala Stud. Ever since Joe O’Farrell staged that inaugural juvenile sale in 1957, Ocala Stud has bred Florida-breds to sell in the Florida juvenile market. Today, that business plan has streamlined even more so to selling in only Ocala Breeders’ Sales Company juvenile vendues. Over six decades, Ocala Stud has sold more than 250 stakes winners, including horses bred by the farm, its partners, as well as those for clients.

Most notably among the Ocala Stud-bred sales graduates are Grade 1 Florida-bred stakes winners Three Ring, Outofthebox, Musical Romance, Turbulent Descent, Rigoletta, Asia Express and Calculator. The highest-priced horse ever sold by Ocala Stud is Florida-bred Chapel Royal. Bred by Ocala Stud, the graded stakes winner was sold for \$1.2 million at the 2003 OBS February juvenile sale at Calder.

In 2015, Ocala Stud sold 35 juveniles for a gross of \$3,150,000. The operation’s top-priced juvenile was Elfin Cove, who sold for \$675,000 at the OBS March 2-year-olds in training sale. The 2013 bay filly by Adios Charlies out Siren Cove, by Montbrook, was bought by Navrick International.

At this writing, Ocala Stud has once again this season surpassed \$1 million in earnings by its Florida-bred runners. To date, Ocala Stud is represented by 2015 Florida-

bred graded stakes winner Calculator, as well as stakes winners Forevamo and Courtesan. The latter was bred in partnership by Ocala Stud, Joseph Michael O’Farrell III and John David O’Farrell, et al.

“We have definitely weathered the test of time in a very tough business,” said O’Farrell. “Of course, we’re very proud of all the good horses we’ve raised and sold, as well as the leading stallions that have stood at the farm. But the truth is that none of that success would’ve happened without the help of a lot of good clients and employees that have stayed with us through good and bad times. Horses come and go, but the relationships you have with people are really what get you through life.”

And in Ocala Stud’s case, that’s 60 years and counting. ■

OCALA STUD HISTORICAL SUCCESS HIGHLIGHTS

Florida Breeder Of The Year: 2010, 2011, 2012 & 2014
TOBA National Breeder Of The Year: 2012

146: Number of Florida-bred stakes winners bred by Ocala Stud solely and/or with partners
(Through Dec. 7, 2015)

Ocala Stud-Bred National Champions
My Dear Girl – 1959 Champion 2-Year-Old Filly
Roman Brother – 1965 Horse of the Year
1965 Champion Handicap Horse
Office Queen – 1970 Champion 3-Year-Old Filly
Musical Romance – 2011 Champion Female Sprinter

Ocala Stud-Bred Breeders’ Cup Champion
Musical Romance – 2011 Breeders’ Cup Filly & Mare Sprinter

Ocala Stud-Bred Florida-Bred Champions
Office Queen – 1969 Champion 2-Year-Old Filly
1970 Champion 3-Year-Old Filly
Chevron Flight – 1971 Champion 2-Year-Old Colt
Wittgenstein – 1973 Champion 2-Year-Old Colt
Country Queen – 1978 Champion 3-Year-Old Filly
1979 Champion Turf Horse
1979 Champion Handicap Female
Mighty Appealing – 1984 Champion 2-Year-Old Colt
Three Ring – 1998 Champion 2-Year-Old Filly
1999 Champion 3-Year-Old Filly
Outofthebox – 2001 Champion 3-Year-Old Colt
Chapel Royal – 2003 Champion 2-Year-Old Colt
Shake You Down – 2003 Champion Sprinter
Green Vegas – 2006 Champion 2-Year-Old Colt
Jardin – 2008 Champion 2-Year-Old Filly
Candrea – 2011 Champion 2-Year-Old Filly

Turbulent Descent – 2011 Champion 3-Year-Old Filly
Musical Romance – 2011 Florida-Bred Horse of the Year
2011 Champion Older Female
2011 Champion Female Sprinter
2012 Champion Older Female
2012 Champion Female Sprinter
Calculator – 2014 Champion 2-Year-Old Colt

Ocala Stud-Bred Florida-Bred Millionaires
Musical Romance - \$1,681,885
Asia Express - \$1,464,947
Shake You Down - \$1,442,014
Turbulent Descent - \$1,211,640
*Gourmet Dinner - \$1,191,230
Bolshoi Boy - \$1,039,702
Shadowbdancing - \$1,003,530
*Co-Bred with William J. Terrill

Ocala Stud Leading Florida Sires
Rough’n Tumble – 1959-1961, 1965, 1967-1968
Leading Florida General Sire
Notebook – 2000, 2001 & 2005 Leading Florida General Sire
Montbrook – 2002, 2003, 2008 & 2009 Leading Florida General Sire
2001 & 2008 Leading Florida Juvenile Sire
Concerto – 2002 Leading Florida Freshman Sire
Trippi – 2007 Leading Florida General Sire
2006 & 2007 Leading Florida Juvenile Sire
High Cotton – 2011 Leading Florida Freshman Sire
Kantharos – 2014 Leading Florida Juvenile Sire

*Other prominent Florida sires to stand at Ocala Stud include Distinctive, Explodent, Sovereign Dancer, On to Glory, Pen-telicus, Mighty Appealing and Saint Ballado.

2011 Breeders Cup Winner and Champion Female Sprinter Musical Romance



COADY PHOTO