

Racetrack applies for 78 dates in 2011

Twilight racing expected to expand

By Kris Dubé September 25, 2010

The Fort Erie Live Racing Consortium (FELRC) is pleased to announce that people whose lives revolve around the Racetrack don't have to enter into a panic like they did last year.

At this time of year in 2009, horsemen who earn a living at the track had no idea if another season was a part of their future.

In December 2009, the provincial government agreed to put forward \$5.6 million every year until 2012, with the Town of Fort Erie committing to \$1.5 million over the same period of time.

On Thursday, the FELRC consortium announced it has applied for 78 race dates in 2011 with an average purse of \$100,000 per day.

The throughbred racing industry has taken a hit over the last few years but FELRC chief executive officer Jim Thibert said with new pilot- projects like twilight racing and the upcoming quarter horse program beginning in October, things are getting better at the local track.

"We've stopped some of the bleeding with our new initiatives and we've actually made some money on occasion," said Thibert.

He said the track struggled in the month of May because of heavy and regular rainfall and many race cards had to be scrapped, but more favourable weather was around the corner... and it helped.

"It all kind of balances out," he said.

Every Tuesday in August, the track hosted evening races that drew large crowds and an average of \$90,000 in wagering.



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The FELRC has applied to hold "twilight" racing on Mondays and Tuesdays during June, July and August, considering it was such a success in its trial run this season.

"People see the racetrack as a place to be in the summertime," said Thibert.

Chief operating officer at the track, Rick Cowan agreed experimenting with evening races in August proved it is an idea that works and expects things to be no different next year, attracting people who aren't regular patrons.

"We had people that haven't been to the track in years," said Cowan.

Starting on Oct. 2, the track will offer a quarter horse program over five dates with a total purse of \$700,000. The style of racing, previously only held at Ajax-Downs when it comes to thoroughbred facilities in Ontario, will take place on Oct. 2, 9, 16, 23 and 24.

As well, there will be eight added money quarter horse stakes races held before the season closes.

"Ultimately, we hope to create some new fans who will look forward to our live racing program next year," said Thibert.

On Oct. 3, polka legend and three-time Grammy winner Walter Ostanek will perform a free concert, for the track's Oktoberfest celebration.