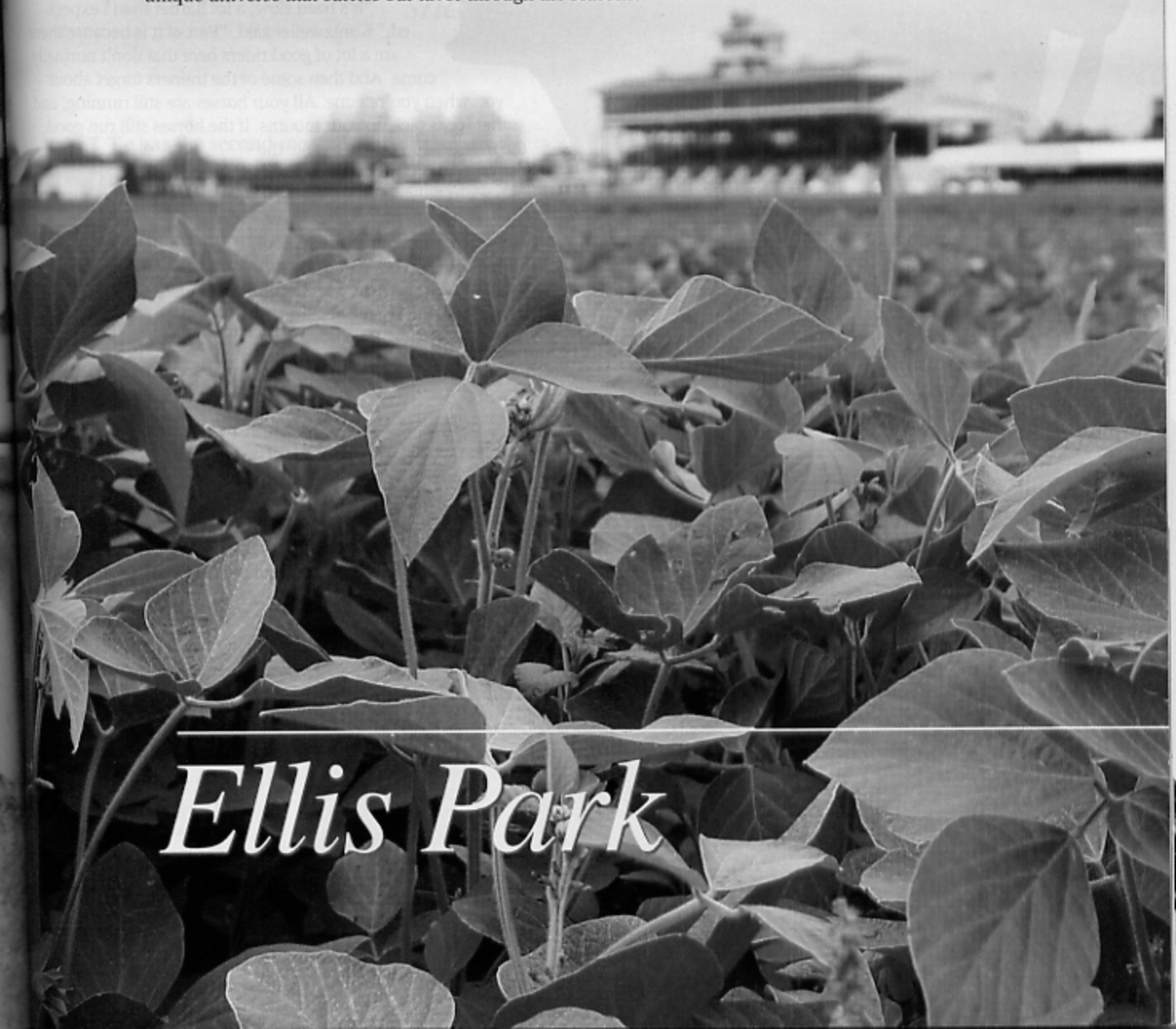
a day in the life *of a racetrack*

The typical fan out for a day at the racetrack is concerned with but a precious few details: perusing past performances, watching horses on post parade, and finding a mutuel window. That fan gives little thought to the people who sell admission and programs, lead the horses onto the track, keep them quiet in the gate, sell the mutuel tickets, drive the tractors, brush the horses, or counsel backstretch workers. Yet the effort necessary to produce the daily show that is live horse racing encompasses a coordinated labor force of mostly behind-the-scenes workers, not unlike a Broadway play. At smaller tracks, like Ellis Park in western Kentucky—affectionately called the "Pea Patch" because soybeans grow in the infield—the folks who make the wheels spin likely lead a gypsy lifestyle, constantly traveling a circuit that takes them south for the winter and up north to places like Ellis for the summer. It is not unlike working a carnival or fair, except for the one requirement unique to the racetrack: a love of horses. The editorial department of *The Blood-Horse* made an en masse pilgrimage to Ellis Park Aug. 14 in search of what it takes to produce and raise the curtain on a day at the races. We hope you share our appreciation for the people who make this sport the unique universe that curries our favor through the seasons.



Ellis Park

persistent pilot

As one of the top apprentice jockeys in the nation two years ago, Greta Kuntzweiler was a finalist for an Eclipse Award. Now she is fighting to find mounts at Ellis Park while making a comeback from an injury. In May, she fractured a vertebra in a training accident at Churchill Downs and missed about six weeks of competition.

"It's been slow, a lot harder than I expected," Kuntzweiler said. "Part of it is because there are a lot of good riders here that don't normally come. And then some of the trainers forget about you when you're gone. All your horses are still running, and other jocks pick up your mounts. If the horses still run good, the trainers don't want to take the new jockeys off. It's hard to get your foot back in the door."

Kuntzweiler, a huge sumo wrestling fan who has the Japanese symbol for the horse tattooed on her arm, rode in two races at Ellis on Aug. 14. She won a claiming race aboard Hacoda, who nosed out Air Forbes at the wire. She also guided Focus On Marty to a fourth-place finish in another claiming contest.

"As far as my riding is concerned, I feel really good about it," said the 26-year-old jockey. "I lifted a lot of weights while I was off. I was able to work out pretty good because I was just in this little brace. You can always look better coming down the lane, so I've been working on using my stick better. Because I've been on some longer shots lately, I'm in the back a lot more. It's a good time to practice because there's not a lot of pressure. You're not having to do it when it really counts."

shake, shake, shake

Ellis Park's claims clerk Tiffany Lovelace can be a heartbreaker. But it's not lovesick admirers the bubbly 27-year-old from Louisiana is disappointing; it's owners and trainers with designs on a promising claimer.

When more than one person submits a claim on a horse, the new owner is determined by a "shake." Lovelace assigns a number to each person with a verified claim and then randomly draws a numbered ball, called a pill, to determine the winner.

"I see people get mad and throw their programs on the floor when they don't get a horse," she said. "It also depends on how the horse ran. If they didn't run well and they get the horse, they ask: 'Why did I claim this one?' "

Sometimes people get their hearts broken before the shake. The information on a claim must be exact. If a trainer writes "Ellis" instead of "Ellis Park" on the claim ticket, it will be voided.

"Sometimes a claim involves a lot of money, so everything has to be just right," Lovelace said. Stewards have the final say in whether a claim is official, but Lovelace said she loves the power of the draw.

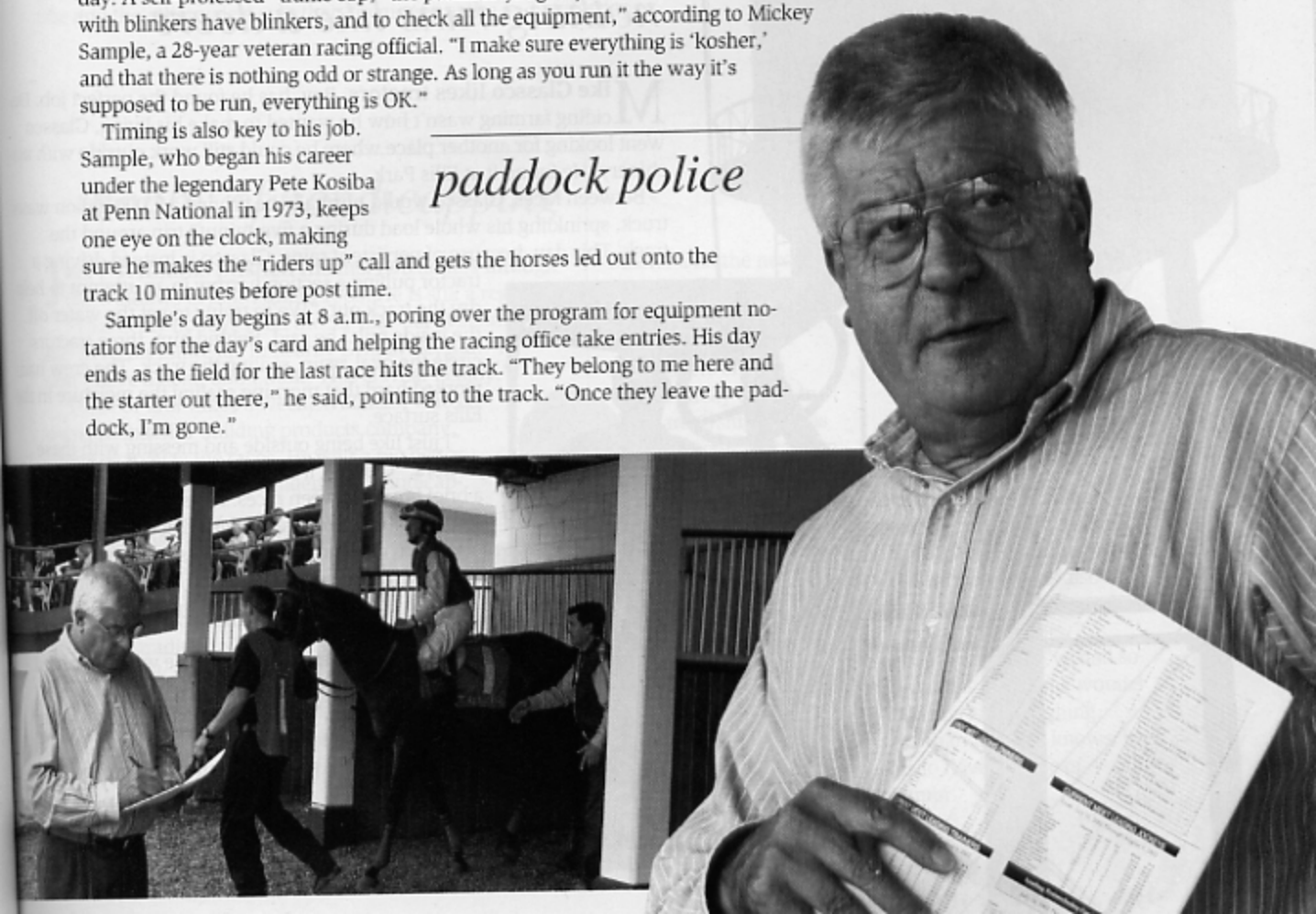
"It is fun to be the one to say whether someone gets a horse or not," she said.

paddock police

He has the second-most recognizable voice at the track. While everyone knows the sound of the track announcer, it's the paddock judge who says "riders up, please" nine times a day. A self-professed "traffic cop," the paddock judge's job is to "make sure that horses listed with blinkers have blinkers, and to check all the equipment," according to Mickey Sample, a 28-year veteran racing official. "I make sure everything is 'kosher,' and that there is nothing odd or strange. As long as you run it the way it's supposed to be run, everything is OK."

Timing is also key to his job. Sample, who began his career under the legendary Pete Kosiba at Penn National in 1973, keeps one eye on the clock, making sure he makes the "riders up" call and gets the horses led out onto the track 10 minutes before post time.

Sample's day begins at 8 a.m., poring over the program for equipment notations for the day's card and helping the racing office take entries. His day ends as the field for the last race hits the track. "They belong to me here and the starter out there," he said, pointing to the track. "Once they leave the paddock, I'm gone."



the party lady

Quality control manager and keeper of tradition should be added to the title for Rose Mary Gray, who handles group sales and special events at Ellis Park.

She books parties of 35 to 1,400 people who come for a leisurely day at the races or an after-hours retirement or holiday office party. Gray sees to it that each party is met at the front gates, escorted to their seats, and served a good meal properly and efficiently. That's half the job.

Making sure people come back is just as important.

Two years ago, Gray began including a three-page questionnaire with the thank-you letter she routinely sends to groups after a visit. The questionnaire strives to get the whole picture from the parking lot attendant's attitude to the condition of the rest rooms.

"Research done by Disney showed that if a person has one bad experience, it takes 33 people to do something positive before that one bad experience is forgotten," said Gray, a former advertising executive with Keller Crescent Advertising, Indiana's largest ad agency.

The questionnaires have helped the track fine-tune any problems and helped maintain an impressive number of longtime regulars. One family from Hopkinsville, Ky., 78 miles away, will have their 41st consecutive family outing at Ellis Park this year.

"That is one of the great things about this job," Gray said. "It has a lot of variety and the stories you hear from these families are amazing."

nothing runs like a deere

Mike Glassco likes tractors. Boy, has he found the perfect job. Deciding farming wasn't how he wanted to make his living, Glassco went looking for another place where he could still work outside with machinery. He found it at Ellis Park.

Between races, Glassco would normally be driving a 2,000-gallon water truck, sprinkling his whole load during a five-minute trip around the track. This day, because of persistent rains, Glassco is instead driving a tractor pulling a section harrow in an attempt to help dry the track out. "We're trying to get the water off the inside rail," he said. Behind him, three tractors circle the oval again, sealing the track. The crew had worked hard that morning sealing the moisture in the Ellis surface.

"I just like being outside and messing with these tractors," Glassco, a sheepish 25-year-old, said during a brief break between races. He is a native of Henderson, Ky., just across the bridge adjacent to the track.

Glassco does not bet nor profess to know much about the horse business. But he loves his job and sees it as an important function in the success of the live racing product.

"I just love it here," he said. "We work very hard to maintain the track. If we didn't, well, you know what can happen. The horsemen say this is a better track than most they run on.

"We work hard on the mixture and composition of the track."

All you need is some sand, some dirt...and some tractors.

in the right spot

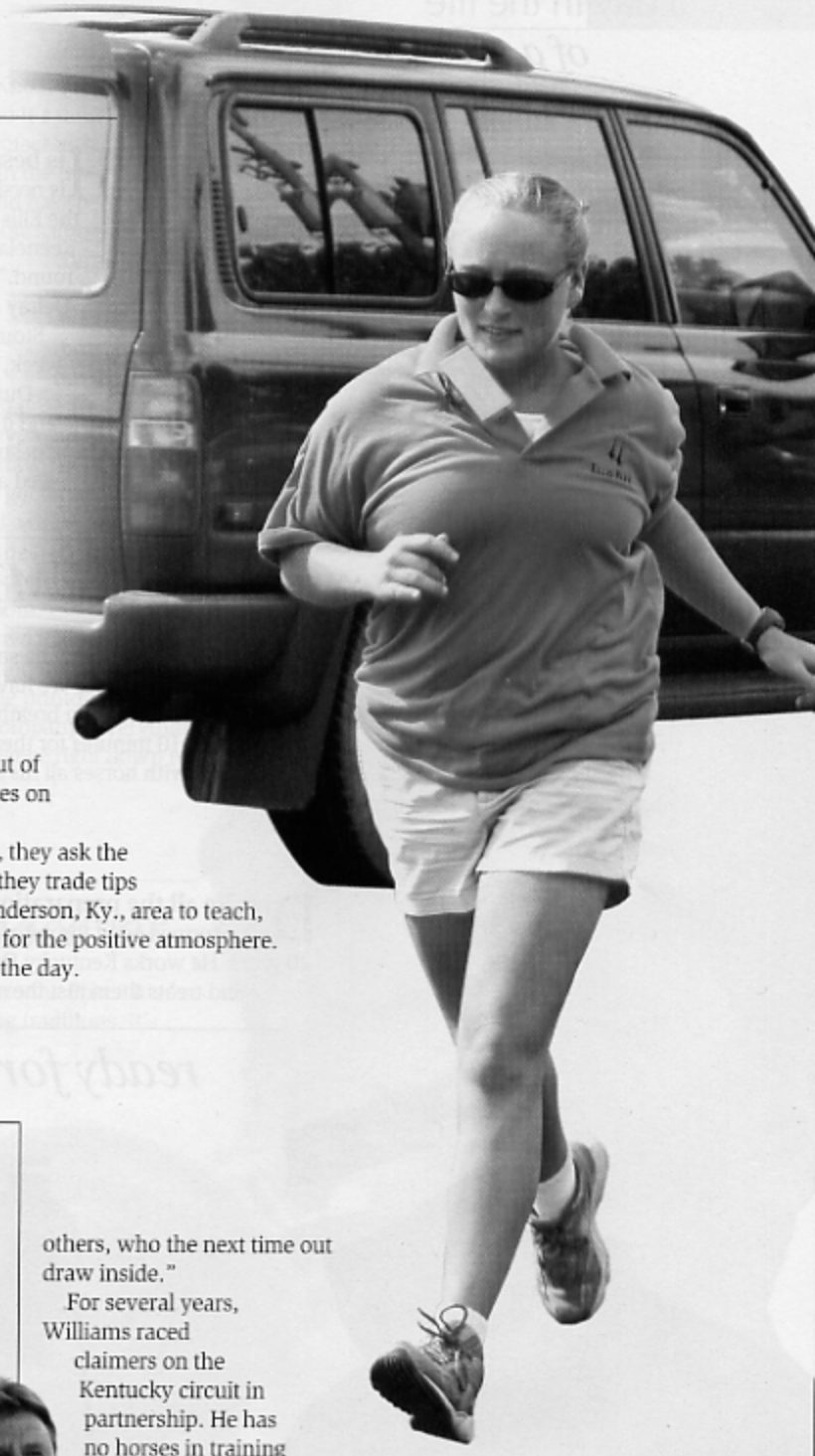
Lindsey Morris has been going to Ellis Park with her father ever since she was a child. For the past five years now, the money she has made working at the track has helped put her through college as an elementary education major at Western Kentucky University.

Morris has worked several jobs, including food service in the Turf Club and clubhouse. Currently she parks other people's cars as a valet. The job is something of a milestone in itself—she's the first female to do it at Ellis. She got the job by substituting for an absent employee one day, and then volunteering to do it full time when a summer employee didn't show.

Morris and the other valets have plenty of regulars, like one man who arrived in a maroon Mercedes-Benz CLK coupe. Morris said one of her most nervous moments was making sure she got a Rolls-Royce into a parking spot without putting a scratch on it.

Shortly before post time, a regular patron arrived, got out of the car, and said, "I've got a tip for you—don't wash clothes on Sunday."

Morris explained that sometimes when regulars pull up, they ask the valets if they have any tips, but since they usually do not, they trade tips about other things. Morris, who wants to return to the Henderson, Ky., area to teach, gives her employment experience at the track high ratings for the positive atmosphere. She and the other valets split their tip money at the end of the day.



hobby of handicapping

Jerry Williams pushed his first two dollars through the windows at Ellis Park in 1965. He is still a regular.

"This is my hobby," said the 55-year-old Williams, who has lived his entire life in nearby Evansville, Ind. "I don't have a boat, don't hunt. This is what I enjoy."

Three or four times a week, Williams, who co-owns an exterior building products company, drops by to play the races. He isn't a big bettor, but is fascinated by the challenge of handicapping.

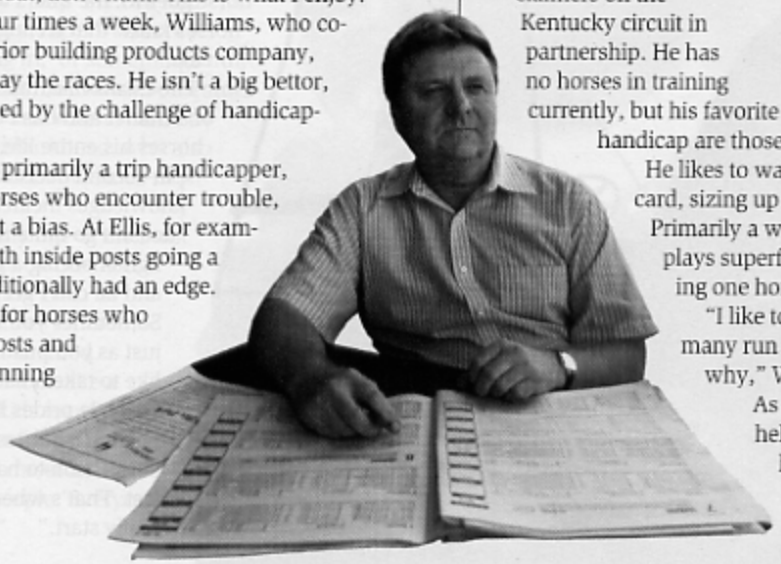
Williams is primarily a trip handicapper, looking for horses who encounter trouble, or race against a bias. At Ellis, for example, horses with inside posts going a mile have traditionally had an edge. So, "you look for horses who had outside posts and were wide, running many lengths more than others, who the next time out draw inside."

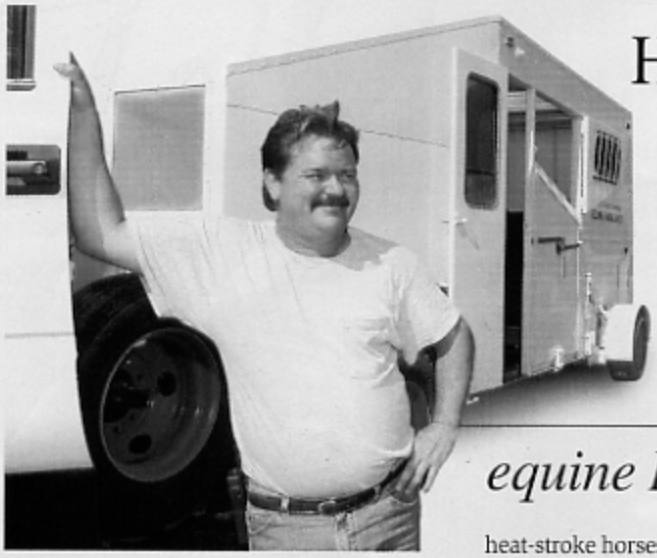
For several years, Williams raced claimers on the Kentucky circuit in partnership. He has no horses in training currently, but his favorite races to handicap are those in the claiming ranks.

He likes to watch the first few races on a card, sizing up the track before plunging in. Primarily a win bettor, Williams also plays superfectas, his normal wager keying one horse over four others.

"I like to bet to win, but I've had so many run second it makes me wonder why," Williams said, laughing.

As any handicapper knows, it helps to have a sense of humor.





equine EMT

His best days come when he doesn't have to work, but Mike Stout is no slacker—he's the driver of the horse ambulance. Stout works the Ellis meet in the summer, the two Keeneland meets, as well as Keeneland's September yearling sale—"I couldn't handle this year-round," he said. The rest of the year he works for a tree company in Delray Beach, Fla.

Stout, who lives on the backside, is at the ready seven days a week, from the morning works through the day's last race.

During the races, Stout parks the ambulance at the half-mile gap and diligently watches through high-powered binoculars. He doesn't breathe a sigh of relief until after all the horses are unsaddled and are being walked back.

So far, it's been a good year. "There haven't been too many horses go down this year," he said. "And the track is real safe."

Running during the summer months, his biggest problems are with heat. "The worst is dealing with heat-stroke horses," he said. "It's distressing when they give up on you. There was one the other day—she went down and wasn't fighting back; but we haven't lost one yet to heat stroke.

"If they go down, you make them stay down. You get them breathing and pack them down with ice. In a worst-case scenario, you give them a cold-water enema. It takes about 10 minutes for them to respond."

The 46-year-old Stout, who has been involved with horses all his life, first got the job 13 years ago because "word got around that I knew how to drive a truck."

ready for a start

Despite all the preparation to get horses to a race, it can't happen without the man who springs open the gate. It is an art form, one that Roger Nagle has been perfecting for 20 years. He works Kentucky Derbys at Churchill Downs and low-level claimers at Ellis Park, and treats them just the same.

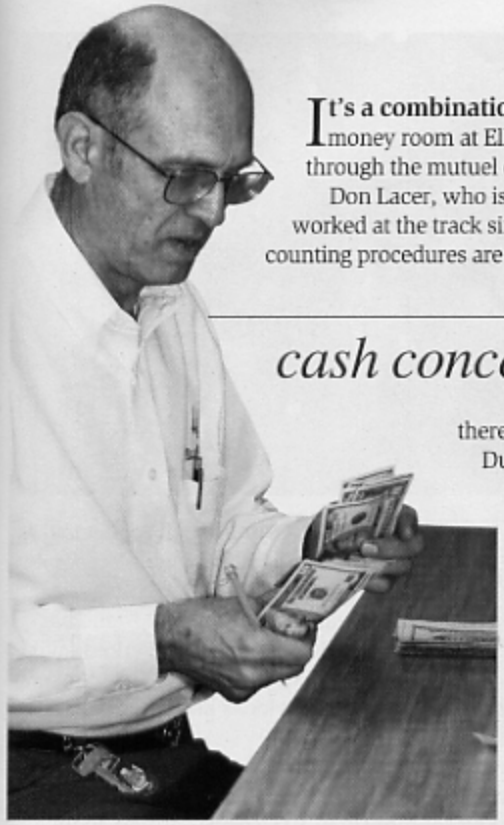
"Every race is someone's Derby," said Nagle, who owned and trained horses "until I busted out in 1976."

Once all the horses have been loaded in the gate, Nagle gives the field what he calls "the hunter's eye. I don't look directly at them; I stare at a spot, focus in, and look for something not right—a man working too hard or any movement out of the ordinary.

"I like to get them in and out of there as quickly as possible, because something's gonna happen eventually. When the last horse goes in, the riders tense up and the horses know that feeling, that it's time to break."

The Evansville, Ind., native is the son of a trainer and has been around horses his entire life. His job requires split-second decisions, and he acknowledges incidences when it doesn't go quite right. "It's like a fighter seeing a punch coming and he can't get out of the way. Sometimes you see something just as you push the button. You'd like to take it back, but you can't."

Nagle prides himself on not playing favorites. "Nobody gets permission to have his horse load last. That's when the complaints really start."



cash concern

It's a combination of Fort Knox, the Federal Reserve Bank, and Ernst & Young. It's the money room at Ellis Park, and it's there to protect, loan, and keep tabs of the cash bet through the mutuel clerks and machines.

Don Lacer, who is stationed in the main money room on the first floor of the grandstand, has worked at the track since 1969 and has spent nearly 80% of his employment time there. The accounting procedures are just about the same as when he started, but transactions are now kept on computer rather than on paper.

"Two of us start in the morning and three more come in at 3:00," said Lacer. "The ones who come in at 3:00 get the money ready for the clerks for the following day. We hand out the bags the following morning when the clerks get there. After the day's races, they turn in the bags."

During the day, a money room employee checks with the clerks to see if they need a "draw" or a "skim."

"Some get hit hard because of a big bet and they need a draw, or extra money," Lacer said. "Some have too much on hand, and we skim it, or take it back to the money room.

"We have to keep track of everything and it has to balance back to the printout sheet from the tote company. Everything has to balance right down to the penny."

noteworthy endeavor

Being a racetrack bugler is more than playing "The Call to the Post." It's about entertaining the crowd and carrying on long-standing traditions. It's also something Bret Burkhead takes very seriously.

Burkhead, a resident of Evansville, Ind., has been sending horses to the post at Ellis Park for the past 12 years. At approximately 10 minutes to post, Burkhead goes to the winner's circle, lines up evenly with the television camera, and waits for the lead jockey to exit the saddling paddock before sounding the familiar "da-da-da-daah" as the horses and jockeys file onto the racetrack.

"I try to mix things up when I can. Before the fifth and ninth race I try to play an extra song. Usually I play 'My Old Kentucky Home,' 'Rocky Top,' 'When the Saints Go Marching In,' or something familiar that will entertain the crowd. Sometimes I even get requests and when I can, I try to play them," said Burkhead, who also works as a professional freelance trumpet player.

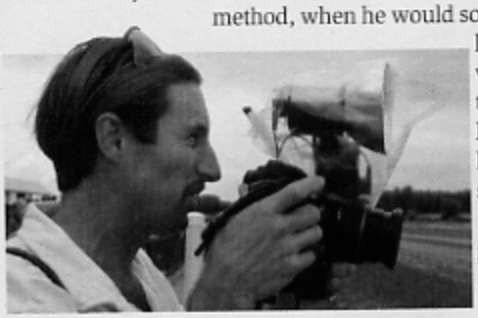
Burkhead is easily one of the most recognizable figures on the racetrack, which can have both its positives and negatives where extra attention is concerned.

"I've heard that I look like a lawn jockey; I get kids wanting to take their pictures with me; I sign autographs. I get to meet a lot of really interesting people. Everyone knows the bugler."

winner's exposure

Terry Jones gets to photograph lots of happy people. As the Ellis Park track photographer, he snaps a win photo of the connections with the horse after each race. Jones and his wife, Mary, work as a team at the track. Terry takes the winner's circle photograph and Mary takes the finish line shot. They both go back to their office, located behind a row of mutuel windows, where Mary types the caption and Terry downloads the shots from his camera to compose the entire package. Mary, a former Illinois police officer, met Terry four years ago at a Henderson, Ky., nightclub.

Terry Jones' job has changed in recent years. Digital cameras allow him to compose his photographs so they're ready by the end of the day. That's a big improvement over the old method, when he would sometimes spend three hours in a dark room developing the photographs. "I basically had to relearn, but it's a lot more efficient," he said.



Jones says he doesn't get tired of shooting the same pose each time. "It's never the same," he said. "There are always a variety of people."

Jones is also the track photographer at Churchill Downs. On Kentucky Derby Day, he composed the win photo of Derby winner War Emblem in time to have it in Prince Ahmed Salman's hands for the trophy presentation.

always on tap

Personality. It's what makes a good bartender, according to Curran Clem, who holds court at the outdoor grandstand bar closest to the Ellis Park saddling area. Judging from the number of patrons who frequent his area, it looks like his customers like what they hear. Sometimes.

"It all depends on who you ask on what day," Clem joked.

Clem, who briefly ran a bar in Henderson, Ky., has worked at Ellis for more than 10 years. He arrives about 10:30 to set things up. He estimates 85% of his orders are for beer and the remainder for mixed drinks and wine.

Part of being a good bartender is getting along with people and having his patrons get along with each other. "I feel good when people can get together and have a good time," Clem said. "Maybe you got a guy there hanging out for a couple of days and another guy over there doing the same thing. By interacting, either through me or someone else, they become friends. That's a good feeling."

Clem also is aware that a good bartender knows when to say when. "It's very rare, very rare, when I have to cut someone off," he said. "Usually it's a case of alcohol and losing. I try to take precautions, like telling them to slow down and getting their drinks slower."

cliff notes

Two men are ultimately responsible for putting each race into the record books within minutes of its running. Cliff Guilliams, one of two employees of Equibase at Ellis Park, has one key rule—no talking or cell phones during a race. That's because he is standing in a big bay window not far from the roof of the racetrack, binoculars pressed to his eyes, telling Jack Valentine which horse is in each position at the start and at each quarter-mile increment throughout the race. Valentine needs to hear so he can scribble down the running order and margins.

"You have to be in a rhythm," said Guilliams. "If you're interrupted for any reason, you have problems."

After the horses reach the finish line, the binoculars drop, Guilliams leaves his vantage point, and heads to a chair at his desk where he rewinds the race on videotape. He plays it back and writes the chart comments for each horse on his program. At the same time, Valentine is audibly punching his keyboard to enter every piece of data from Guilliams' calls.

By the time the horses are jogging back to their trainers, the mutuel department has called Valentine and delivered the pool information for the Equibase program. Guilliams has moved to the second computer and pounds in his contributions to the record. Guilliams has been doing this since 1986. He and Valentine have worked together the last four years.

weighty concerns

Ellis Park clerk of scales Brooks Becraft weighed in the win, place, and show jockeys after the third race. All it took was a quick glance at the needle to make sure it bounced over their weight before the race.

That's the easy part of the job. Becraft not only reads the jockeys' weights, but also runs the jocks' room, a job that seems to be a combination of payroll manager, referee, and proofreader.

Becraft sits at a metal desk next to the exit of the jocks' room and weighs the jockeys before they ride. He tells them whether they need to add or take off weight. Becraft credits part of the success of the process to the valets, who help the jockeys adjust the weights.

Becraft also checks the *Daily Racing Form* every day to make sure the jockeys are listed at the correct weights and the races are listed at correct conditions. If there are any rider changes, he makes the phone calls to the stewards, Equibase, and other interested parties. He also fills out a scale sheet after each race, which lists the order of finish and the jockeys' weights. Those sheets are a hard copy proof of the race and are kept at the track for two years, serving as a pay sheet for the jockeys.

Becraft also acts as the boss of the jocks' room, sometimes breaking up disputes. He said 99% of the jockeys are professionals.

"If you're not a professional in the business, you won't last long," Becraft said.

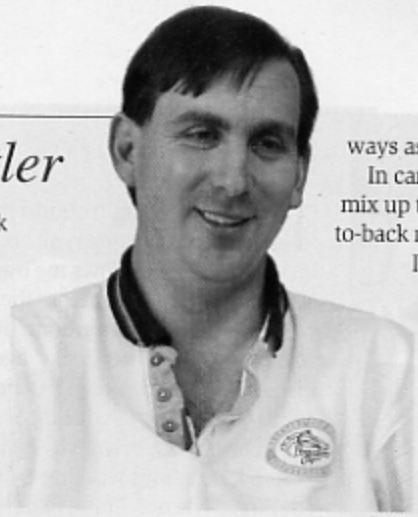
hey, beer man

Hot, humid weather is the norm at Ellis Park. One way to beat the heat is with a nice cold one from the Anheuser-Busch family of beers delivered by Mike and Mark Utley. The brothers have worked for more than 20 years for their family's wholesale distributing firm founded in 1940 by their grandfather, Edward Utley Jr. The company currently is owned by their father, Ron, and his two brothers.

Mike serves as sales manager, and Mark (left) is in charge of the warehouse. They make the eight-mile trip from the company's headquarters in Henderson, Ky., on Tuesdays and Fridays. That short of a distance ensures that the kegs, which need refrigeration, will remain cold until deposited in the Ellis Park coolers.

"Our main delivery day is Tuesday," said Mike, who figures his company supplies 70% of the beer at Ellis. "We deliver 50 kegs and 250 cases. On Fridays, we generally deliver 15 to 20 kegs and fewer cases. Mark shows up at the track just about every morning to go through a check list of things that need to be done. At the simulcast meeting, we deliver about eight kegs a week and 50 cases."

This Bud's for you.



the hustler

From writing the condition book to answering questions to hustling race entries, the job of a racing secretary is never finished. Just ask Doug Bredar, who is the racing secretary at Ellis Park and Churchill Downs.

Bredar's day begins around 7:30 a.m. with a drive across the Ellis Park backside before heading to the racing office, located beside the saddling paddock. Once inside the office, around 8-8:30 a.m., it's time to check on the status of entries for upcoming races. That's also when the e-mail begins pouring in and the phones start ringing.

"By around 10:15-10:30 a.m., we've usually seen all of the voluntary entries we are going to see and then it's time to hit the phones and start hustling," Bredar said. "A lot of the time, I call trainers who have had winners earlier in the meet that are now eligible to move up in conditions."

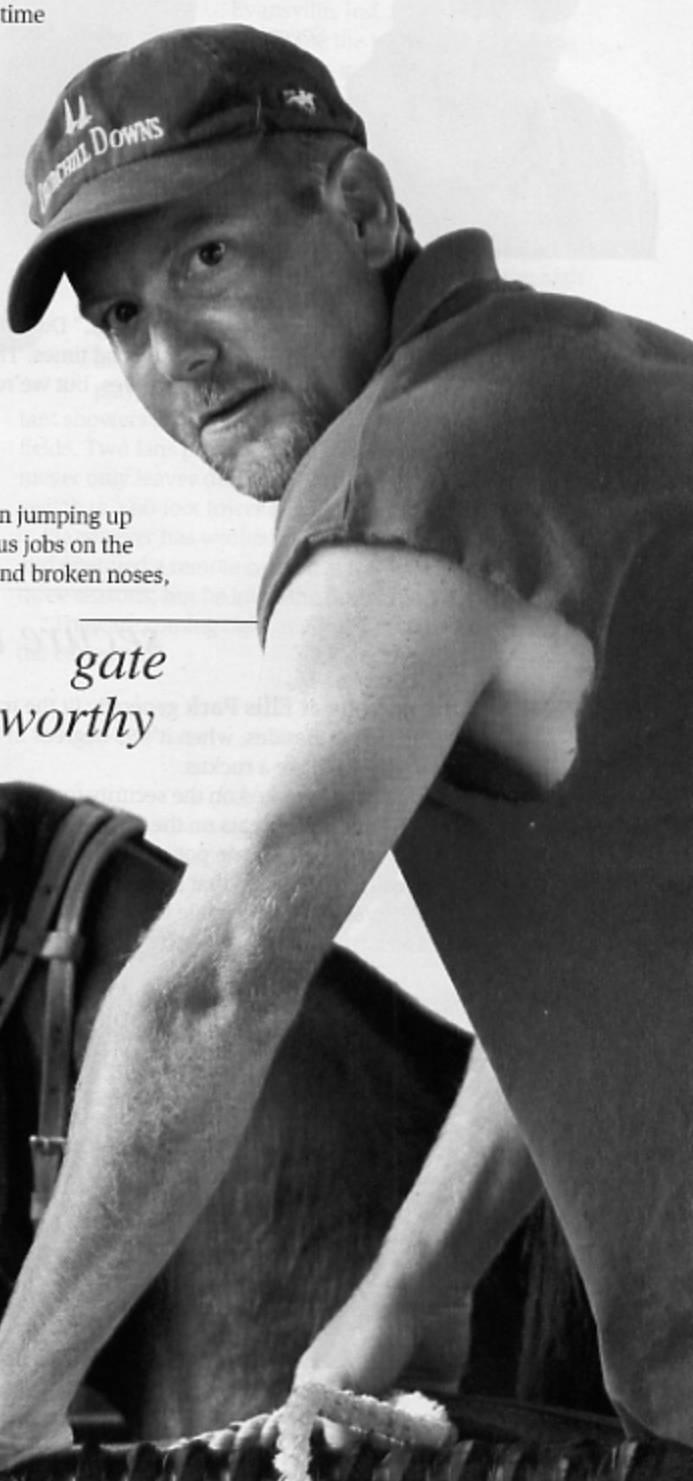
Entries are taken 48 hours prior to race day. Once entries are complete, Bredar begins "selling" or carding the upcoming race program.

"The way you write the condition book is never the way the race card plays out. There are always changes and trainers are always asking for a specific type of race."

In carding a typical race day, Bredar said he likes to mix up the different conditions, never running back-to-back races of any type or condition.

It would seem once the morning duties are complete, Bredar would have an easier day. Not so. Afternoons find Bredar watching the day's races or subbing for a steward.

Bredar said being a successful racing secretary is a three-tiered job. "First, you have to please the horsemen; secondly, you have to please management; and finally, you have to please the fans."



gate worthy

Those guys you see leading horses into the starting gate and then jumping up into the gate before it springs open have one of the most dangerous jobs on the racetrack. The world of an assistant starter is one of crooked fingers and broken noses, thanks to the antics of horses who can be less than well-behaved.

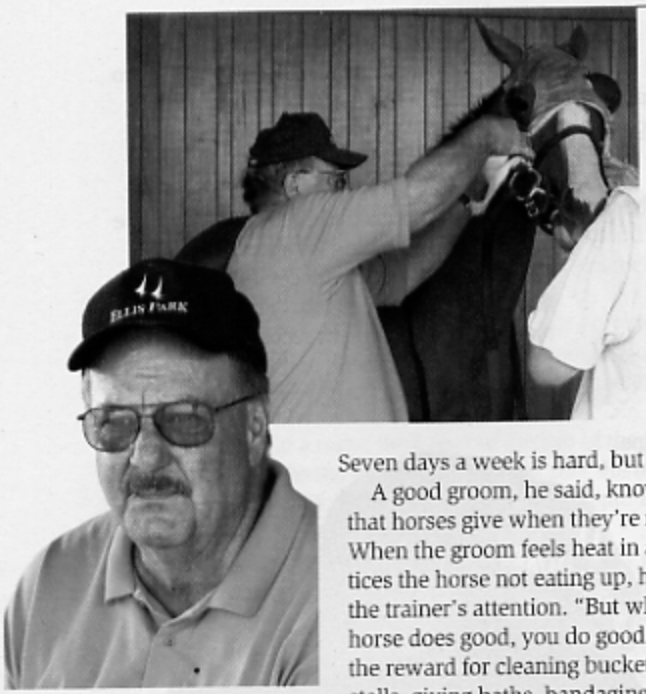
It is a world Stacey Luce, 34, knows inside and out. Luce grew up in Louisiana leading horses and holding them while blacksmiths did their thing.

"It can get funky in the gate, and if you don't know what you're doing, it can be dangerous," Luce said. "The good ones don't really need you—it's the ones who are flipping and flopping."

Luce took a flip at Ellis Park a few years ago when a horse knocked him into another stall while his knee had a collision with the first horse's head. "You're gonna get hurt eventually," he said matter-of-factly.

Luce, who works a circuit that includes Ellis, Churchill Downs, Hoosier Park, and Oaklawn, also schools horses in the gate during training hours. It is especially dangerous because these are horses who have made the starter's list by acting up, or babies who don't know what they're doing yet. He describes his job as "protecting the rider, then the horse, and then ourselves."

Luce calls over while standing with a horse in the gate: "This is an assistant starter's dream horse: He don't move."



double duty

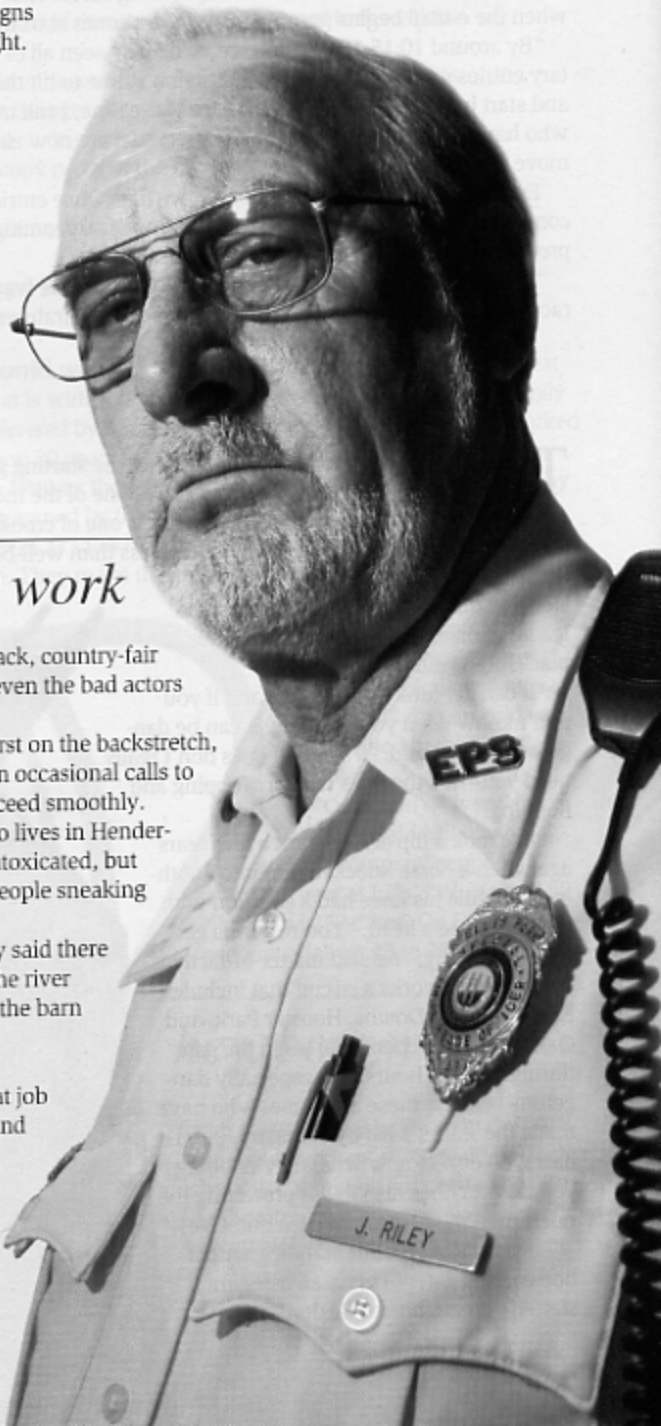
The man sitting outside the jocks' room in late morning is what small-circuit racing is all about. Craig Daligian ("Ask for 'Doublewide,' nobody knows me by 'Craig' ") has held just about every job at every small racetrack across the country.

He has worked as a groom, hotwalker, placing judge, assistant clerk of scales, owner, trainer, jocks' agent, valet, paddock porter, custodian, and office worker. The New England native has toiled at the Marshfield Fair south of Boston, at Paducah, Naragansett, Commodore, and Lincoln. "I've closed a lot of tracks," he laughed.

At 54, he enjoys working roughly half the year, traveling around the country. "The only thing I know is horses, and the track is such a great place. You talk to grooms one day, and princes the next. Seven days a week is hard, but it's like family."

A good groom, he said, knows the little signs that horses give when they're not feeling right. When the groom feels heat in a leg, or notices the horse not eating up, he calls it to the trainer's attention. "But when the horse does good, you do good." That's the reward for cleaning buckets and stalls, giving baths, bandaging, feeding, and taking your charge to the races.

"I always wanted to see the world," Doublewide said. "It's been a lot of fun and good times. There have been some bumps and curves, but we're still swinging."



secure in his work

The patrons at Ellis Park generally fit the track's laid-back, country-fair atmosphere. Besides, when it's 95 degrees in the shade, even the bad actors may not care to make a ruckus.

John Riley has worked on the security force for 13 years, first on the backstretch, and for the past three years on the front side. There have been occasional calls to the local authorities or state police, but otherwise, things proceed smoothly.

"We really haven't had that much trouble," said Riley, who lives in Henderson, Ky. "Every once in a while we'll have a person who is intoxicated, but that's about it. On the backstretch, though, we would have people sneaking in."

Ellis Park is separated from the Ohio River by a levee. Riley said there were times when ruled-off backstretch workers would take the river route, so to speak, by climbing up the levee and returning to the barn area.

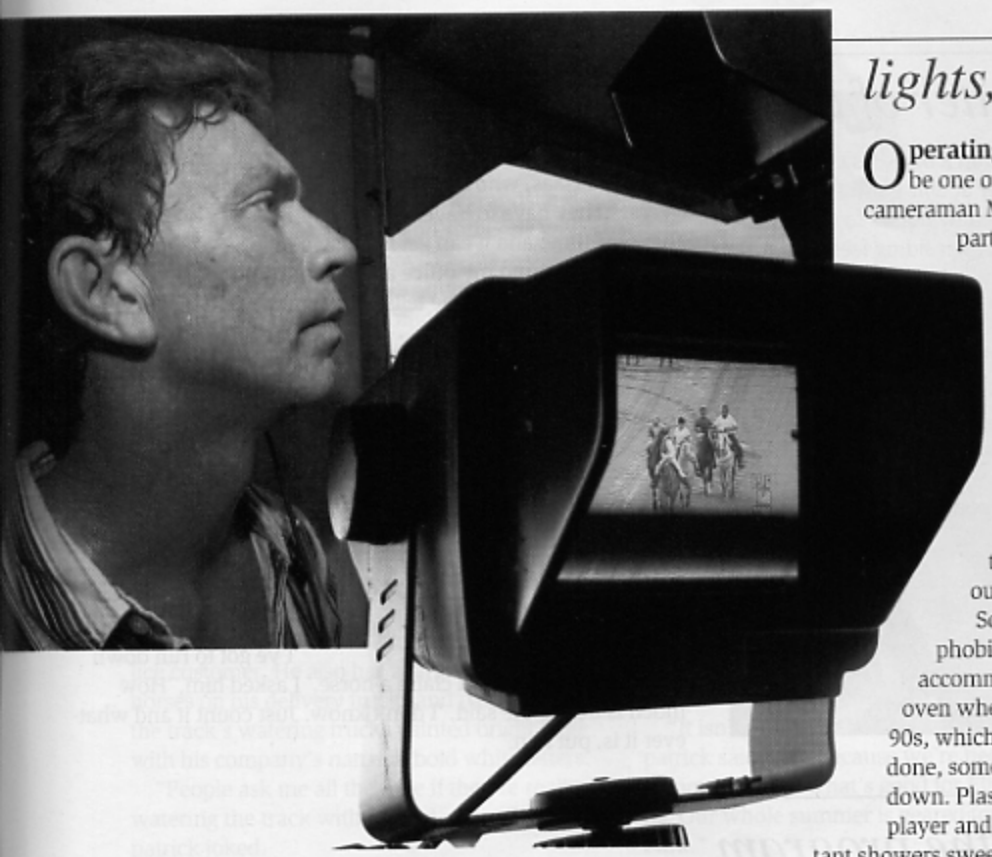
"Eventually, they would get caught again," Riley said.

Riley also has worked in mutuels during simulcasting. That job and his current position put him around people constantly, and that's just how he likes it.

"I've worked with the public all my life," he said. "I was even a bartender. I'm a people person."

Still, Riley takes his job seriously.

"I probably get along with everbody," he said. "But if you step on my toes, I'm going to step back."



lights, camera, action

Operating a television camera would seem to be one of safest jobs around a racetrack. Then cameraman Mike Plassmeyer, who spends a large part of his days in an 80-foot steel tower on the first turn at Ellis Park, describes riding out lightning and gale force winds that pop up quickly in the hot, humid Ohio River valley.

"We get about a week of it every season," said the 38-year-old Evansville, Ind., native. "What scares me the worst is the lightning. And when it gets rocking up here, it's pretty scary. A lot of people want to climb down, but it's better to ride it out."

Some camera operators hate the claustrophobic towers. The sheet metal turret barely accommodates two people and becomes an oven when the temperature spikes into the high 90s, which is most of the time. As soon as a race is done, some camera operators immediately climb down. Plassmeyer stays. He cranks up his CD player and watches the slanting gray bands of distant showers sweep across surrounding corn and soybean fields. Two fans provide some relief from the heat. Plassmeyer only leaves during the turf races when he has to switch to a 60-foot tower aligned with the turf stretch.

Plassmeyer has worked every camera on the grounds and operated a remote camera at the starting gate for three seasons, but he loves the first turn tower the best.

"They are coming right at you," he said. "To me, it's the best shot."

it's all in the call

Pressure? How about having to call the Kentucky Derby with 140,000 patrons on the grounds at Churchill Downs?

It's no wonder track announcer Luke Kruytbosch appreciates the finer things at Ellis Park. There's even that beautiful, relaxing view of the surrounding countryside from his booth atop the grandstand.

"It's laid-back here," said Kruytbosch, who has called races at small tracks like Blue Ribbon Downs, and major ones like Churchill. "It actually reminds me of Blue Ribbon Downs. It's a country-fair atmosphere. Nothing is taken too seriously here, but you still have horses running for $200,000 in purses a day."

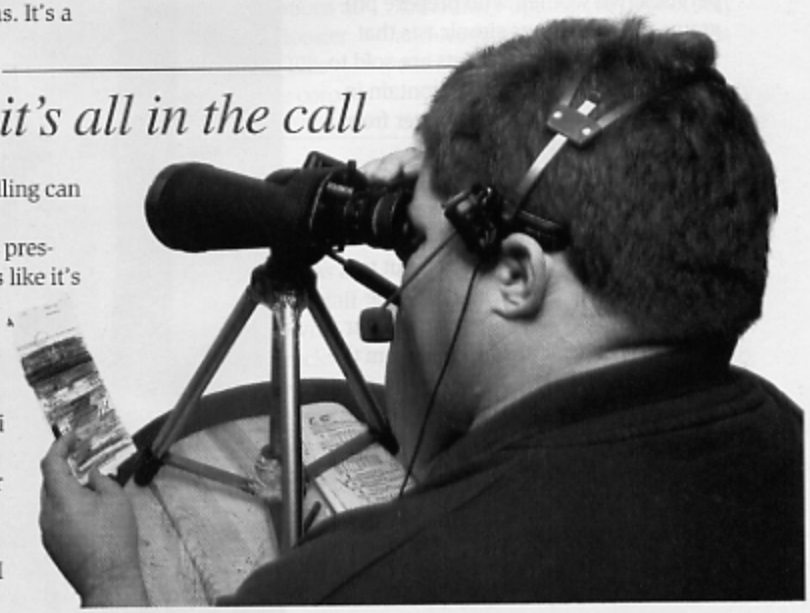
Kentucky Derby or $5,000 claimer, Kruytbosch always has his box of crayons to mark silks and saddle-cloth numbers in his program. Race-calling can be fun, but it's also serious business.

"Not that I don't try to do a good job, but there is less pressure here," Kruytbosch said. "Even Turf Paradise seems like it's a more pressured environment."

Such is the nature of Ellis Park, where Kruytbosch doubles as media relations director. He also is the host of the track's daily race-replay show, and hosts a Saturday morning seminar with general manager Paul Kuerzi and usually a guest handicapper.

As of Aug. 10, Kuerzi had picked 13 winners to 12 for Kruytbosch.

"He's a big chalk player," Kruytbosch said of Kuerzi. "He may have one more winner, but I have a better ROI (return on investment)."



a matter of trust

In simple terms, I more or less run a bank," said Don Haas, the horsemen's bookkeeper at Ellis Park.

Haas distributes the money earned by horses to their owners. He also makes sure jockeys get their riding fees, which are deducted from purses.

A certified public accountant, Haas plays a key role in the claiming process. Horsemen planning to halter a runner must have enough money deposited with Haas to cover their costs.

"Claiming is probably the most nerve-wracking part of my job," said Haas, who has worked at Ellis for approximately 40 years. "They have to have the money in here 15 minutes before post time, and it can get hectic when three or four people come running into my office at the same time."

Based on the stories he tells, it's apparent that horsemen trust Haas with their cash.

"One time a fellow came up to me in church on Sunday and gave me a whole handful of $100 bills to put in his account so he could claim a horse that afternoon," Haas said. "Another time, a fellow ran into my office and threw a big wad of $100 bills on my desk and said, 'Put 'em in my account; I've got to run down and claim a horse.' I asked him, 'How much is there?' He said, 'I don't know. Just count it and whatever it is, put it in.' "

get with the program

As the program coordinator for Ellis Park, Lana Murphy makes sure horsemen and racing fans can find the information they need in the track's publications. Taking data supplied by the racing office, she puts together a program for Ellis' live card that is printed in-house and distributed for free to owners and trainers by the Kentucky Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association. She also supervises two women who prepare programs for the various simulcasts that Ellis offers. Those pamphlets are sold to the public for $1 apiece and contain information obtained via computer from a special Web site.

"We also used to produce the program for the live card that we sell to the public in-house," Murphy said. "But for the last few years we've sent it out to a printer called Sullivan Brothers. The one I do for the horsemen that has our live card in it is a little different from the public program. It has information about stakes closings and about where they can buy videotapes of their horses' races. It also has more statistics in it. The public program has more information about betting and things like that."

Murphy works on the horsemen's program from 8-9:30 each morning, then she helps Don Haas, the horsemen's bookkeeper.

"I enjoy my job because I am a detail-oriented person," she said. "I also like the fact that at the end of every day, it's done. There isn't anything to carry over, so I don't worry about it at home at night."

lightning in a bottle

Walk through the Ellis Park grandstand with Paul Fitzpatrick and someone will likely shout, "Hey, water boy!"

Fitzpatrick is the local distributor of Hinckley Springs bottled water, the official water of Ellis Park and the Gardenia Stakes, and he wears the nickname proudly. He's been the track's "water boy" for 11 years. He started with Cameron Springs, but Perrier bought the company and cut Fitzpatrick's job. With a new supplier and new distributorship, Fitzpatrick went back to Ellis. The track immediately dropped Cameron for Hinckley because Fitzpatrick promotes the track as much as his product.

Fitzpatrick regularly gives away four free general admission tickets to every new home or office customer. He also has a large picture of racehorses on his delivery trucks and paid to have the track's watering trucks painted bright blue with his company's name in bold white letters.

"People ask me all the time if they're really watering the track with bottled water," Fitzpatrick joked.

Water is a precious commodity at Ellis, where the sun and humidity can be merciless. But promotion rather than heat are driving sales here. Last year, Fitzpatrick's Tri Valley Water sold Ellis 200-300 cases of half-liter bottles. The track bought 1,000 cases so far this year with two weeks left in the meet.

"It isn't any more hot and humid," Fitzpatrick said. "It's because we're tied into the community and what's good for Ellis is good for us. Our whole summer is geared toward Ellis Park."

front and center

Paul Kuerzi began his career in racing as a part-time mutuel clerk cashing $2 place tickets at Keeneland. Now, he's in charge of a racetrack that's part of the corporate family of Churchill Downs Inc.

As general manager of Ellis Park, Kuerzi has come a long way from calculating payoffs with pencil and paper. His degree in mathematics, though, has helped him tremendously with the financial aspects of his job.

After management positions at Louisiana Downs and Hoosier Park, Kuerzi came to Ellis Park in 1999. On the corporate side, he serves as a liaison between his staff and Churchill Downs Inc. On the racetrack side, he and his wife, Sue, thrive on interacting with the community, a key part of the success of Ellis Park.

"The job is considerably different than what I envisioned," Kuerzi said. "It's surprising how much public relations work is involved, but it has been a very pleasant part of the job. The community has taken very kindly to it."

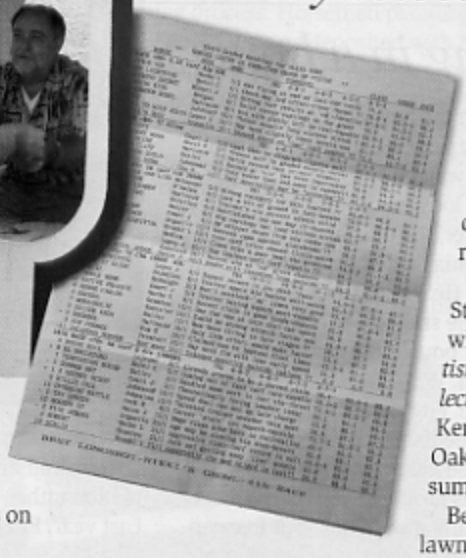
Ellis Park is open for live racing roughly two months a year, in the sometimes-oppressive heat of July and August. That schedule comes with its challenges.

"With a short meet, it's extremely difficult to find people to work for only two months," he said. "The heat can be really debilitating for our employees and the horses, and for our facility, it can limit what we can do for our customers."

Obstacles aside, the quest for success continues. Kuerzi said plans are in the works now on ways to better market next year's Gardenia Stakes, the centerpiece of the meet.

"There are always things you find that need tweaking, or things that you can do better."

very selective



It's easy to sell a tip sheet when you're picking winners," David Bell said. Apparently, he has picked a few over the years, because his STATS sheet has been on the market at various tracks around the country since 1974.

On this day at Ellis Park, Bell's best longshot on the 10-race card, Nikki's Growl, wins the fourth race and returns $22.20.

Situated just inside the main entrance to the track, Bell does not hawk his product like many in his business. He sits quietly as both regulars and newcomers pay $2 for his speed ratings and selections, complete with comments on every starter.

Bell enjoys the banter with customers and is quick to relate how he believes the rain that has fallen that morning will affect the day's races. He sells his sheet for about two hours, shutting down when the first post rolls around.

Bell, 58, was working in St. Louis as a stockbroker when he began selling his *Statistical Trends And Track Selections*. He now covers the Kentucky circuit as well as Oaklawn Park. This is his 20th summer at Ellis.

Bell, who also hosted an Oaklawn replay show for five years, doesn't consider himself a tout, rather a "form cycle interpreter.

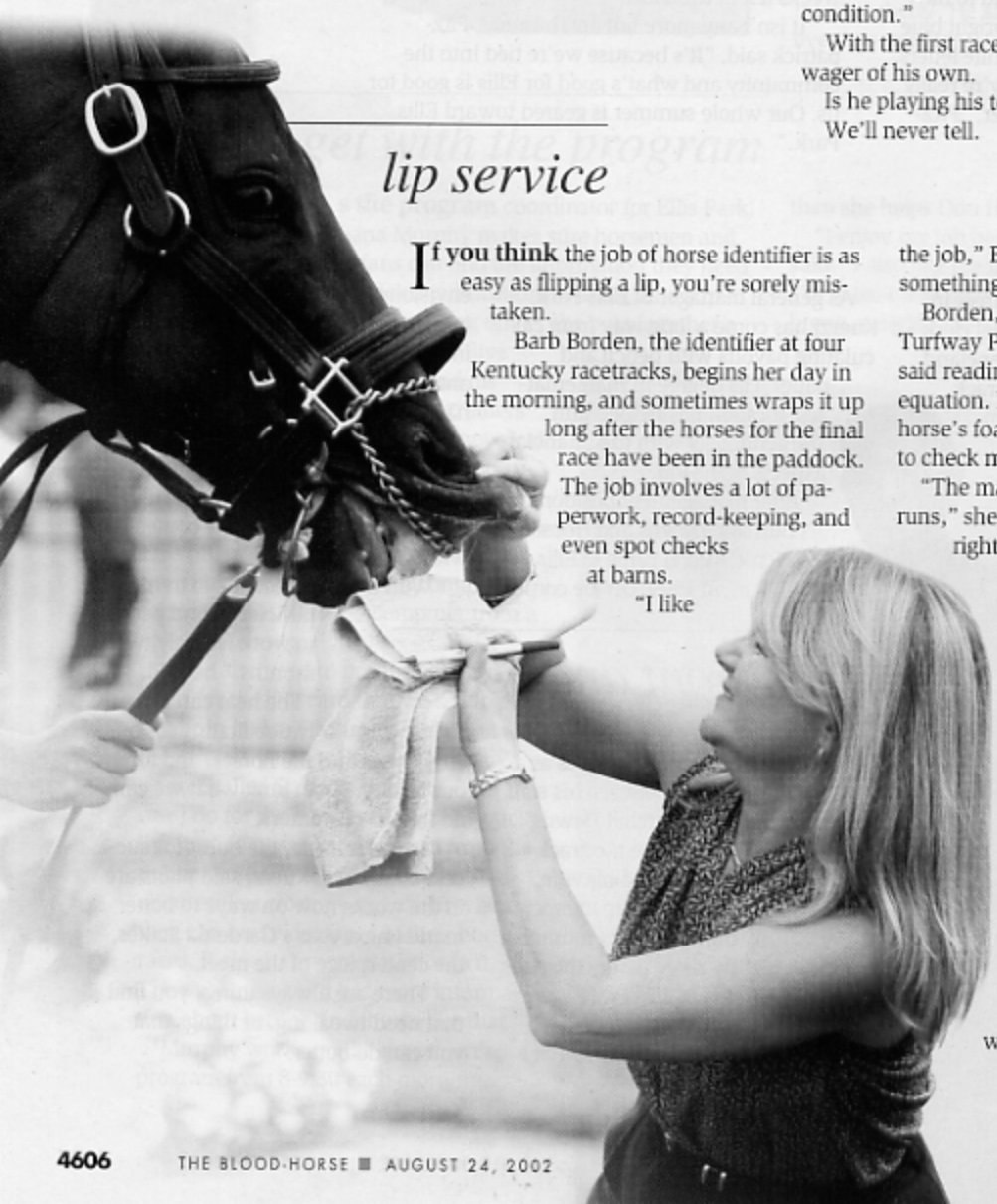
"Speed figures work because they are the best clue to current condition."

With the first race about to go off, Bell hustles in to make a wager of his own.

Is he playing his top selection in the race?

We'll never tell.

lip service



If you think the job of horse identifier is as easy as flipping a lip, you're sorely mistaken.

Barb Borden, the identifier at four Kentucky racetracks, begins her day in the morning, and sometimes wraps it up long after the horses for the final race have been in the paddock. The job involves a lot of paperwork, record-keeping, and even spot checks at barns.

"I like the job," Borden said. "It's fun, and it's certainly something different every day. It's a challenge."

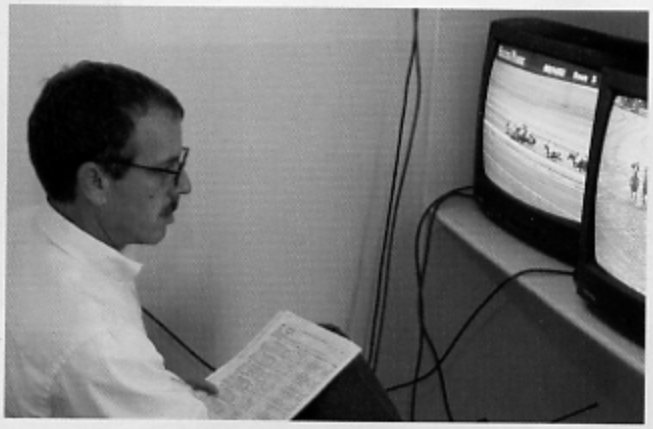
Borden, who began as an assistant identifier at Turfway Park in 1988 and now lives in Louisville, said reading lip tattoo numbers is only part of the equation. In the paddock, she carries a copy of each horse's foal-registration records from The Jockey Club to check markings and color.

"The markings are examined every time a horse runs," she said. "The end goal is to make sure the right horse comes to the paddock and runs."

At Ellis Park, Borden also administers the Kentucky Thoroughbred Development Fund by checking horses' eligibility for purse supplements. That's the easy part of her day.

In the paddock, it can come down to a judgment call, because tattoo numbers and markings aren't an exact science. Given the tight time frame and need to protect the betting public, Borden said it's best to scratch a horse if the evidence leans in that direction.

"In the office, it's pretty much black and white," Borden said. "Out there in the paddock, it can be gray. You have to be assertive and confident, and know what you're looking at."



I'll be the judge of that

Someone has to make the ultimate decisions on the thorny issues that arise during the running of races or the day-to-day running of a racetrack. Steve Obrekaitis is one of three stewards who make such judgments at Ellis Park.

Their most high-profile task is reviewing tapes of each race just after it's run to make sure no infractions occurred. Any bettor holding a winning ticket has heard the following words of doom: "There is a steward's inquiry…Please hold all pari-mutuel tickets."

During a race, two stewards at Ellis watch through binoculars on a platform just outside their office high atop the grandstand. The third, in this case Obrekaitis, watches the race live on two monitors, one showing the pan shot, the other a head-on look at the running. All three watch a replay of the race before making the result official.

Obrekaitis has been a steward at Ellis for five years, and a placing judge at various Kentucky tracks for a dozen years before that. "We can't bring any prejudice into our view," he stated. "Of course, people who lose money have a different perspective."

Although it seems like forever, Obrekaitis said most inquiries are wrapped up in less than five minutes.

In the mornings, stewards record scratches, bills of sale for horses, trainer transfers, licensing, and any other official work that comes across their desks. They also bring jockeys in to look at film if there have been incidences of careless riding. On this muddy day, everything is clean, an easy day for the judges.

making an assist

Valets work for the racetracks, helping saddle and unsaddle racehorses. They also work for jockeys, cleaning their equipment and performing other duties.

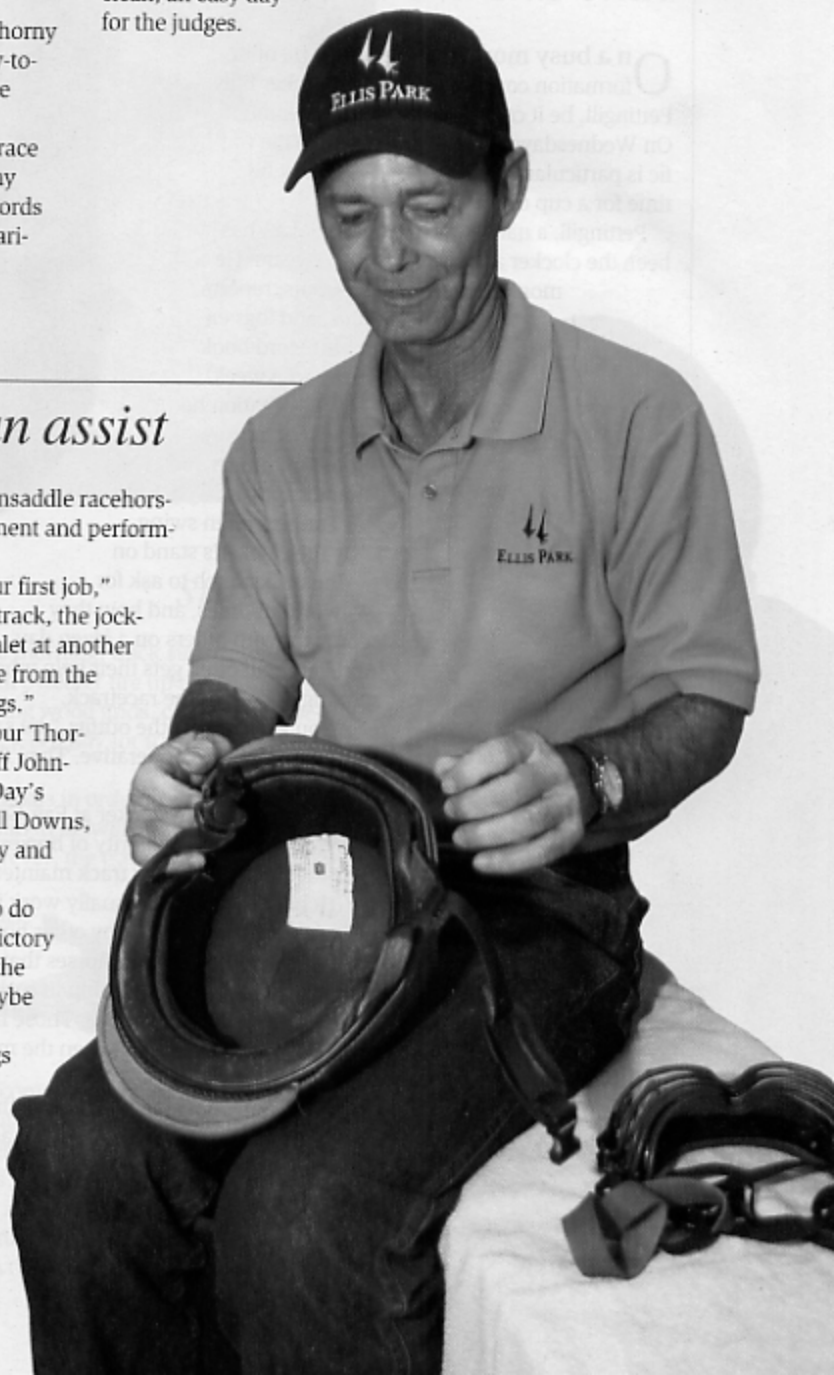
"Saddling and unsaddling horses for the racetrack is our first job," Chuck Victory said. "Then, after we are hired by the racetrack, the jockeys pick us individually to be their valets. Sometimes a valet at another track will recommend you to his jockey. We get a day rate from the track, and the jockeys pay us a percentage of their earnings."

Victory travels the circuit in Kentucky, working at all four Thoroughbred tracks. At Ellis Park, he is the valet for riders Jeff Johnston, Greta Kuntzweiler, and Justin Vitek. He also is Pat Day's valet when the Hall of Fame jockey rides at Ellis, Churchill Downs, or Keeneland. Two other Hall of Fame riders—Jerry Bailey and Earlie Fires—have employed Victory in the past.

"Everyone on the racetrack wants to have something to do with a Kentucky Derby horse or a Triple Crown horse," Victory said. "By working as valets, we enjoy getting to work for the jockeys who ride those horses. We all look forward to maybe winning the Derby one year with one of our riders."

Victory makes sure his riders have clean towels and rags to wipe their boots. He also provides them with shampoo and other toiletries as well as cold Gatorade and sodas.

"He's the coolest, and he takes such good care of me," said Kuntzweiler of Victory. "He even gives me little bags of chocolates. He's one of the best guys."



time and time again

On a busy morning, every little bit of information comes in handy for clocker Billy Pettingill, be it color, markings, or equipment. On Wednesdays and Saturdays, when the traffic is particularly heavy, there might not be time for a cup of coffee.

Pettingill, a native of New Orleans, La., has been the clocker at Ellis Park for five years. He monitors morning workouts, reports official times, and logs entries in his record book seven days a week. The information he provides is a key tool for trainers and handicappers.

Trainers often swing by the clocker's stand on the backstretch to ask for workout times, and how they compare with others on a given day. And Pettingill often gets their help when it comes to spotting horses on the racetrack.

"You get to know the outfits," he said. "Most of the people are pretty cooperative. They'll tell you who the horses are."

Pettingill, also the clocker at Fair Grounds in the fall and winter, said the majority of horses take to the track before the break for track maintenance. The "tough horses," he said, usually work in the dark so they don't get distracted by other horses.

There is a group of horses that stable at Ellis Park year-round, or ship in early to get a work or two over the surface. Those horses, Pettingill said, are worth a look when the meet opens each July.

"It's amazing how well the horses that train here run," he said. "The local horses have an advantage because they're used to the surface."

super man

After the final horses finish training in the morning, track superintendent Glenn Thompson and lead tractor driver Pam Swearer fire up their John Deeres and head out on the dirt track for a few laps, towing wood grids, called floats, behind them. Their main job is making sure the track is ready for training and racing each day.

Usually, they follow the water trucks with the floats in order to smooth the track several times during morning training and in between each race in the afternoon. On this particular morning, however, the track is soaked with rain from the night before, and the weather forecast calls for an 80% chance of storms throughout the day. Instead of watering, two crew members first smooth the track with a device called a drying-out harrow. Thompson and Swearer follow with the floats to seal the track.

A storm rolls in around 11 a.m. and the dirt becomes a soupy mud under the floats. But the rain isn't as much of a problem as it used to be. Swearer noticed at Keeneland that workers had drilled holes under the rail for drainage. She and her crew tried it at Ellis, and the drainage has significantly improved.

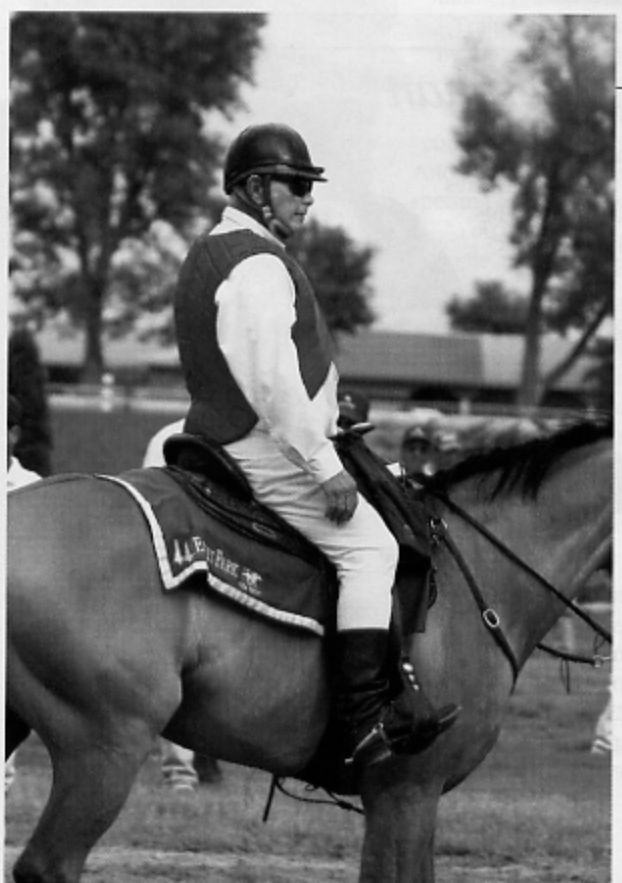
Thompson, a 50-year veteran at Ellis, manages a crew of about 25 people who care for the backside, as well as the dirt and turf tracks. Thompson even cleans stalls or bathrooms when staffing is light in the middle of the winter.

high praise

To a casual observer it might appear that Tom Farley's ministry is simply one of doughnuts and water—Krispy Kreme at Turfway Park and Hinckley Springs water at Ellis Park. However, on his morning rounds handing out bottled water, or agua to many, he checks in with residents and workers on the backside, remembering last night's barbecue and church, or inquiring why others weren't at the weekly Tuesday night service.

Farley, an ordained minister, leads formal prayers, but also counsels, assists, and protects as needed. He is currently working with a couple trying to regain custody of their child. Sometimes his offered warmth is in the form of blankets. Often, it is simply the solemn or jovial mention of Jesus in the midst of many small tasks.

"Turfway is a totally different ministry than here," said Farley of his work at Ellis Park, where he is mostly working solo. In Northern Kentucky he has 11 part-time assistants. At Ellis, too, his work is less about providing tangible things and more about meaning. His water work, which he started after a concern about the quality of drinking water, is what he calls "a drink of water in the name of Jesus." It enables him to casually visit with most of the people who call Ellis home, the favorite part of his job.



out and about

It is morning training hours, and Eddie Rogers, sitting aboard a quiet pony, is king of all he surveys. Situated at a gap on the backstretch of Ellis Park, Rogers keeps a keen eye out for riders who might get into trouble due to equipment breaking or a rowdy horse that throws them off.

"We're like the policemen of the racetrack," the 60-year-old noted. "We make sure the rules are followed and keep everybody in line, check to see they're in the right position on the track."

Rogers has been involved with horses since 1952, when he answered a newspaper ad to help break some babies. "After school I'd go out and get on horses, made $10 a week, and thought I was getting big money. And I was," he said.

The outrider's job is to prevent all the bad things that can happen on the track, including running down loose horses. Rogers remembers one getting loose and going out into a cornfield for three days.

"They brought a helicopter in to look for him before someone found him coming out of the cornfield. He was eating good."

Before each race Rogers leads the field out onto the track and releases the horses to gallop. He then gathers them three minutes before post and walks them to the gate, coordinating his wristwatch with the clock on the tote board. After all these years, Rogers is still always right on time.

relishing her job

Ellis Park is primarily known for its hot, humid weather and the infield soybean patch, but the homemade hot dog relish served at the tracks' eight concession stands also ranks high on the list of track traditions.

"People remember the relish," said Pam Balczo, an employee at concession stand 8 on the track's ground level. "Everyone always comments on the relish."

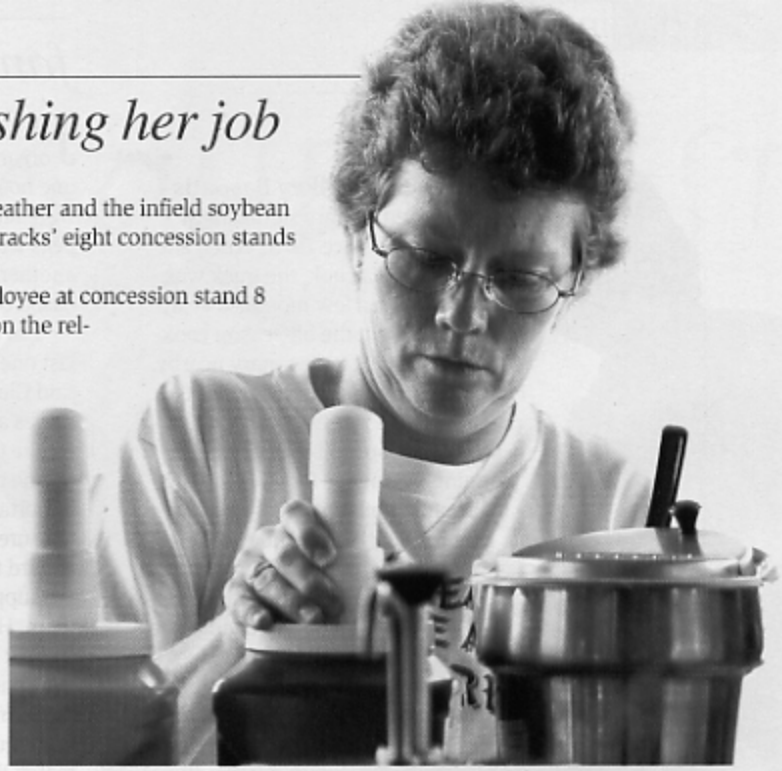
Ice cream, frozen lemonade, and relish-topped hot dogs are the most popular items sold at the stand.

"We have 50 cent hot dogs and Cokes on Sundays and probably sell as many hot dogs and Cokes on that one day as we do the entire week," said Balczo, who works as a nurse at St. Mary's Hospital in Evansville, Ind.

Balczo said a staff of four maintains the concession stand on weekdays while it takes up to six workers on weekends.

"We try to come in around 10 a.m. to begin cooking the hot dogs and to clean the ice cream machines. We also make sure the soda machines are filled and we do a quick inventory of what we will need for the day," Balczo said. "The prep work usually takes about an hour and then customers start stopping by around 11:30 a.m."

Members of Evansville's Premier Stars Cheerleading Booster Club have been manning stand 8 the past three years. Ellis receives all profits from the food sold at the stand while the parent volunteers turn their hourly wages over to the club.



"We just try to be as cordial as possible and wish everyone luck," Balczo said. "This is a really good fundraiser for the girls and it's a lot of fun. A completely different kind of stress from my regular job."

puzzle person

Steve Krajcir finds it ironic that he took courses in engineering and now works at racetracks in Arkansas, Indiana, and Kentucky. However, his role as stall superintendent for Ellis Park is really putting together a giant puzzle of who fits where at the racetrack, so maybe his analytical engineering background helps.

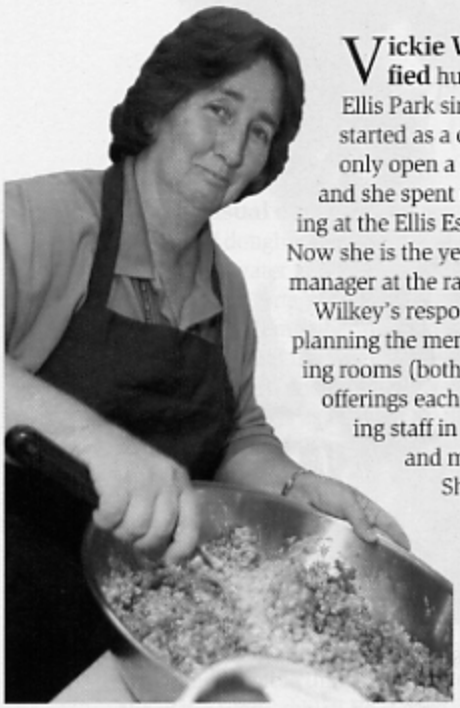
Krajcir is responsible for making sure every horse has a stall, every trainer has a tack room, and every employee has a place to sleep. In addition, he assigns those spots in concert with requests to be near friends or in certain barns, while accommodating as many as 46 horses shipping in daily. He also gives grooms their colored vests for the trip to the paddock before each race. Luckily, he likes all the action.

"I'm very personable," he said. "I like dealing with people. I really enjoy it."

This season started on April 29 for Krajcir, more than two months before the meet began. He came to the track, assessed maintenance needs, and clocked workouts of the horses already on site. He made a few trips to Churchill Downs to get information on the trainers and their employees headed to Ellis, then put together the barn layout. He said once that is in place, his main responsibility is monitoring the horses shipping in and out daily.

Once this meet is over, he will head to Hoosier Park, where he works as the clerk of scales. He won't return home to his wife and son in Hot Springs, Ark., until Dec. 1. Next spring he'll resume work as Oaklawn Park's stakes coordinator, then repeat the circuit.

a day in the life
# of a racetrack



Vickie Wilkey has satisfied hungry stomachs at Ellis Park since 1975. When she started as a cook, the track was only open a few months a year, and she spent the off-season cooking at the Ellis Estate granary nearby. Now she is the year-round kitchen manager at the racetrack.

Wilkey's responsibilities include planning the menus for two large dining rooms (both with separate buffet offerings each day) and coordinating staff in the two kitchens and multiple dining areas. She tries to change the menus a bit each season, and offers more fresh foods during the live meet. Nearly everything is made on site.

really cookin' now

While zipping from place to place, Wilkey is consulted on everything from napkin sizes to which employees started school this week and aren't expected at work until later in the day. Beyond the live meet, she supervises all the food services for simulcast customers, as well as the needs for Christmas parties, wedding receptions, and class reunions held at the racetrack. Kentucky Derby Day means three days of preparation for her and her staff.

Wilkey switches gears effortlessly, going from manager to friend, but above all, prefers working hands-on with food.

"I don't think you ever get tired of it once you get into it," she said.

fancy colors

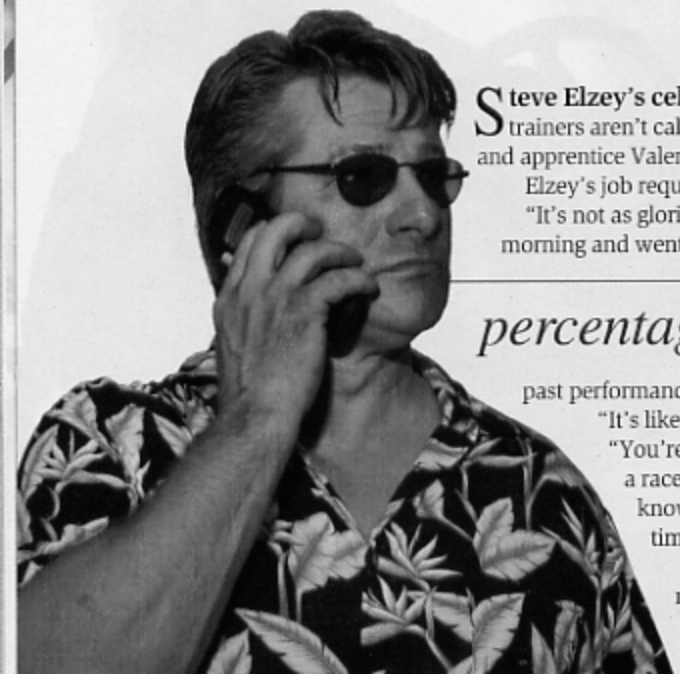
J.J. Gloria works as the silks room attendant at Ellis Park, organizing and keeping track of 900 sets of racing colors. He has one notebook that lists the silks by number in the order that they were received from their owners' trainers. The colors are hung on pegs with corresponding numbers in the silks room. Gloria also has another notebook that lists the colors in alphabetical order, based on their owners' names.

"I'm the first one here in the morning and the last one to leave at night," said Gloria, who also serves as the custodian for the jockeys' room.

One of Gloria's most important duties is making sure the silks end up aboard the horses that are supposed to carry them. He uses a wooden rack that is equipped with one board for each race. On each board are numbered pegs that match the program numbers of the horses. While consulting a copy of the racing program, Gloria finds each owner's colors in the silks room and hangs them on the appropriate peg. Valets take the colors later in the day and hand them to the jockeys.

"The beginning of the meet is the worst," Gloria said. "But after the first couple of weeks, it's a breeze. When you see certain colors go out there every day, you don't even have to look at your book to know where they are."

Gloria also is responsible for keeping the silks clean. If an owner's colors go to the track more than once in a day, Gloria tries to wash and dry them between races. The turnaround time can be as low as three to five minutes.



Steve Elzey's cell phone bill is $10,000 a year, but he doesn't complain about the expense. "If trainers aren't calling, your business isn't good," said the jockey agent who represents James Lopez and apprentice Valerie Nagle. Both were ranked among the top 10 riders at Ellis Park as of Aug. 14.

Elzey's job requires long hours.

"It's not as glorious as people think because you put in a lot of time," he said. "I got up at 4:30 this morning and went to Churchill Downs before I came here. I'll be in and out of here all day, and the phone will ring until nine o'clock tonight."

percentage player

Elzey tries to book his riders on the best horses he can find in each race. In addition to talking with trainers, he spends hours studying condition books and researching past performance records in the *Daily Racing Form*.

"It's like the stock market; you're always looking for the best opportunity," Elzey said. "You're juggling horses at all times. You might have a horse written down for your rider in a race, then a trainer calls you at 9:30 in the morning before the draw with a horse you know is better. So, you call the other man and try to get out of your commitment. Sometimes you can do it, and sometimes you can't.

"The key is riding winners," he concluded. "If your jockeys don't win, you don't make money. I work for a percentage, and the more they win the bigger my check is. I want them to be on top."

of a racetrack

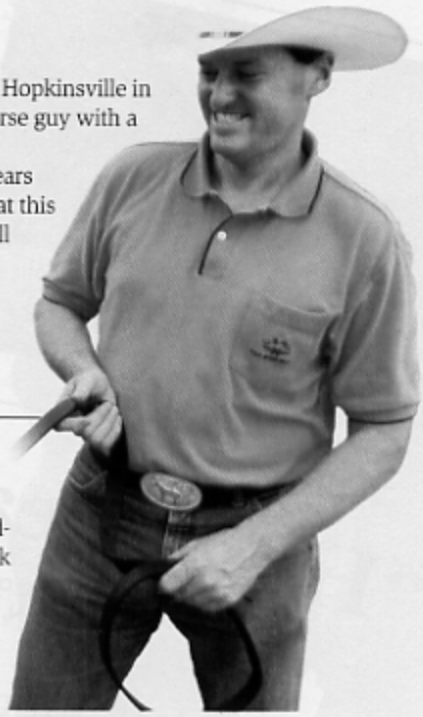
Not many people stable at Ellis Park year-round. Larry Jones is an exception. A native of Hopkinsville in southwest Kentucky who grew up around horses, Jones landed at Ellis Park a Quarter Horse guy with a background in showing, reining, and barrel racing.

The year was 1980 and he was ready to switch to Thoroughbreds. Getting his license two years later, he bought a crooked filly and showed her to his dad. "I had run track and my dad looks at this filly and said, 'What are you going to do with her?' I said, 'Race her,' and he said, 'I think you'll beat her.' "

Since then, the stock has steadily improved at the orange-and-white painted Barn 26 on the Ellis backside. Jones has consistently posted a strong winning percentage—19% at Ellis since 1991—and this meet has won with six of his first eight starters.

Jones, 45, still gallops many of his 16 horses because "riding is what brought me into it."

He has a great sense of humor and is a devoted family man. Those hustling around the barn include his wife, Cindy, and daughter and son-in-law. "She's in foal," he said, pointing to his daughter.



trainer stats

Training year-round at Ellis—though he now makes the Thoroughbred meet at Prairie Meadows—allows Jones to remain close to family, but the real reason is "this is the kindest racetrack in the world.

"We're here to enjoy ourselves, and we're lucky to have owners that will let us be patient; give us the time to work with their horses."

With 19% winners, it ain't broke at the Jones' barn, so don't fix it.

monitoring the situation

Simulcasting represents 80% of total handle at the average racetrack. Getting those images from other tracks up and running is the oil vital to keeping the whole operation humming. As video supervisor, Kim Southerland is one of two full-time board operators who makes sure those out-of-state signals are shown in living color throughout the plant.

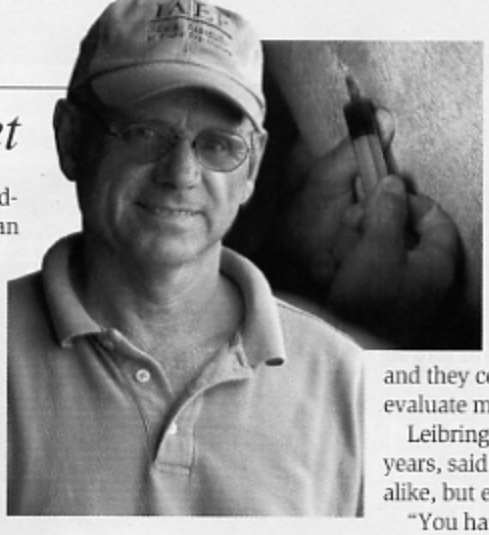
The signals come in from three satellite dishes outside the track's general offices. At his station in the video room, Southerland must keep track of up to 20 different decoders and keep within reach thick, spiral-bound notebooks of operating manuals and other tracks' phone numbers should anything go wrong.

Two full-time operators and one part-time one work a total of 14 shifts a week. It's a "can't miss" job, but in a worst-case scenario, a few people in the mutuel department know which switches to flip.

A core audience of 550-600 a day show up during the off-season for simulcasting. The local Kentucky circuit is by far the preferred product.

Southerland must also make sure all the monitors throughout the facility are working and keep up with their maintenance. A side room is filled with replacements should anything go wrong. "We haven't had a problem with vandalism; the biggest problem is with the elements," he said. "Those monitors can go bad being outside all the time."

seasoned vet



Sixteen-hour days are the norm for Dr. Rodney Leibring, an Evansville, Ind., veterinarian who works the backside of Ellis Park in addition to maintaining a private clinic.

His days begin around 6 a.m., when he packs his gear and heads for the track. He spends the early morning hours inspecting horses that might have worked that morning or those that might be sick.

After medical rounds, it's time to distribute medication, such as Salix (Lasix) shots. The injections are given to horses four hours prior to the start of their individual race.

Leibring's day doesn't end when the last Salix shot is given. It's back to making rounds, where he'll spend the afternoon doing everything from laminitis exams, to "jugging" horses, to simply checking out horses scheduled to run the next day. Jugging is administrating a one-half to one-liter combination of vitamins and electrolytes in fluid form.

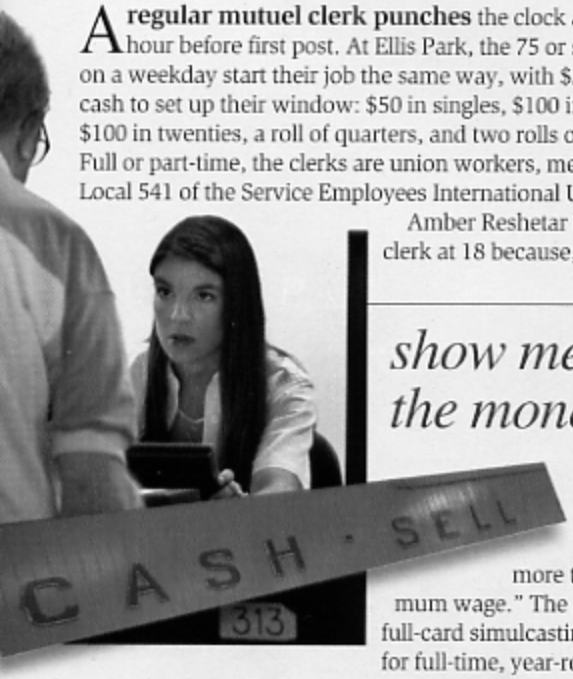
After the last winner has crossed the finish line for the day, Leibring makes one last round through the barn area before returning home to his clinic, where he sometimes works until after 10 p.m.

"Part of the job that I really like is knowing I did something that helped the horse perform better. It's instant gratification. If I can find and properly treat the problem and they come back and do better, it helps me evaluate my job and do it better," Leibring said.

Leibring, who has been a veterinarian over 30 years, said no two days at the track are exactly alike, but everything revolves around the horse.

"You have the trainers' desires, the owners' desires, and then you have the horse. I try to do the best I can to make the horse's well-being my first priority."

show me the money



A regular mutuel clerk punches the clock a half-hour before first post. At Ellis Park, the 75 or so clerks on a weekday start their job the same way, with $270 in cash to set up their window: $50 in singles, $100 in fives, $100 in twenties, a roll of quarters, and two rolls of dimes. Full or part-time, the clerks are union workers, members of Local 541 of the Service Employees International Union.

Amber Reshetar became a clerk at 18 because, "it paid more than minimum wage." The advent of full-card simulcasting makes for full-time, year-round employment for clerks. Despite having a nursing degree, Reshetar prefers working her 5½-hour shift five days a week.

While the majority of her bets are of the $2 variety, the largest wager she's handled was a bet of $500 across-the-board. Her largest payout? Sixteen thousand dollars—cash.

Behind the counter, there is plenty of humor to go around. In her six-year run at Ellis, the funniest thing she remembers was seeing some first-time players come in during inter-track wagering who sprinted around the empty racetrack to watch the horses they saw entering the stretch on television.

Reshetar has a cadre of regular customers at her station in the "terrace" of Ellis Park. "I'm not real good with names, but I know their faces." However, she has to be good with numbers—her cash box must balance out at the end of each day.

the place to be

Keeping track of the whereabouts of a horse during a race can be difficult. Placing judge Jeff Ewalt and associates Tia Murphy and Max Porter help make it easier from their lofty vantage point.

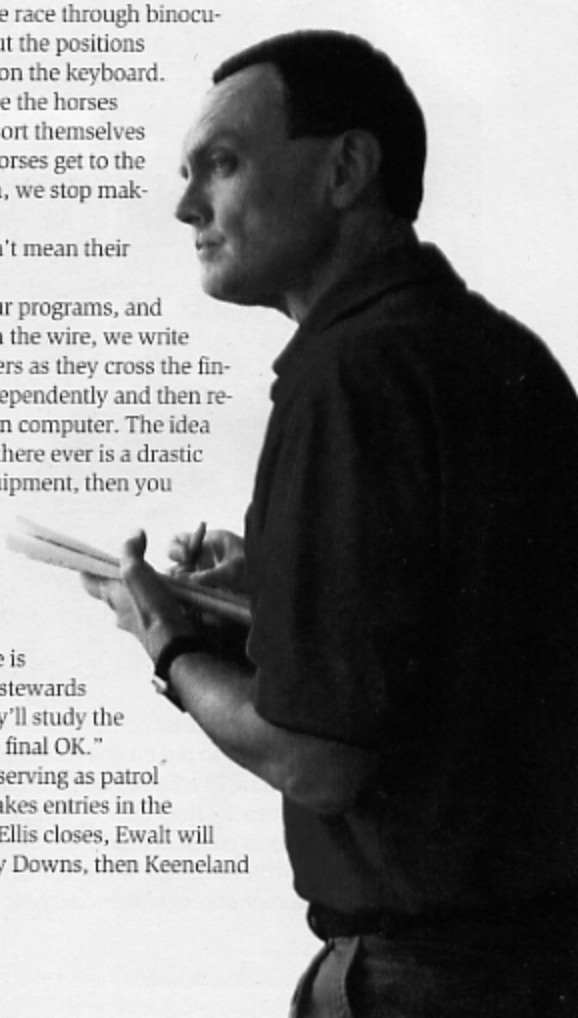
"It's our responsibility to keep track of the field as they run around the track and put the positions of the first four horses on the tote board and the television monitors," said Ewalt, who started his racing career at Penn National after answering an ad in *Daily Racing Form*. "Tia and Max start by going out on the catwalk and watching the race through binoculars. They call out the positions and I type them on the keyboard. They usually give the horses enough time to sort themselves out. When the horses get to the top of the stretch, we stop making the call."

But that doesn't mean their job is done.

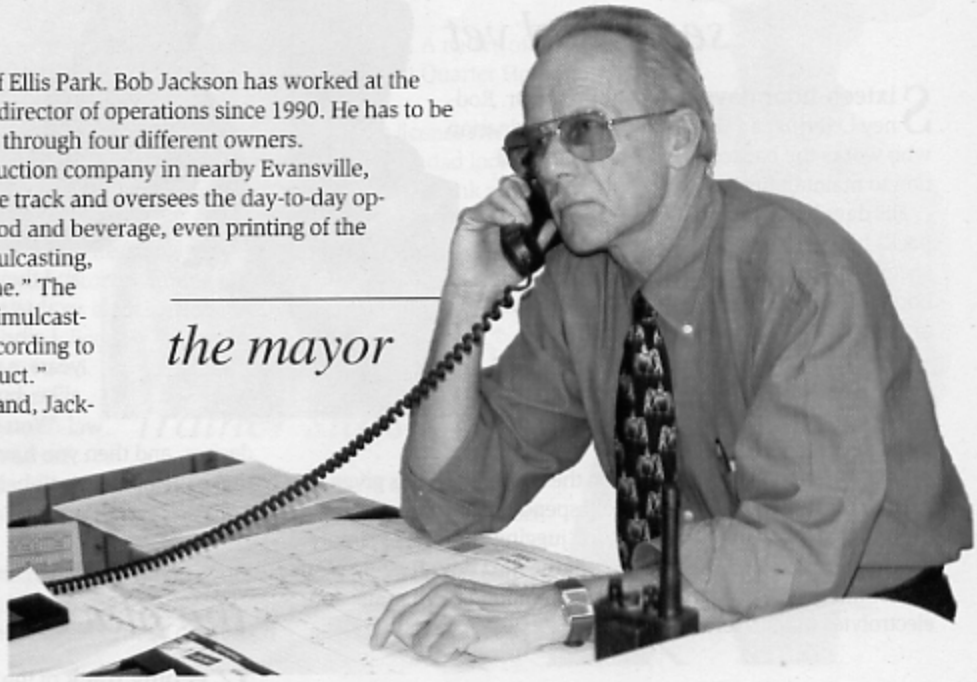
"We gather our programs, and as they approach the wire, we write down the numbers as they cross the finish. We do it independently and then review the finish on computer. The idea behind that is if there ever is a drastic failure of the equipment, then you have three sets of eyes having watched the finish.

"Once the race is over, we tell the stewards it's all clear. They'll study the film and give the final OK."

In addition to serving as patrol judges, the trio takes entries in the mornings. Once Ellis closes, Ewalt will head to Kentucky Downs, then Keeneland and Churchill.



the mayor



He could be called the "mayor" of Ellis Park. Bob Jackson has worked at the track since 1981 and has been the director of operations since 1990. He has to be doing a good job—he's still on the beat through four different owners.

Jackson, the former head of a construction company in nearby Evansville, Ind., deals with every department in the track and oversees the day-to-day operations of all aspects: maintenance, food and beverage, even printing of the track's program. He is also head of simulcasting, which he said takes "10-15% of my time." The hardware and production of full-card simulcasting are the easy part. The hard part, according to Jackson, is "the abundance of the product."

A two-way radio glued to his right hand, Jackson's days are 12 hours long, and he works seven days a week—he did profess to taking a vacation last year—but he rarely gets to watch the races.

His day begins on the backside, passing through the barn area, visiting with horsemen and the maintenance crew. "I know these people well. If they have a problem, they come to me."

In the afternoons, between cruising the plant and making sure things are going smoothly, he has plenty of paperwork to do: bidding out jobs, contracting maintenance, union negotiations, budgeting, and scheduling for the track's 150 full-time employees.

"I'm always looking for ways to improve things," he said. "I'm a man who likes constant change. I don't want things to be stagnant."

He doesn't stand still long enough for that to happen.

TERRY JONES

The editorial staff of *The Blood-Horse* took time out for a photo during its day-long endeavour to discover what it takes to put on one race card at one racetrack on one typical day. Left to right, chief photographer Anne Eberhardt Keogh, senior staff writer David Schmitz, news editor Tom LaMarra, bloodstock sales editor Deirdre B. Biles, senior staff writer Eric Mitchell, staff writer Leslie Deckard, features editor Lenny Shulman, editorial intern Benjamin T. Hickman, art director John D. Filer, staff writer Kristin J. Ingwell, managing editor Evan I. Hammonds, executive editor Dan Liebman, freelance photographer Garry Jones, and freelance photographer Jonathan Roberts.