
TOUCHING BASE WITH THE PAULICK REPORT

THE BREEDERS' CUP FORUM: PUTTING THE HORSE FIRST

by Ray Paulick

Dell Hancock grew up on her family's Claiborne Farm in Paris, Ky., and has lived by the motto to "always put the horse first." As such, she was perfectly suited to succeed the late John Hettinger as board chairman of the Grayson-Jockey Club Foundation, which funds vital research into a wide range of horse health, welfare and safety issues. She has served in that capacity since 2005.

Edward L. Bowen, as president of the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, is involved both in fund-raising and coordinating the efforts of the organization's Research Advisory Committee, which has developed a methodical and thorough process of evaluating applications for research funding. Bowen, former editor-in-chief of *The Blood-Horse*, is a racing historian and Eclipse Award-winning journalist who has written numerous books on racing and breeding and serves as a trustee of the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame.

Hancock and Bowen took time out of their schedules to provide some insights into the important role the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation plays in the horse world.

The merger of the Grayson Foundation and Jockey Club Research Foundation took place more than 20 years ago. What was the reason the two groups joined forces?

Dell Hancock: When the merger came about in 1989, Grayson was giving away less than half of what we fund today, but it had the strength of its research committees and networking within the research community. Several of its most generous donors would make contributions for the money to be spent that year, so the Foundation was unable to build up much in endowment. The Jockey Club had the ability to raise money, but did not have the established relationships with the research community and was having to duplicate efforts made by Grayson. So, a rare thing in the business happened – we merged. I think the only fly in the ointment was whose name would be first, so with The Jockey Club chairman, Dinny Phipps, we solved that in a Hancock/Phipps way— a coin toss.

If there were no Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, wouldn't much of this research get done anyway at the veterinary school or university level?

Dell Hancock: The funding we provide goes to universities, so we augment whatever they would spend otherwise. Still, that's a question worthy of an expert response. We referred this subject

to Dr. Dean Richardson of the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center. Here was his reaction: *"It is a fallacy that universities have abundant 'internal' funding. There simply is no such thing. A few universities have some consistent internal sources for equine research, e.g. Oak Tree at UC-Davis and Zweig at Cornell, but competitive government funding and foundation funding sources still remain the major means of getting any equine research done. Government funding for equine research has historically been pitifully low and probably will remain so. 'Agricultural' species dominate all government spending on animal diseases. Veterinary species in basic science research, i.e. National Health Institute or National Science Foundation, are used only when they are considered an optimal model for a human disease. Furthermore, the horse is an EXTREMELY expensive research animal. You can do research on hundreds of mice for the price of what it costs to obtain and maintain a single horse. Science is built on statistics and numbers of animals in research counts for a lot. The Grayson-Jockey Club Foundation is one of the very few agencies that critically evaluates the essence of a research project looking for qualities that will specifically benefit the equine species."*

Another researcher, Dr. Noah Cohen of Texas A & M, put it this way: *"I don't know whether even the Foundation board realizes that these grants sustain our research programs. Our (recent) project [on airborne exposure to R. equi] didn't just train a graduate student and result in three papers. The study generated a series of hypotheses and research ideas. The ripple effects from each individual research project are enormous. My program would be unable to sustain itself were it not for the occasional grant from Grayson, etc."*

Even in a case where a university would have funded a project anyway, the allocation from Grayson would presumably permit them to undertake another project that otherwise would not have been carried out, so it still is a win for research.

What kind of financial shape is Grayson-Jockey Club in today four years after the crash that depleted so many foundation balance sheets?

Edward L. Bowen: Our Annual Reports tell the story. We hit a peak in net assets of \$24,891,469 as of the end of 2007. It dropped to \$16,921,683 by the end of the precipitous year of 2008. We currently have recovered back to around \$20 million. Happily, our donors have stuck by us – stuck by the horse, really – despite the economic downturn that must have affected everybody. We met our yearly goals in memberships and general donations through the crisis until dropping off slightly in 2011. The donors have been great in continuing to support Grayson as they realize the importance of the work we support. We hope to raise well over \$1 million from all sources this year.

To us, the most disappointing result of the downturn has been that after topping \$1 million in annual research funding for a couple of years we had to drop below that threshold. We are

funding 16 projects for about \$850,000 this year, and that brings us to more than \$19 million for 287 projects at 40 universities in the last three decades. It is a goal to reach the \$1 million annual mark again – and soon.

When you take a longer-range look, I recall that when I came to the Foundation in 1994, John Hettinger, who was then the chairman, had the goal of achieving the \$10 million mark in net worth. We sailed past that in 1997 and set the next goal at \$25 million. As I said, we were within sight of that in only 10 years, so, long term, the strategy of investment rather than just sitting on funds is the way to go. I would hasten to add that the investments are in the hands of an expert committee appointed by our board of directors.

Where does the majority of the Foundation's money come from?

Edward L. Bowen: We have some annual fund raising events— dinners, golf tournaments, etc. – which are arranged by Nancy Kelly and Jenifer Van Deirse, a star team from the New York office. The majority, though, comes from donations and investment management. Membership is open to any person, company, or organization who cares about horses, but we welcome donations of any level. (We receive some \$5 gifts which we think come when the donor cashes a ticket on the races.) We try to be very efficient and direct donations to research, so we are not into giving away trinkets or umbrellas. We do give a modest thank you cocktail party and scientific presentation for our Rokeby Circle, which are members who donate \$10,000 or more.

Dell organized the new Celebration of the Horse in the thought that many people still aren't aware of Grayson and what we do and why it's important. The event should be an evening of fun and will help raise awareness. There will be dinner, music, and some pretty enticing auction items. It will be held at Keeneland on Oct. 26. There are many important fund raisers for specific and good causes. This is a chance to pause and just appreciate the horse itself, the center of what the Turf is all about. We really appreciate the generous sponsorship of our lead sponsor, Great American Insurance.

Can someone earmark donations to a specific area of research?

Dell Hancock: Yes. We welcome such donations. Laminitis is such a ubiquitous problem for all horses that we receive more donations earmarked for that subject than for others. Also, some donations come with the stipulation that the funds go toward research at a specific university, in which case we would reserve them for the next project we support at that institution.

Is all of the research targeted toward the Thoroughbred breed?

Dell Hancock: No. Although we are associated with the Thoroughbred industry and receive almost all of our support from it, a great majority of the projects we fund are as helpful to a child's pony or any other breed as they are to the Thoroughbred. There are a few projects, of

course, that zero in on the race horse, but even those can help other competitive horses. A recent example of how Grayson-funded research is helping other breeds involves herpesvirus (EHV-1). As you know, there have been outbreaks of this major disease around the country, and it can strike any kind of horse. Last year, when an EHV-1 outbreak threatened to cancel a lot of Cutting Horse events in the West, Dr. Jerry Black, who was one of the veterinarians fighting the outbreak, commented that “the knowledge we had of the virus and how to manage the outbreak came from many of the projects funded through Grayson-Jockey Club.” A few years earlier, when an outbreak of herpesvirus affected the horse population in Wellington, Fla., we worked with officials in that state to help distribute an information and advice sheet.

Besides selecting and funding certain types of research, what does Grayson-Jockey Club do in the area of horse health and safety?

Edward L. Bowen: Our primary additional project has been partnering with the parent body, The Jockey Club, in presenting the Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summits. This is one instance in which we are really focused on the racehorse, but even here most progress would be helpful to other racing breeds as well as the Thoroughbred. The fourth version of the Summits is set for Oct. 16-17 at Keeneland. The format of the Summits has been to bring together participants in various areas of the business and develop strategies which are aimed at the underlying ideal of helping the horse through better understanding of risks and trying to reduce them. Of course, we can only recommend changes. The Summit has no power to force decisions, but a number of recommendations have gained traction within racing and some have been further promoted by The Jockey Club’s Thoroughbred Safety Committee. Among the outcomes from the Summits so far are the Equine Injury Database and the Race Track Testing Laboratory. Both were made possible by funding from The Jockey Club itself, so neither has diverted Foundation funding away from our core mission. The value of the database will be to discern patterns of injury with an eye toward reducing their future incidence, and the service rendered by Dr. Mick Peterson of the Testing Laboratory is to help race tracks develop and maintain the safest and most consistent racing surface they can attain.

In addition to the Summits, we do occasionally co-sponsor conferences and workshops, such as the International Infectious Diseases Conference held this month, often in collaboration with the American Association of Equine Practitioners. We are very selective, one might even say tight-fisted in this area. I was told years ago that if I were going to request any funding for a seminar or conference to “make sure that something will get done because of the meeting that wouldn’t have been done anyway.”

Next: *In part two of this interview, Dell Hancock and Edward Bowen discuss specific areas where research has made a difference, along with the hot topic of medication in racehorses and what researchers have learned in that area.*