



From Neighbor To Farm Partner

Sue Agopian Part Of Deo Volente Team Working To Revitalize Sport In NJ

By Kathy Parker

Some Standardbred horse owners buy their first horse before they've ever spent much time at the track. Sue Agopian is a case in point.

Agopian and her husband, Peter, live next door to horse owner and breeder Mike Gulotta and his wife, Madeline. While the couples were out to dinner one evening, Sue shared that as her career in telecommunications was winding down, she was thinking she wanted a horse or two.

That's how Agopian became a partner in Deo Volente Farm, which was built from the ground up in Flemington, N.J. Today Deo Volente stands and/or manages the four stallions, Trixton, Rock N Roll Heaven, Wishing Stone and Lis Mara, and has 39 broodmares.

"I thought I was going to have two horses, and now I have 100 horses!" laughs Agopian.

"When I first got involved, for me, it was more of a romantic notion of having horses and a farm. It's a love of the animals," she continued.

"To me, right now it's not so much a love of the business; it's the love of the sport. For most people, and for the people I know, they come into this not because they are attracted to the business aspects; it's the love of the sport."

Agopian knows the modern business world well. Her career spanned telecommunications with Alcatel-Lucent as a senior vice president of Strategic Alliances Software, Service and Solutions Group, and then in the high-tech world with Gearworks, Snowshoe Networks, Unisphere Networks and Cascade Communications.

"I tried retiring, but it just didn't work. My background is very global," said Agopian, who grew up attending a Catholic school run by French nuns in her native country of Lebanon before her family immigrated to the United States in 1977, when she was 14.

"If you're looking for someone who can rattle off breeding statistics, I'm not that person," admits Agopian, who traveled the world during her career in telecommunications and technology.

"But the look and feel of the farm is mine. I was very involved in that," she adds. "Mike handled getting the farm built and Fedencio (Cervantez, Deo Volente's Operations Manager) is the heartbeat of the farm."

Gulotta says Agopian has brought both her business expertise and energy to the farm, and has developed a passion for the sport.

"Sue is fresh blood. Sue is fresh thinking," said Gulotta. "She's intelligent, she's aggressive, she's a

marketing wizard, she's got a passion for the business. When you put all of that together, she's a force to be reckoned with."

Agopian has already figured out that it is tough to be a breeder and horse owner in New Jersey today since the state's racing and breeding programs are at a disadvantage when competing with states that have expanded gaming tied to racing.

"Mike and I are not new to creating new markets," noted Agopian, citing Gulotta's career in the financial industry. "I'm the kind of person who defines a strategy and executes."

So Gulotta and Agopian have been doing their part to lobby legislators.

"I've been meeting with senators and assemblymen to lobby for harness racing in New Jersey," said Agopian. "For the first time in a long while, I am cautiously optimistic about our industry in New Jersey. My optimistic outlook is based on the fact that the legislature has acted. The geopolitical and economic factors are now closer aligned in our favor."

On Monday, March 14, New Jersey lawmakers approved a measure which puts a referendum on the ballot asking voters to approve the expansion of gaming from Atlantic City to northern counties, with two casinos being permitted.

"This will be explosive, if the referendum passes, and I believe it will," said Gulotta, who estimated he and Agopian personally met with 25 lawmakers during the past year. "There will be stallions and broodmares coming here again. There will be reinvestment in New Jersey breeding and racing. I will be shocked if people can't put two and two together and breed to our stallions because come 2019, when the foals conceived this year race, the money will be flowing!"

Agopian has learned the rhythm of a breeding farm by working there almost daily. Besides her involvement in business matters at Deo Volente, such as marketing the stallions, she has taken the opportunity to indulge her interest in horses, spending time getting to know the stallions, mares and babies.

"Trixton and I have a routine going on," revealed Agopian. "Every time I'm here I spend 10 to 15 minutes with him, and he is so gentle with me."

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—Sue Agopian

She calls Wishing Stone, always known for his small physical stature, “my Napoleon.”

This year the Bellino family’s Rock N Roll Heaven, the 2010 Horse of the Year, joined the Deo Volente stallion roster.

“It’s very important to have high caliber stallions in New Jersey since we are working to rebuild the breeding in New Jersey,” said Agopian of the relocation of Rock N Roll Heaven to Deo Volente for the 2016 breeding season. “Mike (Gulotta) and I consider that to be very important. Mike committed to the New Jersey Sires Stakes and to the SBOA (Standardbred Breeders and Owners Association of New Jersey) to stand stallions in New Jersey and he delivered.”

Agopian, through Deo Volente, also has a 2-year-old pacer in training with horseman Nik Drennan. Bred and raised at Deo Volente, the colt is by Rocknroll Hanover out of See And Be Seen, a stakes-winning filly from the prolific fam-

ily that includes Well Said, Must See and Glowing Report.

“I usually go see him at White Birch on a weekly basis,” said Agopian of the colt named Rock And Be Seen but who she refers to as My Boy, Baby Longlegs, or Sunshine. “I was literally at the barn with him when he was two weeks old. He had me at hello! He is my miracle boy. He was born with five broken ribs and fought for his life. Fendencio taught me how to feed him. I was very happy we got him at the sale.

“Sue is fresh blood. Sue is fresh thinking.”

—Mike Gulotta

“I’m a girl who is afraid to be alone with horses, but this guy became completely mine,” added Agopian. “I’m told he is smart, well behaved, and wants to go fast! He is a major driver as to why I ratcheted up my involvement in making an impact creating a better world for him to thrive in as an athlete.”

While Agopian has fallen in love with horses and is learning more about the business aspects of breeding and training horses every day, she revealed she is not a



gambler in the traditional sense of placing a wager on a horse.

“I wasn’t too thrilled with being in the gambling business. Other than my career and the stock market, I have never gambled,” she noted. “But I have no choice to accept the gambling component. I understand that now.”

As a partner in a horse breeding farm in a state that desperately needs an infusion of money to encourage both breeding and racing horses, Agopian realizes she is indeed gambling.

“We must re-ignite our industry,” adds Agopian. “I have a great deal of admiration for multi-generational breeders and farm owners’ craft. There is a deep bench, and instead of building on it, my perception is that it had been left to wither away and fend for itself. So Mike and I chose to take an active role in making an impact.”



Posing with Trixton is (left to right) Fidencio Cervantez, operations manager at Deo Volente, Bengt Agerup, who campaigned Trixton, Johan Arneng, and Deo Volente’s Sue Agopian and Mike Gulotta. (Courtesy Deo Volente)