



WORKING COMBINATION

The UK-Keeneland partnership benefits Central Kentucky — and the broader Thoroughbred Industry

By Robin Koehler

UK cheerleaders add to the festivities at Big Blue Day at the Races, a fall event at Keeneland that welcomes students, alumni, faculty, and staff.

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Ask almost any University of Kentucky student or alum, and he or she will tell you that a fall or spring race day at Keeneland with friends ranks among their top undergraduate memories.

But many UK alumni — and Kentuckians, in general — might be surprised to learn just how deep the Keeneland-UK partnership goes.

Records show that as early as 1941, just five years after Keeneland's inaugural race season, the Keeneland Association board of directors earmarked contributions to help fund salaries for top University of Kentucky employees.

In 1947 the Keeneland Foundation paid for and donated an electron microscope to UK — the first of its kind in Kentucky. In 1953 the Keeneland Foundation donated \$200,000 toward the building of a dormitory, Keeneland Hall, on UK's North Campus.

In 1984 Keeneland became one of the original funders of UK's Gluck Equine Research Center, pledging \$1 million to help build the facility. Former Keeneland president and chairman James E. "Ted" Bassett was part of an advisory committee of Thoroughbred industry leaders who helped raise an additional \$4.2 million toward Gluck's establishment. Throughout Gluck's history, members of Keeneland leadership — from Bassett and former presidents



The Keeneland Foundation purchased and donated an electron microscope to UK in 1947.

Nick Nicholson and Bill Thomason to current president Shannon Arvin — have held seats on its board of directors.

In recent years the UK-Keeneland partnership has only grown stronger. Today the collaboration is shaping Lexington into a world leader in equine and track safety research. It's helping fund facilities improvements on the UK campus that benefit both staff and students. And it's building new, meaningful collaborations between the UK HealthCare Kentucky Children's Hospital and Keeneland Kids Club, just to name a few.

"The depth of our mutual sponsorship and partnership is



In 1953 Keeneland contributed \$200,000 to help build a dormitory, Keeneland Hall, on UK's North Campus.



Keeneland and UK top brass participated in the dorm's 1955 dedication.

perhaps best described as a friendship," said Bill Thomson, former Keeneland president and CEO. "Keeneland works with every element of the University of Kentucky — the students, the administration, professors, and employees — to make sure that we are working in coordination for the betterment of our community."

Michael Richey, UK's vice president for philanthropy and alumni engagement, agrees, noting the UK-Keeneland partnership works as well as it does because the two organizations share the same goals.

"Keeneland and the university have a shared vision," Richey said. "And that is to serve the Commonwealth of Kentucky and to serve its citizens."

Supporting the community

Across their more than 80 years of partnership, Keeneland and UK have joined forces in ways both large and small.

Keeneland has long supported UK

scholarship programs and is a major contributor to DancetBlue, UK's annual student dance marathon to raise money for pediatric cancer research and treatment at Kentucky Children's Hospital.

Sales of the annual commemorative Keeneland Maker's Mark bourbon bottles have helped raise more than \$1.5 million for UK Athletics' on-campus Center for Academic and Tutorial Services (CATS) and \$500,000 for the UK Gill Heart & Vascular Institute, among other entities within the university.

Keeneland's annual Big Blue Day at the Races — with guest appearances by UK cheerleaders, mascots, marching band members, and more — welcomes UK students, alumni, faculty, and staff for free general admission. Keeneland also often sponsors fun pre-game and halftime activities for fans at UK football and men's basketball games.

In 2014 the Keeneland Association

THERE'S A PART OF KEENELAND ON THE KENTUCKY CAMPUS



Being on their own, we have contributed nearly 700,000 in education and research at the University of Kentucky. Below are some of the ways that we have supported the growth of the great University of Kentucky. We hope you will be inspired to help us make a difference on our own campus.



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J. B. Faulconer's *The Keeneland Story*, published in 1960, outlines donations to UK.

donated \$50,000 to upgrade a meeting room in UK's William T. Young Library with state-of-the-art monitors and furnishings — transforming it into a modern, collaborative meeting space for students and faculty.

In 2019 Keeneland announced UK HealthCare's multiyear agreement to sponsor the Keeneland Kids Club, Keeneland's run/walk program — which opens the grounds to local charity walks and runs — and the First Lady stakes during the fall meet.

"Being able to connect with Keeneland's Kids Club and run/walk program reinforces our existing community engagement program and allows us to extend our mission of health education to a wider audience," said Dr. Mark Newman, UK executive vice president for health affairs, in a statement announcing the collaboration.

Even before the partnership was formalized, the ties between Keeneland's Kids Club and the UK HealthCare Kentucky Children's Hospital had long been strong. In pre-COVID years, guests to the Kids Club's popular "Breakfast with Buckles" December holiday event often brought unwrapped toys to be donated to pediatric hospital patients, and ticket proceeds helped raise more than \$3,000 for the Kentucky Children's Hospital.

Buckles, the Keeneland Kids Club mascot, has frequently delivered Keeneland care packages, including track coloring books and stick horse making kits — fashioned from pool noodles and felt — to help brighten the day of Kentucky Children's Hospital patients.

Also in 2019, Keeneland announced the Keeneland Library's creation of the Life's Work Oral History Project, an initiative designed to capture treasured stories from the Thoroughbred industry and preserve and promote them for future generations. Life's Work represents a unique collaboration of the Keeneland Library along with the University of Kentucky Libraries' Louise B. Nunn Center for Oral History and the *Thoroughbred Daily News* (TDN).

Life's Work features videos and oral interviews from prominent figures in the equine industry, such as Seth Hancock of Claiborne Farm, John Phillips of Darby Dan Farm, Keeneland



Former president Bill Thumason participates in a Maker's Mark bottle signing. Proceeds have benefited several UK programs.



College Scholarship Day recipients gather in the Keeneland winner's circle with their honorary checks.

Trustee Emeritus James E. "Ted" Bassett III, and Shadwell Farm Vice President and General Manager Rick Nichols, among others, whose passion and livelihood have been devoted to the Thoroughbred.



Keeneland has promoted racing at UK men's basketball games at Rupp Arena.



The track also has a presence at Kroger Field, home of UK's football team.

In keeping with the Keeneland Library's mission to preserve and promote the rich history of Thoroughbred racing, the library engaged the prestigious University of Kentucky Libraries' Louise B. Nunn Center for Oral History to support the project. The Nunn Center's state-of-the-art archives will index and preserve each Life's Work video interview.

"We know that when the University of Kentucky and Keeneland join forces, it's going to be impactful," said Christa Merrill, Keeneland vice president and chief marketing officer. "We don't do it just to create buzz and do something that's fun — even though we have had fun along the way. We do it as a continuation of our mission and to enhance the community. That's what makes it so exciting."

Supporting the Industry

Recently Keeneland and the University of Kentucky have merged their focus on a common goal: making Lexington and Central Kentucky the country's epicenter for equine-related research.

For more than 30 years UK's Gluck Equine Research Center has been a respect-

ed leader, internationally, in research on equine health and disease.

"One of the most successful examples of the UK-Keeneland partnership was the establishment of the University of Kentucky Equine Research Foundation," said former Keeneland president Bassett, who was instrumental in Gluck's founding.

"The Gluck Equine Research Center has been at the forefront of a wide range of research regarding equine infectious diseases and is recognized internationally for establishing safety protocols for the recovery and transportation of horses," Bassett added.

Building on Gluck's strong foundation, Nancy Cox, Ph.D., dean of UK's College of Agriculture, Food and Environment and vice president for Land-Grant Engagement, has made it a mission to grow and expand UK's status as a leader in equine safety and track safety research since her appointment as dean in 2014.

Keeneland has been an active, willing partner in helping achieve that vision.

"Keeneland has had a wonderful, collaborative relationship with Dean Nancy Cox," said former Keeneland president Thomason. "Nancy has got a vision for what she's



Keeneland helped upgrade a meeting room at UK's William T. Young Library.



Keeneland Kids Club mascot Buckles visits a patient at UK HealthCare Kentucky Children's Hospital.



Gluck researchers are at the forefront of studying and improving equine health and safety.

Keeneland contributed \$1 million to the Gluck Equine Research Center, one of the world's foremost such institutions.



KEENELAND AND THE
UNIVERSITY HAVE A
SHARED VISION.



—Michael Richey, UK's vice president for philanthropy and alumni engagement

doing at the University of Kentucky. It's about creating a center of excellence for so many issues that are critical around the country to the health and safety of horses."

Cox agreed that the partnership has been a rich one. "The Univer-

sity of Kentucky and Keeneland have the same philosophy — not only about making things as safe as they can be for racing but also about using the best approaches based on sound science and evidence," she said.

In the past five years, Keeneland has played a key role in helping attract top equine research faculty to the University of Kentucky, including Scott Stanley, Ph.D., a former UK College of Agriculture graduate who enjoyed a highly respected 20-year

career at the University of California-Davis' Equine Animal Chemistry Laboratory before joining the UK faculty in 2018.

Stanley specializes in equine drug testing. His testing procedures allow tracks and equine sales companies to screen horses for any non-regulatory drug use, including steroids, phosphonates, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

"Our testing capabilities have grown and expanded to accommodate the needs of the industry," Stanley explained.

In 2019 Keeneland made a \$1.3 million gift to UK to create the Keeneland Endowed Chair in Equine Veterinary Science — the faculty seat that Stanley now holds. The funds were pivotal in UK's goal to create a world-class equine drug research and testing program in Lexington, under Stanley's leadership.



UK's racetrack safety initiative allows on-site research. UK's Michael "Mick" Peterson describes the Keeneland racing surfaces as "living laboratories."

"Since I've arrived, the endowment has grown to more than \$3 million. These funds will support my salary as well as research," explained Stanley, who works as both a professor and a researcher at Gluck and as a director of UK's new Equine Analytical Chemistry Lab, a service laboratory for the industry based at UK's Coldstream Research Campus.

Keeneland was also instrumental in attracting Michael "Mick" Peterson, Ph.D. — a national expert in track surfaces safety research and testing — to the UK faculty in 2017.

"Keeneland is really central to the fact that I'm even here or that UK's racetrack safety program even exists," said Peterson, a former researcher at the University of Maine who now directs racetrack safety research at UK.

"Keeneland not only provided the support to help move my lab here, but they have also been a key facilitator for our work. They have allowed us to use the Keeneland track and The Thoroughbred Center as living laboratories for our track surfaces testing equipment and the research that we're doing," Peterson said. "It's like these two people, Dean Cas

and Keeneland's Bill Thomason, were able to say, 'We want to be the center of the world for the equine industry' — and they made it happen."

In late 2020 Keeneland, Churchill Downs, Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, the New York Racing Association, and The Stronach Group jointly pledged additional financial resources to further UK's research on track surface safety, under Peterson's directorship.

As the racing industry works to keep its horses and riders safe through new guidelines — including anti-doping and track surfaces safety standards mandated by the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act of 2020 — UK's work at the forefront of drug testing and track safety research will be all the more critical.

"As racetracks need to be certified and need scientific expertise in order to ensure they're meeting these uniform standards around the country, the University of Kentucky is poised to be that center of excellence and expertise," Thomason said. "UK is equipped to provide services all across the country that are going to be critical for the success of the Thoroughbred industry into the future." **MB**



UK researchers use special equipment to test the Keeneland dirt surface.