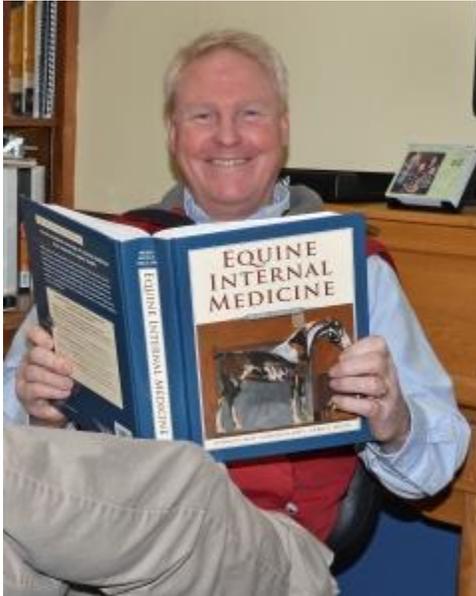


Dr. Keith Berkeley – Valley Equine Associates



As a large animal veterinarian serving Jefferson County since 1984, Dr. Keith Berkeley sees live thoroughbred racing as a mainstay of his practice and a lynch pin of the entire local economy. He strongly believes that “any loss of racing days or change in the purse structure would have a dramatic effect on the families here in Jefferson County” and would irreversibly change the rural character of the area.

Berkeley owns Valley Equine Associates, a practice that employs seven veterinarians and up to eight administrators and technicians. The animals associated with the race track and surrounding thoroughbred farms make up about 80 to 85 percent of his practice. He readily acknowledges that without the current level of racing activity at Charles Town, the profitability of his practice would be impacted and “we could not support the 14 families that we do today.” Other equine veterinarians who do not have as a diversified practice as Berkeley does would feel it even worse.

Every dollar spent at the track generates six dollars or more in the commercial and rural economy, and this multiplier effect plays a disproportionately large role in sustaining local farms throughout the year. “We have farmers providing the best nutritional hay and straw for the horses,” says Berkeley. “If racing were to go away, the farmers would see a precipitous drop in income from the horsemen.” The veterinarian predicts a domino effect would ensue with farms going under and farmers selling their land to developers. Once that happens, he says, “the green space is gone and the rural character of this beautiful place with its lovely horse farms and historic traditions is lost forever.”

Dr. Berkeley believes it’s time PNGI, the gambling consortium that owns Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Racing, hold up its end of the bargain. “PNGI promised if we, the community, the teachers, the business people and the horsemen voted for 222, the bill to expand Charles Town gambling, live thoroughbred racing would be protected. I can’t see how reducing racing days will do anything but ultimately destroy live thoroughbred racing for good.”

That’s why he says it is important to the long-term health of the state and the local economy that “we find a way for all of us to work together to make live thoroughbred racing successful and sustainable for future generations.”