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We're Talking Money, Honey

New Equine Facilities are Finding Creative Ways to Contribute to the Economy.

BY LISA MUNNIKSMAS

"Economic impact" sounds like a topic you may have slept through in Business 101. It's actually a factor of any industry which reflects its position within the nation's overall economy. In the case of economics, what goes around comes around; the money spent caring for and enjoying horses directly benefits the equine industry, as well as many others.

According to the American Horse Council, there are 7.1 million people in the U.S. involved in the equine industry, which provides 1.4 million full-time jobs and has a total economic impact of \$112.1 billion on the nation.

EQUESTRIAN magazine caught up with five of the newest facilities in the U.S. to find out what services they offer and what economic impact those services have on their communities. While many facilities do not have concrete economic statistics, it's evident that, big and small, these farms and showplaces are making an impact that goes beyond their own equine activities.

No Biz Like Show Biz

At least three states have recently taken notice of the value of the horse show industry. Idaho, Florida and New

York have welcomed state-of-the-art facilities dedicated to complementing their regions' already-vibrant equine industry through hosting competitions.

The 100-acre Idaho Horse Park in Nampa, ID, opened its gates in 2002 as part of the larger Idaho Center, a recreational complex with an amphitheater, an arena and a sports complex. The Idaho Horse Park itself boasts a 100,000-square foot indoor arena, 596 stalls, a 150'x300' outdoor arena and three warm-up arenas. Designed with the area's abundance of western events in mind, feeding pens that can hold up to 500-head of cattle and 1,000 feet of permanent alleyways to move cattle between the rings are also part of the setup.

The horse park also has access to the 120,000-square foot arena at the Idaho Center for larger equine events such as the Snake River Stampede, a top-12 ranked Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association rodeo that comes to Nampa each July.

Construction of 44 overnight

parking spaces with water, electric and sewer; additional trailer parking; and a 17-acre English riding center are currently in the works for the park.

Approximately \$45 million was spent on constructing the entire Idaho Center and Horse Park complex. The indoor arena alone cost \$2.2 million.

The Idaho Horse Park's convenient location makes it worth the construction expense. Rod Orrison, president of the Idaho Horse Park, says,

"We're no more than a day's drive from Seattle, Salt Lake, Spokane, Reno and Portland, so we have great access for all of the northwest."

In 2004, the horse park will host more than 21 equine events, including cutting horse and reining competitions, team roping championships, riding club events, and Arabian breed shows. Between October and March, the horse park's indoor arena turns to racing, but not the Triple Crown kind; during these months, the Idaho Horse Park is home to Boise State University's indoor track team.

The cost of renting a facility of

Above: An artist's rendering of the newly-opened HITS-on-the-Hudson facility at Saugerties, NY. Among the first events to grace the grounds will be hunter, jumper and grand prix classes.

this magnitude depends on the event. The indoor arena goes for a flat fee of \$1,000 per day. Some competitions require multiple rings set up within the indoor arena and special staffing, which increases the price.

To keep all of this running smoothly, the Idaho Center and the Idaho Horse Park have 18 full-time people and as many as 500 part-time people on its payroll, including security and concessions. The numbers are combined because the areas of the complex share many of the employees.

In a study done by Barney & Worth, an independent research group, the Idaho Center brought about \$9 million to the area last year. This is up from \$7.5 million in 2000. Part of the increase is attributable to the development of the horse park.

Orrison points out, "Horse events bring in more money than other events because people stay longer once they're here."

And businesses are taking notice. Last September, a 101-room Hampton Inn opened adjacent to the center, and the hotel has plans to build another 101 rooms to keep up with the demand from visitors.

Orrison says, "In the case of people who come and stay here three or four, five days, usually there are some family members who are horse people and at least one who isn't. There are so many things they can do here that are close to the center," including golfing, visiting the city of Nampa, and taking part in year-round activity at the Idaho Center.

Also, the Idaho Equine Hospital, which, according to Orrison, treats about 12,000 horses a year, was built next door after plans for the horse park were made.

Fun in the Sun

More than 2,500 miles away and built in similar fashion, the Jacksonville Equestrian Center in Jacksonville, FL, opened its doors on March 20 of this year. Set in a 1,700-acre city park, the center's amenities include a 4,000-seat indoor arena, three outdoor competition arenas, a 200'x400' rebound turf arena donated by Ford Motor Company, and 450 permanent stalls.

Center Director Lesa Williams says, "We're just getting started, but already we have 17 or 18 events booked through 2004 and 2005. There is a real combination of events that are coming here, including some rodeos, a couple



Christy Voss (2)

of dressage shows and several horsemanship clinics. There is also a hunter/jumper series looking into being based here."

The Jacksonville Equestrian Center has its share of two-legged exhibitors, as well. This spring, the center was host to Scout Blast, an equestrian-themed Boy Scout event with activities, vendors and 2,500 Boy Scout campers. The center is also booked for several concerts and dog shows.

Williams says, "It's a real multi-discipline facility," which she attributes largely to the washed-stone and screening footing that can be modified based on the event *du jour*.

Like the Idaho Horse Park, the Jacksonville Equestrian Center tailors facility rental fees based on each event. The set rate for the facility is \$2,000 for one day, which includes the indoor arena and one outdoor arena.

"When we have smaller events, we kind of make it work for them. We are priced competitively with other facilities of our size but adjusting it event by event," Williams explains.

When the city built the facility, they were very careful not to compete with, rather to support, the local equine industry, therefore the Jacksonville Equestrian Center does book travelers' layovers but does not

Above, top: An aerial view of the Idaho Horse Park facility.

Above, bottom: Interior of the indoor facility

have a boarding facility.

"A local equine group (the North Florida Equine Society) made a big push for the center. They did a lot of the original design work," she continues. The organization also commissioned a study of the local equine industry to prove the center's worth and spearheaded much of the fundraising.

The Better Jacksonville Plan, instituted to rejuvenate and grow the city, largely funded the \$22-million facility. Under the plan, a new concert venue and an Olympic-size public swimming facility have also been built in the vicinity.

The Jacksonville Equestrian Center was built on an old airbase on the

sidering a piece of land just outside the center's gates for a new hospital.

Horses on the Hudson

While the centers in Florida and Idaho had quiet beginnings, the Horse Shows in the Sun (HITS) new HITS-on-the-Hudson facility in Saugerties, NY, held its highly anticipated grand opening in May. The seven weeks following the grand opening are being packed with USEF-rated hunter, jumper and grand prix competition on 300 acres.

A portion of the land occupied by HITS-on-the-Hudson is owned by the HITS corporation and a portion is leased from Family of Woodstock, a local charity which provides crisis intervention and

Below: Among the facilities at Pat and Linda Parelli's ranch in Pagosa Springs, CO, is this TITAN 110'x160' structure.



Cover-All Building Systems

west side of Jacksonville, just off Interstate 10. "This side of the city lost a lot of jobs and deteriorated after the base left," Williams says.

Since the creation of this center, new businesses are blooming. In addition to the 15 full-time jobs and hundreds of part-time event staff positions belonging to the Jacksonville Equestrian Center, a new hotel, restaurants, gas stations and a large horse trailer dealer have come to the area. An equestrian subdivision is under construction, and, similar to the setup at the Idaho Horse Center, a team of veterinarians is con-

support services. HITS see this as a win-win situation. The horse show has an ideal location just off the New York Thruway, and Family of Woodstock benefits from income from the lease as well as from the \$5 weekend special event entrance fee.

Mary Creech of HITS Media & Public Relations says, "First and foremost, we chose this location because it's convenient. There is adequate lodging in the immediate area, and there are good restaurants and entertainment."

HITS want to have "something that we can offer in addition to the show expe-

rience," she continues.

Organizers hope the special events such as a chili cook-off, antique show and art exhibit will be extra enticing to both spectators and exhibitors. Offsite, not too far away is New York City, and even closer is the legendary town of Woodstock.

With facilities like these, it's likely that HITS-on-the-Hudson will be viewed as an attraction all its own. Two competition arenas, eight all-weather performance rings, four practice rings, 504 stalls in six barns, a restaurant, indoor vendor areas, a Mercedes Benz showroom and riding trails are contained in this city of horses. As far as show facilities go, Creech says, "There is none other like it in the country."

When HITS isn't occupying HITS-on-the-Hudson with its own shows, "the facility is available for other horse shows, and we've already had a booking for a dressage show," says Creech. Lendon's Youth Dressage Festival, formerly known as the Northeast Junior/Young Rider Championships, is scheduled for the venue at the end of August.

The establishment of HITS-on-the-Hudson has created 15 full-time jobs and an estimated 100 seasonal employment opportunities. Having taken two years to complete, Creech could not divulge the construction cost; however in a study commissioned by HITS, the direct economic impact on the area will be approximately \$34 million annually. This includes gas, shopping, entertainment, food and hotel stays for the estimated 5,000-6,000 exhibitors and 5,000 spectators who will join in the excitement. Not bad for the tiny town of Saugerties—population 20,000.

Jack-of-all-Trades

All competition, all the time works great for some facilities, but Eden Park Equestrian Complex co-owner Sharon Edelman wants to offer more than just a competition venue. The 400-acre Eden Park in Sunbury, OH, opened for business in September 2002, features 54 boarders' stalls, two indoor arenas, two 72'x400' buildings for temporary stabling and three 520'x160' outdoor arenas. All of the indoor facilities are climate-controlled and permanently connected. In January of this year, five shed rows with 60 stalls each were constructed, bringing the total stall capacity of Eden Park to 650.

Eden Park hosted 18-20 shows last year and has 64 shows booked for 2004. The majority of Eden Park's boarders—34 currently—are hunter and jumper rid-

ers, although the facility caters to everything from Standardbred sales to dressage competitions to Foundation Quarter Horse shows.

Eden Park's fees for facility rental depend on the group renting the facility. Especially for the smaller or newer events, Edelman explains, "If an organization grows and they're happy, they'll come back here. Then I can charge them a little more. I don't want to take advantage of them; I want to help them grow."

Edelman often rents the facility to local groups such as the Pony Clubs at significant discounts and makes money instead from stall rental and shavings.

Of all the places she could have started a top-of-the-line facility, Edelman says Ohio's Delaware County is the place to be: "I just read in *The Columbus Dispatch* that Delaware County is the fastest-growing county in Ohio and the twelfth-fastest in the U.S. We're very close to Routes 71 and 270; six minutes from the freeway, yet in the country. We're centrally located to the Midwest and Eastern U.S."

This area of Ohio is fairly horse-rich, and there is plenty of competition for boarders. "As a student, I understand that it's difficult to leave a trainer, but it's easy to leave a facility. Here, boarders can have the best of both worlds," Edelman says.

For \$550 a month, this does sound like the best of every world, financial included. She continues, "This is a very expensive sport and in order for it to continue, we need to make it more reasonable."

Local newspapers have reported that since Eden Parks' opening, restaurants are doing very well and hotels are booked. In addition to attracting tourism and business for the community, Eden Park is providing jobs with a year-round staff of about 30 and more during large events and busy times of the year.

Home Sweet Home

On the smaller side, the Canton, GA, E-Quest has an interesting niche cut out for itself. At not quite three-years-old, the 22-acre boarding and training facility is welcoming an adjacent equestrian subdivision.

Karla Nichwander, E-Quest's administrative office manager, described the 34-home, one-acre-lot community as having full amenities: swimming, tennis, a clubhouse, and a riding facility to boot. She says, "The residents will have the

ability to board and to use our facilities. There will be initial incentives to come here, but after that, just the convenience of having a farm like this next door is a perk."

Only 40 minutes north of Atlanta, E-Quest finds its 36 stalls full at just about all times. For \$650 per month, boarders have access to a covered arena, outdoor

jumping and dressage arenas, and daily grass and paddock turnout.

"People come here for the facility and the care we provide. A manager lives on site, so the animals have care 24/7. Weather is not an issue because of the covered arena," says Nichwander.

Below: An outdoor view of the indoor arena at the 400-acre Eden Park in Sunbury, OH. Sharon Edelman wants to provide a multi-purpose facility to meet the demands of its customers.

Nichwander. "This site was chosen because of the locale of the greater Atlanta area. Plus, it's absolutely beautiful here, and the cost of land is reasonable."

Before E-Quest was built, the heavily wooded land sat unused. While E-Quest isn't a huge facility, it has brought about 10 jobs to the area and supports local businesses.

"This area is quite the equine pocket. E-Quest compliments the locale, as far as feed stores and hay suppliers go. I don't know that we pushed anyone out of the market so much as added to the horse community that was already here," says Nichwander.

It All Adds Up

Some qualities shared by the majority of these facilities are just too



Courtesy Eden Park

Equestrian subdivision aside, there's another area in which E-Quest is becoming known. "We recently became very involved with interscholastic and intercollegiate programs at local high schools, middle schools and colleges. We host some of the teams at our facility and have provided a coach," explains Nichwander.

The facility hosts shows, mostly intercollegiate and interscholastic, and clinics, often dressage and jumping, about six times a year. The facility isn't rented to other groups, although they will bring in outside trainers for clinics. "Even then, we manage it all ourselves out of respect for our clients," says

uncannily to go unnoticed. Convenience is the name of the game when it comes to location, allowing competitors and boarders easy access to facilities. Also, competitive pricing and the desire to support, not dominate, the local equestrian market has become paramount. And, most importantly, each new center has brought in jobs and dollars to the local economy, making the equestrian industry a viable piece of the nation's economy. ■

Lisa Munniksma, of Frankfort, IN, has been involved in equine business, small business and non-profit writing and marketing services for six years.