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# Diamond 'Dude'

**Donald Dizney and his Double Diamond Farm  
are moving the industry forward in Florida**

BY DEIRDRE B. BILES

**T**he Thoroughbred business is a family affair for Donald Dizney, who has been involved in breeding and racing for more than 20 years. Go to the website for his Florida-based Double Diamond Farm and you'll see a big photograph of Dizney and his wife, Irene. There also are pictures of his son, David, who is Double Diamond's president, and Roger Brand, who is Dizney's son-in-law and the 550-acre farm's vice president and general manager.

"Winning is a lot of fun, but I think it's the people and being able to have your family involved in it that I enjoy the most," said Dizney, who has three children and eight grandchildren. "It's good to have things in common and things you can talk about with your kids—like genealogy and trying to build the perfect athlete—as they get older."

One of the family's greatest pleasures recently was following the 2010 campaign of Dizney's homebred First Dude, who was a standout on the Triple Crown Trail. A winning son of Stephen Got Even, the bay colt finished second in the Preakness (gr. I) and third in the Belmont Stakes (gr. I) while being trained by Dale Romans.

In addition, First Dude was second in the Pennsylvania Derby (gr. II) and third in the IZOD Haskell Invitational (gr. I), Travers (gr. I), and Toyota Blue Grass (gr. I) stakes.

"He took us places we had never been before," Dizney said. "Every time we saddled him up, I thought the big guy could win. I've never had a horse that I've gone into a race with that  
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Donald Dizney at the Kentucky Derby in 2006; First Dude (above) works out at Pimlico before the 2010 Preakness



ANNE M. EBERHARDT PHOTOS

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much confidence. He never won a stakes, but he was second and third a bunch of times, and I always thought he was going to win the next one. I was proud of the fact he was kind of an 'iron horse.' We thought we were going to have to rest him, but he would pop right back up and be fine."

First Dude, who raced 10 times in 2010 and earned \$844,640, kicked off his 3-year-old campaign in January by breaking his maiden at Gulfstream Park and ended it with an eighth-place finish in the Nov. 6 Breeders' Cup Classic (gr. I) at Churchill Downs.

"We've got pictures of my granddaughter Grace with First Dude (when he was foaled)," Dizney said. "She's actually reaching up and thinking that she's delivering him. That's a great memory for me, and those are great pictures."

Dizney was born in Pensacola, Fla., but his roots are in Kentucky.

"My grandparents on both sides were Eastern Kentuckians, and one of my granddads was killed in a coal mine," he said. "My dad moved back to the Bluegrass State when I was just a kid, and I was raised in the coalfields."

Dizney was a lineman and a captain of his high school football team, playing for a squad in the small Harlan County town of Lynch that won a state championship. He later was a member of Eastern Kentucky University's football team.

"When you go to Eastern Kentucky, you look for places to go when it starts getting warm," Dizney said. "A bunch of guys and I would always go to Keeneland and watch the horses. We would wear our brightest greens and our brightest yellows, and we didn't wear any socks. We thought we were cool."

Dizney fell in love with racing during those trips to Keeneland. But his interest didn't progress beyond the fan stage for many years even though "I really kind of hoped my buddies and I would buy a horse," he remembered.

After graduating from college, Dizney pursued a career in health care.

"I worked at Humana before it was known as Humana, and I was the senior vice president of operations when I left," he said.

Dizney's next major venture involved the founding of the United Medical Corporation in 1974. Today, he is the chairman of that Florida-based company, which oversees acute-care hospitals, skilled nursing centers, medical equipment rentals, and other health care-related businesses.

"God blessed me with a pretty good job and a pretty good income," Dizney said, so he decided to pursue his interest in Thoroughbreds more seriously in 1983, and he made a big commitment by purchasing a farm. The nursery, located near Ocala, already was known as Double Diamond then, and Dizney kept the name because its initials were the same as those of his first and last names.

"When I want to be involved in something, I usually jump right in; it's just my personality," Dizney said.

Among Double Diamond's first equine residents was the winning Tri Jet mare Jetting Angel, who was a \$12,000 Double Diamond purchase at the 1983 Ocala Breeders' Sales Co. fall mixed sale. Consigned by the late Fred Hooper, one of Florida's most successful horsemen, Jetting Angel was in foal to Lord Rebeau. The resulting foal, Hello Lord, was a winner.

Jetting Angel went on to become a top producer for Double Diamond. Her offspring included Diamond Sunjet, who captured the 1989 Minaret Stakes at Tampa Bay Downs; Thinkernot, who finished second in a division of the 1991 Hoist the Flag Stakes (gr. IIT), and Indomable, who was third in the 1994 Criterium Stakes at Calder Race Course.

But Jetting Angel's most successful runner was Wekiva Springs, a full brother to Thinkernot by former Double Diamond stallion Runaway Groom, who was 1982's champion 3-year-old male in Canada. Raced by Dizney in partnership with James English, Wekiva Springs earned \$1,512,575 and won six added-money events, including the 1996 editions of the Suburban (gr. I) and

Gulfstream Park (gr. I) handicaps.

Wekiva Springs, one of three current stallions at Double Diamond, has sired such stakes winners for Dizney and others as Panamanian champion Uremic, Apalachian Thunder, Silversider, Pyrite Springs, and Rodeo Springs.

"He probably is my favorite horse," said Dizney of Wekiva Springs.

In 1994 Dizney bought Omi, a daughter of Wild Again, for \$75,000 from Three Chimneys Farm, agent, at the Fasig-Tipton Saratoga select yearling auction. The dark bay or brown filly won the 1997 Arlington Matron Handicap (gr. III) and two other added-money events.

As a broodmare, Omi produced Brushed Bayou (by Broad Brush), who triumphed in the 2007 Caress Stakes at Belmont Park. Omi's progeny also include the winner Distinction (by Seattle Slew), who brought the sale-topping price of \$4.2 million at the Fasig-Tipton Saratoga select yearling auction in 2000, a sale record for a Florida-bred yearling.

"We knew we had a nice horse, but you don't really know how much one is worth until they walk them over there (to the sale ring)," Dizney said.

Other horses bred and/or raced by Dizney include 1997 Del Mar Derby (gr. IIT) winner Anet, 2005 Oak Leaf Stakes (gr. II) winner Diamond Omi, 1999 Baldwin Stakes (gr. IIIT) winner and Double Diamond stallion American Spirit, and Semoran, who captured the Kentucky Cup Classic (gr. III) and Prairie Meadows Cornhusker (gr. III) handicaps in 1997.

"When you've been at this a long time, you realize that the horse gods kind of rule," Dizney said. "You see people do things in this sport all the time that you just shake your head and don't understand, but they work. I just try to read everything that I can and try to breed to some of the better stallions."

Dizney has a broodmare band of about 30 mares, many of



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JOSEPH DIAMOND

Donald Disney with wife, Irene, at Gulfstream Park

### 2010 Florida Sires By 2-Year-Old Winners

Sires	2yos	2yo Rnrs	2yo Wnrs
Pomeroy.....	85	44	25
Wildcat Heir.....	96	48	21
Chapel Royal.....	96	46	20
With Distinction.....	106	52	19
Consolidator.....	92	44	14
Gibson County.....	51	30	14
Mass Media.....	45	21	13
Indian Ocean.....	66	32	13
Put It Back.....	48	23	13
Halo's Image.....	44	22	11
Concerto.....	23	16	10
Strong Hope.....	59	22	9
Value Plus.....	66	33	9
Imperialism.....	45	15	9
Roar of the Tiger.....	58	32	9
Werblin.....	43	16	8
Da Stoops.....	37	18	7
West Acre.....	21	13	7
Burning Roma.....	33	21	7
D'wildcat.....	31	19	7
Act of Duty.....	38	14	6
Bwana Charlie.....	38	17	6
Sarava.....	36	15	6
Black Mambo.....	28	12	6
Leroidesanimaux (BRZ).....	58	19	6
City Place.....	24	10	5
A. P. Warrior.....	27	13	5
Strong Contender.....	43	19	5
Graeme Hall.....	44	17	5
Gimmeawink.....	21	6	4
Proud Accolade.....	20	13	4
Montbrook.....	24	14	4
French Envoy.....	10	6	4
Three Wonders.....	40	20	4
Marciano.....	14	4	4
Leading the Parade.....	20	6	3
Concorde's Tune.....	11	5	3
Full Mandate.....	38	17	3

which are covered by Kentucky-based stallions and returned to Florida to foal. While the primary goal of his operation is to breed to race, some young horses are sold at public auction because "it helps cash flow," Disney said. The rest are broken at Double Diamond, which has a five-furlong dirt training track and a half-mile turf gallop. Double Diamond's staff also prepares young horses to race for other Thoroughbred owners and breeders.

"Don is fully committed to and heavily involved in the Thoroughbred business, and he runs a first-class farm," said G. Watts Humphrey Jr., who owns Shawnee Farm in Kentucky. "Double Diamond breaks 10 or 12 of our horses every year and does a wonderful job."

Humphrey's homebred grade III winner Rey de Cafe is a Double Diamond stallion.

Disney, like Humphrey, is a member and former steward of The Jockey Club. The Sunshine State farm owner also is a trustee and former officer of the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association and has been a Breeders' Cup board member and trustee.

"To play the game, you need to be involved; it's really that simple," Disney said.

A member of the Florida Thoroughbred Breeders' and Owners' board of directors, Disney has served multiple terms as the organization's president since the mid-1980s. According to the FTBOA's executive vice president, Richard Hancock, Disney's hard work has been key to the passage of important Florida legislation that allowed intertrack wagering, slots at tracks, and minors to attend the races.

"He's very quiet and very deliberate," Hancock said. "He's usually pretty laid-back, but when a decision is made about what our board wants or there is a direc-

tion he feels we should go in, he is very firm. He's really helped our industry grow."

Brand, Double Diamond's general manager, said Disney's role as one of the movers and shakers in the Thoroughbred industry has helped improve Double Diamond's efforts in breeding and racing.

"It is advantageous for us because he is able to talk to all those important people and hear what they have to say," Brand explained. "He keeps his finger on the industry's pulse, and that's probably why we've made some of the changes we have such as breeding some mares in California. His exposure to a lot of things outside the day-to-day life on the farm helps him decide if something is advantageous for us or if it isn't."

Disney's sports interests outside of horse racing include following and supporting the University of Florida's athletic programs. He was the president of the Gator Boosters in 2006-07 when the school won national championships in football and basketball. In addition, Disney has been involved in the ownership of several United States Football League and Arena Football League teams in Florida.

But Double Diamond has never been far from Disney's mind since its establishment because of the constant challenges required to keep a Thoroughbred breeding and racing operation running smoothly.

"When you get into the Thoroughbred business, you realize you can't really call it a business," Disney said. "It's a game, and it's a tough game. People go about it in a lot of different ways, and I haven't seen anybody completely figure it out."

"I'm a corporation guy," he continued, "and people like me want to write a business plan. In any business plan your first column is revenues, but it's hard to project revenues in the Thoroughbred game when you don't know what the horses you breed are going to look like or what they are going to sell for. It takes several years to find out if you made the right breeding decision. So what we do is make a budget on what we're going to pay for stud fees, try to hold our mares down to a certain number, and keep rolling right on. Because there are limits, you don't see me at the sales buying many expensive horses."

An American recession and global financial crisis have caused many Thoroughbred owners and breeders, including Disney, to make adjustments in recent years. But he hasn't lost his enthusiasm for winning races.

"I still love the game, and we enjoy it as a family," Disney said. "Whenever we look at our 2-year-olds, we dream about the Kentucky Derby (gr. I). It's something I know we'll do until I die. And then, hopefully, someone in the family will want to do it after that." 