

BLOODHORSE®

Dedicated to the improvement of Thoroughbred breeding and racing for more than 100 years

September 23, 2017 | No. 39



*Helen
'Penny'
Chenery*
1922-2017

ALSO INSIDE:

KEENELAND
SEPTEMBER
SALE SOARS

EVIN ROMAN


WORLD APPROVAL'S
WOODBINE MILE

OUT OF THE GATE

'TREMENDOUS MACHINE'

Meadow Stable's Secretariat wins the 1973 Belmont—the last leg of the Triple Crown—by 31 lengths at Belmont Park

BOB COGLIANESE

 To purchase Out of the Gate photos go to [Photos.BloodHorse.com](https://www.bloodhorse.com/photos)



Penny Chenery and family celebrate Secretariat's win in the 1973 Kentucky Derby



BLOODHORSE LIBRARY

RACING ROYALTY

Penny Chenery was the sport's greatest ambassador

BY LENNY SHULMAN

THERE ARE TWO INDELIBLE MOMENTS that reflect the essence of Helen “Penny” Chenery. They occurred mere yards from one another, yet 42 years apart. In the box seats at Belmont Park, there was Penny (Tweedy then) in 1973 after her Secretariat had won the Belmont Stakes (G1) in record time by 31 lengths and by extension the Triple Crown, thrusting her arms above her head in exultation, giving a double-handed wave to those fortunate enough to be assembled in the grandstand below, witnesses to history. And then in 2015 she sat in a nearby box with Patrice Wolfson, the owner of 1978 Triple Crown winner Affirmed, watching American Pharoah join the echelon of Triple Crown winners. Penny was delighted for the new member of the exclusive club because his emergence was good for racing. But when someone mentioned how fast American Pharoah had completed the 12-furlong course, Penny didn’t hesitate. “Not fast enough,” she shot back.

In those moments, Penny, who left us Sept. 16 after 95 years, showed us in her own powerful way what made her so special to Thoroughbred racing: Her love of the sport, her power to persevere and succeed, and her fierce loyalty to and pride in her horses. Secretariat was not a gift that came wrapped in a bow and placed in her lap. She had to make difficult personal decisions under great duress to assume her place as the voice of this legend, and she was as protective of his legacy, and that of her Riva Ridge, as a mother bear with her cubs.

Christopher Chenery, a civil engineer, made his money buying up water, gas, and electric companies, so much so that he was able to buy The Meadow, the neglected farm he’d spent youthful summers on in rural Virginia. With his daughter, an admitted “daddy’s girl,” Chenery rode horses along trails and through the hills. Penny served with the Red Cross in Europe during World War II, becoming one of a



JERRY COOKE

At Belmont Park with trainer Lucien Laurin (white jacket) after Secretariat won the Triple Crown

very few women to attend business school at Columbia University upon her return.

While Christopher Chenery built a top-shelf stable of racehorses such as Hill Prince, First Landing, Cicada, and Sir Gaylord, his daughter moved to Colorado with her husband, Jack Tweedy, to start a family. After her mother died and her father's health began declining, Penny took up the challenge of running the racing stable. With her father critically ill and her siblings wanting to sell the horses, Penny became adamant.

"These are Dad's horses, and as long as he's alive, we can't do that," she said, knowing it was her father's dream to win the Kentucky Derby.

Sure enough, a lop-eared, crooked, sickly, ugly duckling homebred of a horse named Riva Ridge came along and won the 1972 Derby with Penny and her two siblings watching at Churchill Downs. Back in a New York hospital, a nurse said to the gravely ill Christopher Chenery, "Your horse just won the Kentucky Derby."

"Tears came down his face," Penny said in a 2005 interview, "so we know that he knew."

Instead of quitting while on top, Penny kept on with the horses. Truth be told, she liked the attention and responsibility, and the confines of being a housewife couldn't

hold her. Plus there was an up and coming Bold Ruler colt that had caught the eye of everyone at The Meadow. The pressure mounted on her to sell the horses after her father died at the beginning of 1973. Besides her siblings, her husband wanted Penny to return to her previous life.

"But I had the bit in my teeth," Penny Chenery said. "I was not going back."

And so it was under the Meadow Stable banner that Secretariat made his march to greatness. Nestled between the horror of the Vietnam War and the Watergate reality that America's President was, indeed, a crook, Secretariat's status was elevated beyond being a great racehorse to becoming a country's hero. And, as Penny put it,

"All the love that went to the horse spilled over to (trainer) Lucien (Laurin) and me."

Penny used her fame well and always for the good of the sport that had given so much to her and her family. There wasn't an industry organization she didn't chair or serve. There wasn't a young fan she ever turned away. And there wasn't an after-care program she wouldn't champion. If there arose any plan or program to attract people to racing, she was behind it.

After Riva Ridge had won the Belmont Stakes in 1972, Penny was exhausted, yet stopped for every picture and every reporter, making sure the story got out to every newspaper and to as many people as possible.



PAUL SCHAFER



NYRA PHOTO

Chenery with Secretariat and christening 'Secretariat Ave' on the Belmont Park backstretch

“It’s such a simple thing, sharing,” she said. “Don’t be a small tribe. We need the fans; we need the potential owners and breeders. Why not let them see what fun it is.”

And a year later, there she was in those Belmont Park box seats, watching her Secretariat and listening as track announcer Chic Anderson voiced what will never be forgotten: “He’s moving like a tremendous machine.”

There was more going on than winning the Triple Crown for Penny Chenery, however. There was also reestablishing the status of her parents.

“I wanted my dad’s friends and contemporaries to see we were alive and kicking,” she said. “He’d been an important figure in New York racing, but when he got sick, people forgot about him socially. I wanted to reassert the family name. And that day, people like Paul Mellon and Jock Whitney and Joan Payson—friends of my father’s—thanked me for keeping the stable going.”

“They broke the mold with Penny,” said Leonard Lusky, who for the past 17 years was Penny’s business partner in Secretariat.com as well as her confidante. “She was so unique and so strong; indomitable. She liked people and liked to laugh and have a good time. And she liked everything that had to do with horses and their care. She was a unique spirit.”

Although the fine actress Diane Lane portrayed Penny in a Disney film about Secretariat, she deserved Katharine Hepburn—strong, funny, breezy in a natural way. As Secretariat continued to entertain his legion of fans while standing stud at Claiborne Farm, Penny remained a vital



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Chenery at home in 2005

force in the industry.

“Many people put her on a pedestal as a feminist, but she was a pioneer in so many ways,” said Lusky. “She loved men, she loved empowering women, and she had a great outlook on everyone getting along. She also loved the spotlight. On many occasions she said, ‘I’m a ham, just like my horse.’”

Any open accounts she had, Penny Chenery settled late in life. After three decades of controversy, she spearheaded a study that, using digital video, confirmed that Secretariat had set a stakes record in winning the Preakness Stakes (G1), a fact long denied by faulty timing equipment. When Maryland officials corrected the error, it went official that Penny’s colt set records in each of his Triple Crown triumphs.

She acknowledged a couple of years back that she had carried on an affair with Laurin while her marriage was crumbling. And on the 40th anniversary of Secretariat’s Triple Crown, she admitted that, faced with losing him to the breeding shed because of needing to satisfy estate taxes, she

had made mistakes by running him in the Whitney and Woodward stakes (both G1) when he wasn’t 100%.

“I was trying to get prestige, money, everything. I knew the end was coming. ‘Greedy’ is the word that comes to mind.” In that admittance, she finally freed jockey Ron Turcotte from the blame of those losses.

There was a magic about Secretariat, and that aura spread to surround Penny Chenery as well. On Belmont Stakes days, Lusky sets up a booth just inside the grandstand, selling photographs of Penny’s great horse. And every year it is the busiest station on the premises, with people queuing up to buy. When Turcotte is present to sign autographs, the que gets longer. But when Penny signed, as she did most recently in 2015, the line stretched back through the old Belmont grandstand clear to the mutuel machines.

After more than 40 years, people haven’t forgotten what the horse and the woman have done and meant for Thoroughbreds and racing.

We had the honor of visiting with Penny Chenery numerous times through the years, and the responsibility of telling her story to younger generations. You knew you were in the presence of racing royalty when you sat with her. We talked once about whether she expected Secretariat to re-create himself at stud.

“Of course, you always think that it happened once, so it could happen again,” she’d said. “But I’ve had a lot of years to realize, no. I was never going to see another.”

And with that, Penny Chenery summed up also our feelings about her. **BH**



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Personable Chenery always had time to sign autographs, meet with young fans



RAY WOLFE JR.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE

Editorial Comment

LIFE AFTER SECRETARIAT

Penny Chenery gave us much more than a great ride with Big Red



EVAN HAMMONDS
MANAGING EDITOR

THE LATE PENNY CHENERY (see page 19) and the great Secretariat are forever linked as the greatest one-two punch in the history of American racing. The story remains as rich today as it was in 1973, especially considering the fact Chenery was navigating her way through settling her family's estate and negotiating a record-breaking stud deal all the while trying to manage the most popular athlete in sports.

Oh, and by the way, Chenery's Meadow Stable won the 1972 Kentucky Derby and Belmont Stakes with Riva Ridge.

But there was so much more to Chenery than the great ride with Big Red. Just 51 when Secretariat became the first horse in 25 years to annex the Triple Crown, in many ways Chenery's life at the forefront of the industry was just the beginning.

The term "ambassador" is one that could be overused in describing Chenery's enthusiasm for the sport, but she never tired of telling Secretariat's story and sharing tidbits with anyone who asked.

In any trip to a racetrack, especially Belmont Park, it would take much longer for her to reach her seat than it did for Secretariat to travel the 1½ miles of the Belmont Stakes.

If one never had the chance to meet Chenery, receive her warm smile and a kind word, well, you needn't even ask. She found the time for everyone.

Chenery also served the indus-

try in oh-so-many ways. Not long after Secretariat was off to stud at Claiborne Farm, she was the first woman to be named president of the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association, and after serving two terms, she was named the organization's board chairman.

She served on the board of directors of the Breeders' Cup and just about every other Thoroughbred-related organization. She also served on the executive committee of the American Horse Council and as president of the Grayson Foundation and raised an incredible amount of money for various equine organizations.

Just one example: Chenery helped kick-start a fundraiser for the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation by donating Secretariat's tack box while vice president of the organization.

And she continued to breed horses. She bred New York-bred Saratoga Dew (Cormorant—Super Luna, by In Reality). Super Luna is out of Alada, a daughter of Riva Ridge out of Syrian Sea, Secretariat's full sister.

In 1992 for Charles Engel, Saratoga Dew won the Comely Stakes (G2), ran second in the Alabama Stakes (G1), and won Belmont's Gazelle Handicap (G1) and Beldame Stakes (G1) on her way to earning an Eclipse Award as the champion 3-year-filly and was also named the New York-bred horse of the year.

In 1983, Chenery, along with Martha F. Gerry and Al-

laire du Pont, broke the glass ceiling in racing while becoming the first women admitted as members of The Jockey Club.

The Blood-Horse editor Kent Hollingsworth, in the "What's Going On Here" column of Nov. 26, 1983, wrote:

"And now the base of the club membership has been expanded to include—not only those who have spent a good deal of money breeding and racing horses, and some friends who have not—but those who already have raised the level of racing, through their great horses, and by their presence, their sportsmanship, their contributions, their service, such as few men have contributed.

"The new members of The Jockey Club may not make a paradise, but they are good examples, of the best in racing."

From our own personal memories of Chenery, she was gracious enough to not only share her box seats at Saratoga Race Course, but also allow us to stay with her at a rented summer home at the Spa on State Street back in the mid 1980s, allowing us first-hand to learn of her charm, class, and service.

She also pulled us aside prior to the 2004 Belmont Stakes at an overcrowded Belmont Park and into her box area—along with actor Bill Murray—to watch Smarty Jones try to emulate Big Red.

During a pre-shooting party for the Disney movie "Secretariat" held at the "Castle" in Woodford County in the fall of 2009, Chenery introduced us to actress Diane Lane, who was portraying her in the film. When told of our position at *The Blood-Horse*, Lane—who had studied Chenery extensively for the role—excitedly explained the importance of the weekly publication as a "must read." A series of stammers followed.

Chenery, however, never stammered, was never at a loss for words—always the right words—and never wavered in her love for all things Thoroughbred. **BH**



REMEMBERING Helen "Penny" Chenery (1922-2017)

BLOODHORSE LIBRARY



CHURCHILL DOWNS, INC./KINETIC CORPORATION



BLOODHORSE LIBRARY



BLOODHORSE LIBRARY



BLOODHORSE LIBRARY



BLOODHORSE LIBRARY