

Southeast

ALABAMA FLORIDA GEORGIA MISSISSIPPI
NORTH CAROLINA SOUTH CAROLINA TENNESSEE

In Good Hands



Peter Brant builds on Payson Park's winning legacy

BY CYNTHIA McFARLAND
PHOTOS BY DANA WIMPFHEIMER

IT'S THE RARE individual who is both willing and able to step up to change the course of fate. It would appear that Payson Park Training Center, the 405-acre facility in Indiantown, Fla., has been graced by not one but two such unique individuals who intervened when the facility needed them most.

And racing is the better for it.

In the mid-1950s a handful of Thoroughbred racing visionaries turned several hundred South Florida acres into a training center with a state-of-the-art track. Bull Hancock, Michael Phipps, Townsend Martin, and C.T. Chenery had hopes that one day their project might become a commercial racetrack. That dream never materialized and upon Phipps' passing the property was sold to a land speculator in 1973.

Left to its own devices, land in Florida doesn't take long to revert to its wild roots. Despite its lack of maintenance and

2020 LEADING SIRES IN FLORIDA



For daily updated sire lists
visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2021 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2020 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	KHOZAN (12, Distorted Humor), Journeyman Stallions	\$10,000	87/52	5/8	3/5	(Princess Secret, \$434,300)	\$3,342,115	*127	6	1.77	1.41
2	FIRST DUDE (07, Stephen Got Even), Double Diamond Farm	\$7,500	117/62	2/2	0/2	(Ready to Runaway, \$166,150)	\$2,095,683	397	13	1.15	1.19
3	BRETHREN (08, Distorted Humor), Arindel Farm	\$7,500	101/50	2/2	0/2	(Key Biscayne, \$171,520)	\$2,075,694	176	5	1.28	1.53
4	ADIOS CHARLIE (08, Indian Charlie), Ocala Stud	\$4,000	89/47	1/3	0/1	(Jean Elizabeth, \$189,398)	\$1,745,173	231	7	1.44	1.20
5	GONE ASTRAY (06, Dixie Union), Northwest Stud	\$4,500	101/41	2/4	1/2	(Noble Drama, \$327,435)	\$1,722,026	*291	9	0.94	1.09
6	TREASURE BEACH (GB) (08, Galileo), Pleasant Acres Stallions	\$4,000	128/40	1/1	0/1	(Sugar Fix, \$190,539)	\$1,516,875	*527	3	1.08	1.39
7	BIG DRAMA (06, Montbrook), Stormborne Stallions	\$5,000	91/42	0/0	0/0	(Inter Miami, \$100,780)	\$1,459,349	262	4	0.87	1.22
8	THE BIG BEAST (11, Yes It's True), Ocala Stud	\$4,000	56/38	3/3	1/3	(Up in Smoke, \$173,318)	\$1,347,236	92	3	1.13	1.30
9	HANDSOME MIKE (09, Scat Daddy), Pleasant Acres Stallions	\$4,000	73/41	0/0	0/0	(Running for Riz, \$76,012)	\$1,273,500	112	0	0.81	0.83
10	FIELD COMMISSION (05, Service Stripe), Solera Farm	\$3,500	71/32	0/0	0/0	(Lil Commissioner, \$129,060)	\$1,056,654	166	2	0.81	0.96
11	AWESOME OF COURSE (00, Awesome Again), Ocala Stud	\$2,000	58/29	1/1	0/1	(Shivaree, \$274,355)	\$1,049,110	*270	12	1.27	1.27
12	CAJUN BREEZE (08, Congrats), Stonehedge Farm South	Private	26/14	2/3	1/2	(Breeze On By, \$303,000)	\$918,460	38	3	1.78	1.40
13	OVERDRIVEN (09, Tale of the Cat)	Pnsd	50/23	0/0	0/0	(Red Crescent, \$87,002)	\$914,456	162	3	0.94	1.13
14	SONGANDAPRAYER (98, Unbridled's Song)	Pnsd	89/29	1/1	1/1	(Boston Cadillac, \$76,655)	\$858,310	*1051	37	1.06	1.36
15	RATTLESNAKE BRIDGE (08, Tapit)	N/A	52/25	0/0	0/0	(Loriloupies, \$54,020)	\$609,441	145	0	0.52	1.00
16	CHITU (11, Henny Hughes), Bridlewood Farm	\$3,500	35/14	0/0	0/0	(Lugamo, \$65,140)	\$527,864	79	0	0.71	0.87
17	HIGH COTTON (03, Dixie Union)	Pnsd	41/17	0/0	0/0	(High Five Cotton, \$68,150)	\$476,652	*415	11	0.93	1.20
18	WINSLOW HOMER (07, Unbridled's Song)	N/A	31/14	0/0	0/0	(Oh Deborah, \$66,150)	\$469,654	79	0	0.77	1.11
19	BAHAMIAN SQUALL (09, Gone West), Double Diamond Farm	\$3,000	30/9	0/0	0/0	(Assertiko, \$69,490)	\$397,649	55	0	0.80	0.88
20	GREATNESS (99, Mr. Prospector), Solera Farm	\$3,500	21/11	1/2	0/1	(Lady's Island, \$158,020)	\$375,754	*262	8	1.29	0.99
21	FLASHSTORM (04, Storm Cat), Northwest Stud	\$2,500	31/15	0/0	0/0	(Flashndynamite, \$83,560)	\$355,671	123	3	0.85	0.91
22	¶ JESS'S DREAM (12, Curlin), Ocala Stud	\$4,000	27/6	0/0	0/0	(Restofthetory, \$135,400)	\$332,076	*59	0	0.64	1.56
23	FURY KAPCORI (10, Tiznow), Journeyman Stallions	\$2,500	25/9	0/0	0/0	(Napa Rules, \$69,950)	\$300,973	56	1	0.59	1.41
24	AMIRA'S PRINCE (IRE) (09, Teofilo), Pleasant Acres Stallions	\$2,500	19/10	0/0	0/0	(Our Fantasy, \$51,740)	\$263,449	33	0	0.61	0.96
25	BACKTALK (07, Smarty Jones), Stormborne Stallions	\$2,500	23/10	0/0	0/0	(Nick the Cardshark, \$45,465)	\$235,075	63	2	0.90	0.77
26	HEAR NO EVIL (00, Carson City)	N/A	15/8	0/0	0/0	(Toni Ann's Miracle, \$62,373)	\$227,951	140	8	1.35	1.39
27	IQBAAL (06, Medaglia d'Oro), Ward Ranch	Private	13/6	0/0	0/0	(Johnny Cab, \$59,330)	\$207,034	37	0	0.95	1.09
28	¶ RIDE ON CURLIN (11, Curlin), Pleasant Acres Stallions	\$5,000	10/3	0/0	0/0	(Sophisticurl, \$48,250)	\$145,919	25	0	0.79	0.86
29	TELLING (04, A.P. Indy)	N/A	14/3	0/0	0/0	(Arcelor, \$43,740)	\$137,989	54	0	0.62	1.23
30	YOUNG BRIAN (13, Hard Spun), Stormborne Stallions	\$2,500	8/4	0/0	0/0	(Heavenly Blessing, \$34,510)	\$110,395	9	0	0.56	0.18
31	HELLO BROADWAY (06, Broken Vow)	N/A	7/2	0/0	0/0	(Dem a Wonder, \$54,160)	\$107,279	38	1	1.00	0.82
32	BROOKS 'N DOWN (05, Montbrook), Ocala Stud	\$1,500	7/2	0/0	0/0	(Garter and Tie, \$56,155)	\$103,180	30	1	1.25	2.14
33	FORT LOUDON (09, Awesome of Course), Ocala Stud	\$1,500	9/3	0/0	0/0	(Happy Loudon, \$43,660)	\$98,842	25	0	0.58	2.17
34	FINALE (09, Scat Daddy), Stormborne Stallions	\$2,500	15/5	0/0	0/0	(Masterclass, \$29,360)	\$96,983	38	0	0.22	0.71
35	IN SUMMATION (03, Put It Back), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	19/3	0/0	0/0	(Awsum Roar, \$48,465)	\$95,268	*233	5	0.87	1.28
36	COUNCIL MEMBER (02, Seattle Slew)	N/A	12/6	0/0	0/0	(Council Rules, \$32,168)	\$89,361	107	0	0.55	0.85
37	BURNING ROMA (98, Rubiano)	Died, 2018	5/3	0/0	0/0	(Sizzling Roma, \$31,410)	\$86,773	*183	5	0.97	1.10
38	THE BIG MYSTERY (12, Warrior's Reward)	N/A	2/1	0/0	0/0	(Mystery Bank, \$85,690)	\$86,490	4	0	1.01	0.73
39	SILVER TREE (00, Hennessy)	N/A	9/4	0/0	0/0	(Silver Sun, \$19,585)	\$79,025	50	1	0.77	1.05
40	DOCTOR PEACH (07, Tiznow)	N/A	6/3	0/0	0/0	(Precocious Peach, \$25,625)	\$68,303	8	0	0.90	1.13
41	GLOBAL RESPONSE (09, A.P. Indy), CoCo Ranch	Private	11/4	0/0	0/0	(Richie Goes Global, \$17,750)	\$67,157	25	0	0.41	0.87
42	BEAU CHOIX (07, Elusive Quality)	Died, 2020	9/1	0/0	0/0	(Plenum, \$21,040)	\$60,645	28	0	0.52	0.85
43	SEÑOR SWINGER (00, El Prado)	N/A	8/2	0/0	0/0	(Rebel Traveller, \$23,414)	\$59,132	98	0	0.44	0.97
44	THOREAU (08, Gone West), Ocala Jockey Club	\$1,500	7/2	0/0	0/0	(Jonathantoquick, \$27,001)	\$58,929	24	0	0.56	1.12
45	SPENSIVE (00, Ponche)	N/A	2/2	0/0	0/0	(Ohanzee, \$52,910)	\$58,773	43	0	0.61	0.69

unkempt surroundings, Virginia Kraft Payson and her late husband, Charles, recognized the track's quality and decided the facility was worth rescuing. After purchasing the property in 1980, Payson renovated it and began operating it as Payson Park Training Center, which over the decades became a winter training venue for many top stables and respected trainers.

However, in 2012 she listed it for sale.

In a February 2013 *Forbes* magazine article, Payson said that selling the training center was an estate planning move because her children had no interest

in Thoroughbred racing.

"I think they would sell it for 10 cents on the dollar to get rid of it, and I don't want that to happen to Payson Park," she told *Forbes*.

BRANT STEPS UP

Because Payson was intent on not selling to anyone who didn't want to keep it as a training center, this obviously limited the field of potential buyers. Enter Peter M. Brant who already had a connection with Payson Park because a number of his horses had stabled there in the 1970s and

1980s with trainer LeRoy S. Jolley.

In the business world Brant is known as the man behind White Birch Paper, which he has grown to become the second-largest newsprint paper producer in North America.

Outside the office, Brant relishes the role of philanthropist and art collector and has been recognized for his commitment to both. In addition to supporting prominent museums, he established The Brant Foundation and The Brant Foundation Art Study Center in Greenwich, Conn., and the main museum space in the East Village in

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in the selected region (stallions that have died or been exported prior to the 2015 breeding season are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available Northern Hemisphere statistics through December 6, 2020. As supplied to *The Blood-Horse* by The Jockey Club Information Systems, Inc., earnings include adjusted money from Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Adjusted earnings are put on par with average North American earnings from the previous year. For example, the average North American purse in 2019 is \$25,300 or 53% of the 2019 average purse in Japan. To put earnings on par, all Japanese progeny earnings are multiplied by 53% before being credited to a sire's progeny earnings. Hong Kong earnings are adjusted by 17%; Singapore by 85%. Current year stakes winners include all N.H.-foaled black-type stakes winners worldwide. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners include all countries. (A ¶ indicates a sire represented by his first crop to race).



The overhaul of the one-mile main track was completed this fall

New York, with the goal of promoting education and appreciation of contemporary art and design.

Thoroughbred racing recognizes Brant as a top-level owner. Among his top horses are Breeders' Cup winners Sistercharlie and Gulch, along with grade/group 1 winners Raging Bull, Dunbar Road, Fog of War, and Sottsass. In 2020 his runners have earned \$2,091,926 (through Nov. 30).

Sottsass recently delivered on a lifelong dream for Brant when the colt captured Europe's most famous race, the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe (G1) in October, pushing the French-bred colt's earnings to \$3,900,437.

Brant, who has been fascinated by horse racing since childhood, said currently there are about 50 horses in his racing stable, many of which he owns in partner-

ships with friends.

"I've bred some myself, and others I've bought in partnership," he said, noting that the majority of his horses are now trained by Chad Brown.

Don't ask him to pick a favorite, but if pressed, Brant admits Sistercharlie probably holds that title. The 2018 Eclipse Award champion turf female has earnings of \$3,786,003.

At the recently concluded Breeders' Cup Championships at Keeneland, Brant was represented by an impressive five starters, all trained by Brown, including Sistercharlie. Although Brant's champion failed to repeat her 2018 Maker's Mark Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Turf (G1T) win, his good filly Dunbar Road finished a game third in the Longines Breeders' Cup Distaff (G1), upping her earnings to \$1,196,040.

REASON TO BUY

After Brant purchased Payson Park in May 2019, he made it clear that while renovations and upgrades were planned, one thing wouldn't change: the name. He was determined to honor Virginia Kraft Payson's efforts with the facility over the years.

Brant says the fact that a number of his good horses trained at Payson Park in the '70s and '80s—including such stellar runners as Gulch, Track Barron, Mogambo, and Class Play—factored into his decision to purchase the facility, but the main reason is that Payson Park does right by the horses themselves—fitting into all of Brant's racing goals in the U.S. and beyond.

"It's a very good place to train. Horses winter very well there; they rest and don't have to rush," Brant said. "The affiliation with the New York tracks is good, and we have similar surfaces. We're a feeder to the (New York Racing Association) spring and summer programs, so we want to make sure our training is on the same level as theirs. Our overall plan is to have the flexibility of all kinds of training there for various international racing venues, including England, France, and Ireland.

"We've improved the tracks; the facility is pretty superb now. My ultimate goal is to have it as a training center where you can winter and then come out and run at Ascot, in California, go to Kentucky, or stay in Florida," Brant said. "It gives you every option you can think of."

Payson Park's significance as a training



There are 21 barns at Payson Park that can accommodate up to 500 horses

center made headlines as the winter home of the three official top finishers in the 2019 Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve (G1). Country House, Code of Honor, and Tacitus hailed from the barns of trainers Bill Mott and Shug McGaughey.

Brant points out that in addition to Mott and McGaughey, Payson Park is also the winter home to such trainers as Brown, Christophe Clement, Bill Harrigan, and Canadian trainer Roger Attfield, who has been coming to Payson Park since its early days.

Clement hails Payson Park as a top spot worldwide, not only for training and for young horses but also for affording the opportunity to give a break to those hard-working horses competing at the top level.

“It’s a great old place, and I’m sure it will have a great future,” said Brant, noting that the facility is completely filled now.

TRACK RENOVATIONS

When Virginia Payson owned the facility, she came up with the slogan, “happy horses win.” Payson Park general manager and longtime horseman Larry Kelly says there was a good reason for that sentiment, and it’s still in action.

“We look out for number one—the horse. One of the things that make Payson special is that it’s unique to the horse,” said Kelly, himself a former trainer. “Every-



Payson Park also offers several miles of trails

body gets along. There’s a lot of camaraderie, and it’s all about the horse.”

“I’ve been going there every year except for a couple of years since the mid-1980s. I’ve had a lot of luck out of there,” says Hall of Famer McGaughey, who trained Code of Honor at the facility last year. “They’ve done a lot of work on the turf course, cleaning things up and have gotten some new equipment. I think everything is moving in the right direction. My plans are to keep going back every year. I just hope it stays the way it is.”

That current condition includes a well-respected turf course.

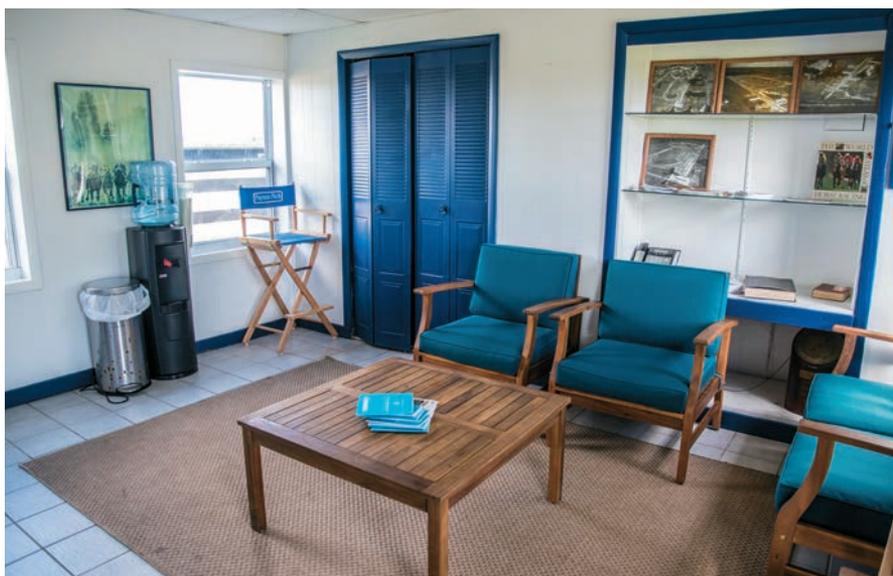
“We put in the new French rails like the NYRA has been putting in, and we replanted grass on the turf course to make it thicker and more lush,” said Brant. “It’s under a grass management program now and is a very well-manicured turf course.”

Kelly said that effort is delivering results.

“Mr. Brant did an exceptional upgrade on the seven-eighths-mile turf course. A lot of good winners have trained around that turf course,” said Kelly of the project that was completed in the fall of 2019. “We widened it—in many spots 30 feet—added an inside rail and installed a whole



The turf course at Payson Park has been replanted to make it thicker and more lush



The clocker's stand has a clubhouse feel

new sprinkler system on the inside of the turf course. There's also a nice galloping course between the three-quarter and seven-eighths-mile inside the turf course."

Kelly notes that the original sand-based one-mile track was exceptionally well-

made. "They built a really fine base on this track, and it's been a good racetrack for many, many years," he said.

Kelly added that an overhaul of the one-mile dirt track was completed this fall, which includes the time-intensive process

of using a beach-rake machine and giant sifter over the entire surface going down several inches.

"We have a new six-horse starting gate; it's a schooling gate and perfect for us. We also redid the whole back chute with new railing," added Kelly.

Payson Park also offers places to ride away from the actual racetrack and turf course. Several miles of trails wind through the woods, over the open fields, and along the outskirts of the 405-acre property.

"We call them English hacking trails. They're that beautiful Florida sand and about 10 feet wide; we till the trails and keep them safe," Kelly said. "They offer a lovely mental break for the right horse. The trainers know when to use it. This is a great option to have—especially with a more mature horse—and, obviously, we're 100% fenced in."

In a normal year about 500 horses winter at Payson Park from Oct. 15-May 15, but



Gate crew at Payson Park

2020 has definitely not been a “normal” year. Because of the COVID-19 shutdowns of many U.S. racetracks, Payson Park has been home to more horses that have stayed and trained longer than usual.

BARN IMPROVEMENTS

Many of the property’s structures are decades old, so a methodical approach was needed to update the facility.

“We have 21 barns with approximately 500 stalls total. We are replacing and upgrading the electric and plumbing and installed a really nice fiber optic system for all the barns. The whole facility’s being wired for fiber optics, which will help with communication,” Kelly said. “This year we refitted the structures, painted the inside and outside of all the barns, and added a lot of nice woodwork in the barns. We’ve done a really nice overhaul on the barns, which are concrete block.”

Kelly added that cosmetic improvements, such as painting, will continue. Paddock areas also have been improved.

“We’ve spent a lot of time on the 76 turnout paddocks, rebuilding and upgrading with new gates for safety; we have built 10 completely new paddocks,” Kelly said. “The paddocks are not overly big but are just right for horses to get a little exercise, roll, and get some movement, but not big enough to get up speed and get hurt.”

It wasn’t just the equine end of the facility that was slated for renovation. Kelly



Payson Park general manager Larry Kelly

notes that there are two staff dormitories with a total of 62 berths. One dorm has been totally refurbished and the other upgraded with all new paint, bathrooms, and plumbing.

“We have a dining room for the staff and lounge area, and the cafeteria has been upgraded to a very nice restaurant with a new trainer’s lounge,” Kelly said. “We call it Main Street Cafe, but it’s a full restaurant and is open seven days a week. It’s there for all the staff, trainers, owners,

and their friends.”

Trainers don’t have to leave the property to purchase feed and hay.

“Finish Line Feed rents the hay and barn facility and supplies the barns,” Kelly said. “Their products are great quality. All our major players use them even when they’re not stabled at Payson Park.”

THINKING AHEAD

The horsemen have appreciated Brant’s efforts.

“No better person could have bought this place than Peter Brant. His love of the business is evident by this gesture,” said Alan Quartucci of North Shore Bloodstock, who has served as a consultant during the renovation of Payson Park. “I think the real reason he bought it is because he wanted to be sure it would stay a viable and great place to train young and older horses.”

In making improvements, Payson Park has relied on some of the industry’s leading experts on surfaces.

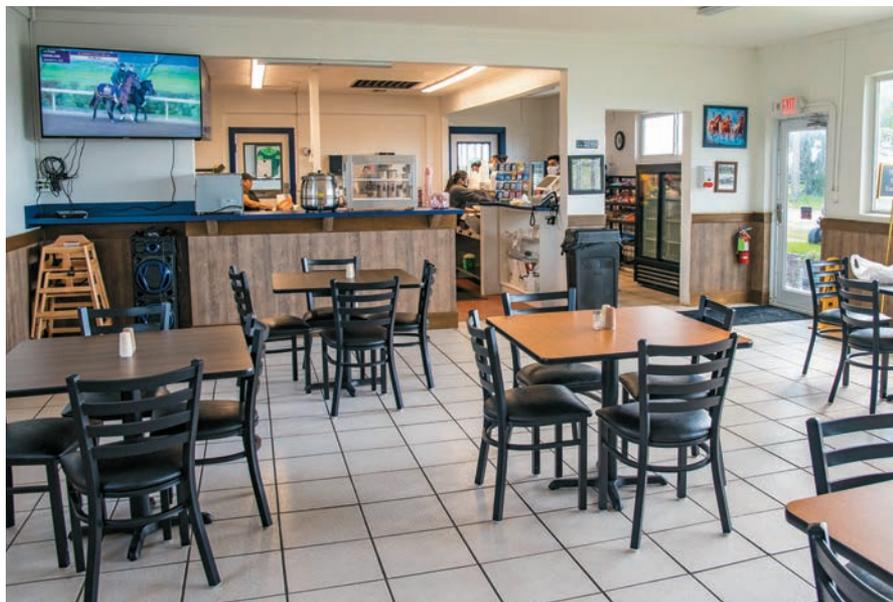
“We were fortunate in that we have Glen Kozak from NYRA who has come down several times to give us his opinion on what was needed on track maintenance and equipment,” Quartucci said. “A lot of renovation went into the main track, and the turf course was a total renovation. We have purchased new tractors, rollers, harrows, a starting gate, and water truck.

“Everything came together quickly when Mr. Brant purchased Payson; it was kind of at the end of the season already,” said Quartucci. “This being the second year of the renovation, the turf course will be even better than it was.”

Brant notes that Quartucci will also be part of the future program should the facility emulate the barn ownership model that has been successful at Fair Hill Training Center in Maryland.

“In the future we would like to sell barns to owners and trainers and allow them to renovate as they see fit,” explained Quartucci. “Going forward, the people who own and rent barns would all contribute to the maintenance of the property. The hope is that eventually Payson Park would be self-sufficient.” 

Cynthia McFarland is a freelance writer based in Ocala, Fla.



Main Street Cafe, a full-service restaurant, is open seven days a week