

MID-ATLANTIC

DELAWARE MARYLAND NEW JERSEY PENNSYLVANIA
VIRGINIA WEST VIRGINIA



Middleburg Training Center is one of the Virginia farms benefiting from the state's certified program

Game Changer

VIRGINIA-CERTIFIED THOROUGHBRED PROGRAM A WELCOME ADDITION

By CHARLIE McCARTHY

AFTER VIRGINIA'S HORSE industry was dealt a disastrous blow due to the closing of Colonial Downs in 2013, Eagle Point Farm's Karen Godsey felt forced to take undesired action.

"I was actually looking at other jobs, putting in résumés at places but it wasn't what I wanted to do," said Godsey,

whose grandfather started the farm in 1947. "I just feel like I was born and bred to do this, but I didn't really see a clear option to be able to do it."

More than 10 years later, Colonial Downs has been reopened for racing since 2019 and the Commonwealth's horse industry is enjoying a rejuvenation, thanks largely

ALL SIRES LISTS ARE THROUGH DEC. 31, 2023

Advertisers' Index

Virginia Thoroughbred Association 117
www.vabred.org

COURTESY OF MIDDLEBURG TRAINING CENTER

In 2023, **YOU GOT PAID** to breed or raise your horse in Virginia!

Virginia breeders earned a

34%

award for each 1st thru 3rd place
in all open races in North America

LEADING 2023 BREEDER AWARDS

Morgan's Ford Farm and partners	\$251,000
Audley Farm Equine	\$218,000
Chance Farm	\$151,000
Ann Backer/Smitten Farm	\$122,000
Jimmy & Emily Day	\$96,000
Sam English	\$85,000

Virginia Certified Developers earned

25%

MORE for open race wins in the Mid-Atlantic

LEADING 2023 EARNERS

Taylor Mountain Farm	\$117,459
R. Larry Johnson and partners	\$81,677
John A Casey	\$70,167
O'Sullivan Farms	\$68,606
Respect the Valleys, LLC	\$68,909
P A Warriors II	\$65,076



Learn more about the Virginia-Bred and Virginia-Certified programs at vabred.org

2023 LEADING SIRES IN NEW JERSEY

For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2023 Stud Fee	Rnrs/Wnrs	BT SWnrs/Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2023 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									BT SWs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	Sea Wizard (13, Uncle Mo), Pegasus Stud	\$1,500	14/8	1/1	1/1	(Great Navigator, \$199,407)	\$794,751	20	1	1.57	1.33
2	Hey Chub (00, Carson City)	N/A	8/5	0/0	0/0	(Grouch, \$136,843)	\$377,869	62	4	1.72	1.33
3	Il Postino (06, Distorted Humor)	N/A	6/3	0/0	0/0	(Irish Meadow, \$113,700)	\$296,539	24	1	1.50	0.88
4	Ali (15, Pioneerof the Nile)	N/A	3/1	0/0	0/0	(Rumaway, \$18,798)	\$39,540	4	0	0.44	0.67
5	King Puma (06, Forest Wildcat)	N/A	5/0	0/0	0/0	(Rachel Caroline, \$18,195)	\$30,162	33	0	0.99	1.46

* includes Southern Hemisphere foals

to the presence of historical horse racing machines and incentive programs for both breeders and owners.

The Virginia Breeders Fund is a financial incentive program to encourage Thoroughbred breeding in the state.

Breeders of registered Virginia-breds born before 2024 earn bonuses for first through third place in all races in North America. Beginning with foals of 2024, breeders earn bonuses for registered Virginia-breds finishing first through third place in any open race in North America (excluding state-bred and state-sired races).

Awards from that program are paid on a yearly basis.

As much as that incentive program has helped encourage in-state breeding, the Virginia-Certified Thoroughbred Program has been a true game changer for the state's Thoroughbred industry since it began in 2018.

The certified program pays a bonus of up to 25% of the winning purse to the developer—the person or entity that owned the certified horse when the horse made its first start, even if that person or entity no longer owns the horse when it earns a bonus—when the horse wins an eligible race anywhere in the Mid-Atlantic region.

A Virginia-certified horse is an equine registered by The Jockey Club, conceived and foaled outside of Virginia, but that maintains residency in Virginia for at least a six-month consecutive period prior to Dec. 31 of its 2-year-old year.

There are other stipulations and bonuses, but that's the program's main selling point.

The funding for that program largely comes from the HHR revenue.



Larry Johnson, the leading owner at the 2023 Colonial Downs meet, says his success was “in large part because of the certified program.”

The Virginia Thoroughbred Association says the certified program contributes to the long-term economic prosperity of state agriculture and encourages the preservation of farmland by rewarding horsemen.

While many people have played a role in the state's equine revitalization, nobody deserves more credit than VTA executive director Debbie Easter.

It was Easter, raised on a Virginia farm, who felt most tasked to come up with a way to save the Commonwealth's horse industry.

“Virginia has this great history of breeding horses and tradition, but maybe because we don't have the money to incentivize people to come here like they do in other states, we have to come up with another idea,” Easter said about her thinking at the time.

THIS PAGE: COADY PHOTOGRAPHY; OPPOSITE PAGE: ANNE M. EBERHARDT

2023 LEADING SIRES IN PENNSYLVANIA

For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB, Sire), Where Stands	2023 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2023 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									BT SWs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	Warrior's Reward (06, Medaglia d'Oro), WynOaks Farm	\$3,500	120/66	1/1	1/1	(Warrior's Ransom, \$202,662)	\$2,976,286	*777	21	0.93	1.23
2	Uptowncharlybrown (07, Limehouse), WynOaks Farm	\$3,250	81/44	0/0	0/0	(Young Squire, \$145,890)	\$2,812,228	175	5	1.24	1.05
3	Cloud Computing (14, Maclean's Music), Pin Oak Lane Farm	\$3,500	123/53	3/3	2/3	(Big Data, \$251,980)	\$2,752,600	*237	3	0.87	1.00
4	Weigelia (01, Safely's Mark), WynOaks Farm	Private	68/39	4/5	1/4	(Ninetypercentmaddie, \$229,100)	\$2,723,466	*218	12	1.36	1.04
5	Wicked Strong (11, Hard Spun), Pin Oak Lane Farm	\$3,500	158/58	0/0	0/0	(Wicked Finn, \$136,980)	\$2,485,486	*375	6	0.81	1.32
6	Jump Start (99, A.P. Indy)	Died	81/48	1/1	1/1	(Jayjaydee, \$122,274)	\$2,482,647	*1517	56	1.36	1.23
7	Brody's Cause (13, Giant's Causeway), Equistar Training and Breeding	\$3,500	106/55	1/1	0/1	(Paluxy, \$120,434)	\$2,155,251	201	4	0.80	1.09
8	Peace and Justice (10, War Front), Blackstone Farm PA	\$5,000	65/39	1/1	1/1	(Dontlookbackatall, \$148,640)	\$2,111,835	118	2	0.98	1.20
9	Flashback (10, Tapit)	N/A	80/35	2/3	0/2	(Offlee Naughty, \$201,000)	\$1,667,198	297	6	0.88	1.39
10	Boisterous (07, Distorted Humor), Diamond B Farm	\$3,000	65/35	0/0	0/0	(Dream Chaser, \$140,598)	\$1,381,934	177	3	0.80	0.99
11	Normandy Invasion (10, Tapit)	Pnsd	41/15	0/0	0/0	(Ron Don Scorese, \$75,320)	\$632,902	128	0	0.60	1.08
12	Smarty Jones (01, Elusive Quality), Equistar Training and Breeding	\$3,500	28/13	1/2	1/1	(Aoife's Magic, \$261,600)	\$632,347	*904	29	1.29	1.58
13	Lord Shanakill (06, Speightstown), Pin Oak Lane Farm	\$2,500	25/14	0/0	0/0	(Betsy Is the Gal, \$62,060)	\$503,724	249	3	1.01	0.91
14	Eastwood (10, Speightstown), Blackstone Farm PA	\$1,250	11/9	0/0	0/0	(John Dutton, \$90,480)	\$490,849	16	0	1.22	1.54
15	Winchill (08, Tapit), Timber Ridge Farm	\$3,000	20/6	0/0	0/0	(You Must Chill, \$117,135)	\$444,830	62	2	0.97	1.31
16	Well Spelled (09, Spellbinder), Mountain Springs Farm	\$1,500	24/9	0/0	0/0	(Queen's Dream, \$83,800)	\$404,060	73	2	0.79	1.05
17	Red Vine (10, Candy Ride), Cabin Creek Gettysburg	Private	14/8	0/0	0/0	(Sundria, \$97,666)	\$388,153	31	0	0.84	1.11
18	Desert Party (06, Street Cry)	N/A	20/12	0/0	0/0	(Jackie A, \$55,108)	\$308,861	266	6	0.88	1.25
19	Il Villano (09, Pollard's Vision), Xanthus Farms	\$1,500	8/4	1/1	1/1	(Veeson, \$151,170)	\$279,404	18	1	1.10	0.73
20	Golddigger's Boy (07, Jump Start), Equistar Training and Breeding	\$1,500	13/7	0/0	0/0	(Golden Moonlight, \$89,140)	\$272,576	32	0	0.74	0.81
21	Emperor Tiberius (04, Storm Cat)	N/A	10/4	0/0	0/0	(Empress Deona, \$90,620)	\$258,454	51	1	1.05	0.84
22	Got the Last Laugh (04, Distorted Humor)	N/A	7/2	0/0	0/0	(La Regalada, \$33,962)	\$93,770	65	0	1.08	1.06
23	Crown of Thorns (05, Repent)	N/A	3/2	0/0	0/0	(Discernment, \$41,597)	\$69,105	61	2	0.77	1.01
24	Broad Rule (08, Dixie Union)	N/A	4/2	0/0	0/0	(Harvey Specter, \$26,683)	\$59,994	12	0	0.34	0.40
25	Show Tune (04, Unbridled's Song)	N/A	5/3	0/0	0/0	(Madi's Tune, \$20,202)	\$54,715	69	0	0.64	0.90

* includes Southern Hemisphere foals

“Maybe we’re not going to be the best breeding state, the largest breeding state in the Mid-Atlantic, but we can certainly raise horses real well. We have the grounds and the farms to do that. And that’s how the certified program started, and we started that with foals of 2016.”

The six-month residency requirement has given a huge boost to the state’s farms and training centers.

“Virginia had gotten down to where we were breeding only about 100 foals a year,” Easter said. “Over 10 years, we could breed 1,000 foals but the certified program is bringing in about 900 horses a foal crop. So, in 10 years, you can see the difference.”

“We can’t grow that horse population breeding horses even if we had a ton of money to throw at the breeding program. I don’t think you could grow that program anywhere near as quickly as we were able to grow the certified program and put these horses on these farms.”

The certified program is funded by



Debbie Easter, the executive director of the Virginia Thoroughbred Association, was a driving force behind the state’s revitalization of the equine industry

the Virginia Equine Alliance, with the money coming from all forms of wagering, including the HHR machines. Bonuses are distributed monthly and there’s roughly \$4 million in the program pool right now.

“Specifically for the Virginia horse people it was a boost for them to have the certified program that gives you incentive to race your horses year-round, get bonus structure out of it, help with their being able to support

their farms, to help do a lot of work on their farms by now all of a sudden have this influx of horses come to the state of Virginia,” said VEA’s vice president of strategic planning Jill Byrne. “And then, that isn’t where it ends. It continues on through racing.”

“Trainers like Phil Schoenthal, Graham Motion, Ferris Allen who had a lot of access to Virginia-certified horses, the boost to their stable, recognizing how good the program was, and, of course, economics. The purses are fantastic at Colonial but then being able to race elsewhere and still not only get

a purse from that place but also get this additional bonus. That incentive program really has encouraged people to bring even more quality stock horses into the state of Virginia to get certified.”

Schoenthal, a trainer for 20 years, says Virginia is one of the “very, very few bright spots in the industry right now, of a region that’s really on an upward trajectory and going the right way.”

“The way I do my job hasn’t changed at all due to the certified program, but it has

2023 LEADING SIRES IN VIRGINIA

For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2023 Stud Fee	Rnrs/Wnrs	BT SWnrs/Wns	Rstrct SW/BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2023 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									BT SWs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	Hello Broadway (06, Broken Vow)	N/A	8/4	0/0	0/0	(Dem a Wonder, \$59,510)	\$174,470	44	1	0.97	0.82
2	Snappy Halo (ARG) (04, Southern Halo)	N/A	4/3	0/0	0/0	(Wilmas Irish Rover, \$64,410)	\$91,345	*54	2	0.63	1.02
3	Cosa Vera (05, Dynaformer)	N/A	2/1	0/0	0/0	(Heart Light, \$79,510)	\$81,050	45	0	0.59	1.20
4	Mr. Sidney (04, Storm Cat)	N/A	6/3	0/0	0/0	(Allegheny Hero, \$18,716)	\$65,599	*140	1	1.00	1.49
5	Fierce Wind (05, Dixie Union)	N/A	4/1	0/0	0/0	(Fire At Midnight, \$32,732)	\$42,616	33	0	0.58	0.35
6	Gone Clubbing (07, Gone West)	N/A	5/0	0/0	0/0	(Serious Moment, \$19,066)	\$41,035	11	0	0.51	0.22
7	Big Picture (02, Pioneering), Virginia Equine Services, P.C.	\$5,000	1/1	0/0	0/0	(Goodluckchuck, \$36,478)	\$36,478	8	0	1.06	1.15
8	Pivot (97, Pleasant Colony), Clay Hill Thoroughbreds	\$750	1/1	0/0	0/0	(All the Way Mae, \$9,013)	\$9,013	14	0	0.23	0.46
9	Friend Or Foe (07, Friends Lake), Smallwood Farm	\$1,000	5/0	0/0	0/0	(Friend Furh Real, \$3,658)	\$6,044	43	1	1.85	1.25

* includes Southern Hemisphere foals

enhanced it,” Schoenthal said. “For years and years and years, probably like most trainers starting off, I always kind of had, I guess, what would be considered cheaper kind of horses. And you’d have to send them off to get broke. Obviously, going to South Florida or Ocala is a long way from Maryland. So, a lot of the farms in the Mid-Atlantic would break those horses.

“As the certified program took hold, we have sent all of our horses to Virginia since then. I tell my clients, ‘We have to pay to get them broke somewhere, and so why not do it somewhere where there’s financial incentive down the line to get bonus money.’”

Madison Meyers and her husband, Kieran Norris, break and train horses at the Middleburg Training Center where they have rented barns for five years.

A native of Lexington, Meyers has embraced Virginia’s equine history, which includes Commonwealth-bred horses such as Secretariat, Arts and Letters, Hill Prince, and Pleasant Colony.

She says the certified program has been “invaluable.

“It’s brought just such a huge influx of horses to the area and quality horses, as well,” Meyers said. “For us, it has greatly increased our business and brought connections back to the area that have not had horses in this area ever or for years and years.

“It’s cool to see it all revitalized and coming back. This is a great time to be in Virginia.”

Larry Johnson, 77, was the leading owner at the 2023 Colonial Downs meet with \$604,300 in earnings, which does not include Virginia-certified bonuses.

“I WAS ACTUALLY LOOKING AT OTHER JOBS, PUTTING IN RÉSUMÉS AT PLACES BUT IT WASN’T WHAT I WANTED TO DO. I JUST FEEL LIKE I WAS BORN AND BRED TO DO THIS, BUT I DIDN’T REALLY SEE A CLEAR OPTION TO BE ABLE TO DO IT.”

—EAGLE POINT FARM’S
KAREN GODSEY

Concern for “where Maryland is going,” combined with Virginia’s incentive programs, has inspired Johnson to breed in the Commonwealth. In fact, his first crop of Virginia-breds turned 2 in 2024.

“I still have a substantial number of horses that are Maryland-bred, Virginia-certified horses,” Johnson said. “It’s proved very beneficial, not just in the Mid-Atlantic area, but particularly now that Colonial has done so well and the purses are so good, and they’ve put into place a restricted race program eligible to the Virginia-certified as well as the Virginia-bred which has really been terrific.

“I was fortunate enough to get an awful lot of purse money in 27 days (at Colonial). And it was all with Virginia-certified horses. So, my 2023 year was reasonably successful in large part because of the certified program.”

Johnson said he sees Virginia’s



Jill Byrne, who has a long and distinguished career in the racing industry, is the vice president of strategic planning for the Virginia Equine Alliance, which funds the certified program

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2023 LEADING SIRES IN WEST VIRGINIA

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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2023 Stud Fee	Rnrs/Wnrs	BT SWnrs/Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2023 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative			
									BT SWs	A-E Index	Comp Index	
1	Fiber Sonde (05, Unbridled's Song), Beau Ridge Farm	\$1,000	69/35	2/4	2/2	(No Change, \$172,711)	\$1,838,995	333	21	1.28	0.81	
2	Windsor Castle (98, Lord Carson)	N/A	66/45	0/0	0/0	(Coach Rube, \$123,930)	\$1,806,924	441	16	0.98	0.98	
3	Juba (11, Tapit), Casey's Legacy	\$1,500	56/37	4/6	4/4	(Jubawithatwist, \$149,083)	\$1,789,805	101	8	1.03	1.04	
4	Limehouse (01, Grand Slam), O'Sullivan Farms	\$2,500	34/20	1/2	1/1	(Little Roo Roo, \$248,592)	\$1,004,942	*518	24	1.06	1.09	
5	Talent Search (03, Catienus)	Pnsd	30/14	2/2	2/2	(Talented Man, \$173,610)	\$964,902	*207	5	1.03	1.11	
6	Golden Years (12, Not For Love), O'Sullivan Farms	\$1,500	34/19	0/0	0/0	(Royal Pain, \$86,263)	\$840,621	56	1	0.95	0.88	
7	Denis of Cork (05, Harlan's Holiday), Casey's Legacy	\$750	23/14	0/0	0/0	(No Denying Denis, \$105,485)	\$713,436	*166	6	0.70	0.98	
8	Capo Bastone (10, Street Boss), O'Sullivan Farms	\$1,500	22/9	0/0	0/0	(Querobin Dourada, \$173,694)	\$603,621	69	0	0.84	1.07	
9	Bullsbay (04, Tiznow), Pellinor Lane	\$1,500	22/11	0/0	0/0	(Tiz the Reason, \$106,770)	\$463,555	141	4	0.98	1.15	
10	Exclusive Quality (03, Elusive Quality)	Died	17/10	0/0	0/0	(Exclusive Champion, \$64,232)	\$404,778	367	8	0.88	1.03	
11	Despite the Odds (06, Speightstown)	N/A	14/6	0/0	0/0	(Utterly Enchanting, \$68,650)	\$396,595	83	0	1.04	1.15	
12	Aldrin (12, Malibu Moon), O'Sullivan Farms	\$2,000	23/9	0/0	0/0	(Xanthe, \$57,040)	\$326,948	47	0	0.47	0.93	
13	Machen (08, Distorted Humor)	N/A	21/13	0/0	0/0	(Machen's Ridge, \$48,482)	\$320,227	99	0	0.63	0.70	
14	Gattopardo (05, Johannesburg), O'Sullivan Farms	\$1,500	20/8	0/0	0/0	(Doctor Pardo, \$30,590)	\$214,527	61	1	0.72	0.80	
15	Cal Nation (08, Distorted Humor)	N/A	8/3	0/0	0/0	(Ournationonparade, \$117,900)	\$184,318	73	1	1.01	0.96	
16	¶ Redirect (16, Speightstown), Beau Ridge Farm	\$1,000	2/1	1/3	1/1	(Direct the Cat, \$149,988)	\$151,128	9	1	2.50	0.88	
17	Three Chopt Road (06, Rock Slide)	N/A	7/5	0/0	0/0	(Appealing Road, \$50,259)	\$135,688	32	0	0.48	0.62	
18	Master Rick (09, Master Command), Beau Ridge Farm	\$1,000	6/3	0/0	0/0	(Ghostly Squall, \$45,579)	\$107,332	31	0	0.76	0.87	
19	Declan's Warrior (10, Majestic Warrior), O'Sullivan Farms	\$1,000	5/4	0/0	0/0	(Catfish, \$38,368)	\$102,537	12	0	0.69	0.92	
20	Siente El Trueno (07, City Zip), Stehr's Farm	\$500	6/2	0/0	0/0	(Siente La Brisa, \$35,046)	\$82,972	29	0	0.68	0.60	
21	Swiss Yodeler (94, Eastern Echo)	Died, 2022	9/3	0/0	0/0	(Dixie Yodeler, \$21,848)	\$80,881	796	15	0.96	1.01	
22	Ruler King (08, Forestry)	N/A	3/1	0/0	0/0	(Silver Rules, \$46,014)	\$70,967	4	0	0.48	0.35	
23	Our Entourage (09, Street Cry), O'Sullivan Farms	\$1,250	5/2	0/0	0/0	(Calypso John, \$20,084)	\$64,905	35	0	0.68	0.61	
24	Weave It to Me (08, Bernardini)	N/A	6/2	0/0	0/0	(Scare Dem, \$32,138)	\$59,128	27	0	0.41	0.64	
25	Monster Mash (09, Ghostzapper)	N/A	3/2	0/0	0/0	(Awesome Moon, \$22,701)	\$39,430	5	0	0.28	1.02	

* includes Southern Hemisphere foals

certified program continuing to thrive, thanks in part to restricted races at Colonial Downs.

“Colonial is unique. If you look around the other states, when you go into a restricted race, typically the purse is less than the open race,” he said. “Virginia is just the opposite. The restricted races last year at Colonial, and I expect going forward, actually the purse is 25% more than the open race.”

Going forward, developer bonuses for wins at any racetrack other than Colonial Downs will not be paid during the New Kent County racetrack’s opening day through its closing day.

In 2024, Colonial Downs again will host a 27-day live racing season from July 11 through Sept. 7, with racing three days per week (Thursday through Saturday).

“It’s a terrific incentive to race certified- or bred-horses at Colonial during the Colonial meet,” Johnson said, “and when the Colonial meet is over, those horses are still able to compete, whether it’s Maryland or the other adjoining states, be eligible for not only what your state-bred program might be, whether it’s New York or Maryland or wherever, but also to be able to earn that certified bonus on the

non-Colonial dates.”

The Virginia certified program clearly has affected most everyone connected to the Virginia horse industry in mostly financial ways.

For someone such as Godsey, it has meant even more. Not only has Eagle Point Farm remained in business, the 41-year-old mother of a 6-year-old son

named Cooper has been able to continue a family tradition.

“Without the incentive program, or the breeders and racing coming back, that probably wouldn’t have happened,” Godsey said. “I love being able to raise him here, especially since my mom and I are both raised here and there’s so much history here.” **BH**



Trainer Phil Schoenthal says Virginia is one of the “very, very few bright spots in the industry right now.”