



CHRISTINE AND JAY HAYDEN

SAINTSBURY FARM

Fresh off one of their most successful sales seasons, Christine and Jay Hayden are looking ahead with excitement to their 2026 yearling crop and to a couple of runners they hope to see on the track this spring.

The Haydens' Saintsbury Farm in Lucan, Ontario, began as a hobby about 18 years ago and has since grown into one of Canada's leading small-scale breeding farms, selling Ontario-breds both locally and at major markets in Kentucky and Saratoga.

Last August, a homebred Nyquist colt out of a mare they had purchased for \$60,000 (US) sold for \$550,000 to Charlotte Weber's Florida-based Live Oak Plantation.

The result came as something of a surprise to Jay, especially since early feedback from fellow horsepeople suggested the handsome colt was not quite perfect from a conformation standpoint.

"He grew out of it and became this big brute of a horse," said Jay. "You are always optimistic in this business. These things have a way of surprising you. Once you get those yearlings out on the grass in May, they start to blossom."

Jay represents the third generation of his family to operate Hayden Water Wells in southwestern Ontario, a business started by his grandfather, Lorne, with a drilling machine “he bought for \$1,200.” Jay’s father, Charles, farmed and raced and raised a few Thoroughbreds in the 1960s.

“It was very exciting and I always kept it in the back of my mind to one day get involved, perhaps when I retired,” Jay said.

As it turned out, he could not wait that long.

In 2008, he came home from the Keeneland November Breeding Stock Sale with half a dozen broodmares and nowhere to put them. Standardbred breeder and neighbour Joe O’Brien housed the new purchases while Jay and Christine scrambled to get barns built and fences up on their property.

One of the first horses born at Saintsbury Farm was a large colt by Indian Charlie out of Major Idea who failed to meet his reserve at \$70,000 as a yearling. The Haydens kept him and later sold him as a juvenile for \$300,000.

Just two years later, they held on to another yearling who had been overlooked at auction because of a bone spur. They named her Unspurned, and with Hall of Fame trainer Roger Attfield guiding her career, she went on to earn more than \$460,000, including a victory in the Grade 3 Whimsical Stakes.

“We were so green when Unspurned ran all those years ago. It didn’t seem like real life and we got hooked.”

The Haydens stayed committed to their program of breeding eight to 10 mares each spring. They celebrated their first classic winner through friend Bernard McCormack when Breaking Lucky, a son of Lookin At Lucky, won the 2015 Prince of Wales Stakes and later the Grade 3 Seagram Cup, earning more than \$1 million.

This year, the Kevin Attard-trained Baaeed Alynna, who was second in the Display Stakes in his career debut last season, is a King’s Plate hopeful. A son of Good Magic, Baaeed Alynna sold for \$180,000 as a yearling in Kentucky in 2024.

The Haydens are also especially excited about their newest mare purchase, Gun d’Oro, acquired through the highly successful Mare Purchase Program run by the Thoroughbred Improvement Program, CTHS Ontario, and Ontario Racing.

Gun d’Oro, a daughter of Medaglia d’Oro out of a Tapit mare and a granddaughter of the dam of champion and \$15 million earner Gun Runner, was purchased for \$155,000 at the Keeneland January Sale this winter. Through the Mare Purchase Program in 2026, 16 Ontario buyers purchased 23 in-foal broodmares for more than \$1.7 million.

“The Mare Purchase Program is a real punch in the arm,” said Jay. “It is like getting income tax back. I applaud everyone who developed the program.”

Gun d'Oro recently produced an Arabian Knight colt, and the Haydens still have half a dozen more mares left to foal. They are planning to offer four colts and four fillies at yearling sales in 2026, including what Jay describes as their best-conformed youngster, a son of their own stallion Mohaymen, who will sell at Woodbine this summer.

The Haydens, who plan to breed most of their Kentucky-bound mares this year to freshman sire and champion two-year-old Corniche, also have a pair of "project" racehorses in the barn of trainer Mike DePaulo. Italianvisa, a Liam's Map filly who cost \$295,000 as a two-year-old in training two years ago, and Slayster, a son of Speightster, are both expected to race this spring.

A devoted student of pedigrees and patterns in the ever-changing North American bloodstock market, Jay spends much of his time in the well business alongside Christine, but their true passion is the horses.

"You don't do this to lose money, of course," said Jay. "But you have to look at it like a crop farm. It's not going to be a bumper crop every year. You might lose one year, break even the next, and then sometimes you get \$550,000 for a yearling out of a mare you bought for \$60,000. I don't know if it averages out, but we have definitely been lured in by the beauty of the Thoroughbred."

