

Member of the Month: Dan Mooney

Huntington Stud Farm holds a legendary place in Canadian racing history, and much of its modern success can be attributed to Dan Mooney. Since taking over operations in 1998, Mooney has helped establish the Nashville, Ontario farm as one of the country's most respected and successful breeding grounds—a birthplace and training hub for champions.

But this year marks the end of an era. Huntington will close its doors as a service farm for clients, with development plans finally moving forward on the land.

“I’m going to be done this year,” said Mooney, 69. “I’ve been helping my clients prepare so they have time to move their horses.”

Still, Mooney and his wife of 47 years, Mary-Ellen, may not be stepping away entirely. “We might find a little farm and keep a couple of mares. I’m too used to doing something every day.”

The farm’s origins date back decades. Originally named Huntington Stud Farm, it was first owned by Bill Stills and later by Jack Carmichael. Both men were passionate about racing and breeding, but it was Carmichael who saw a breakthrough when his yearling purchase, Fiddle Dancer Boy, captured the 1983 Queen’s Plate. He used the winnings to purchase the farm.

Recognizing talent, Carmichael hired Mooney as farm manager—a brilliant decision. Mooney brought with him a deep pedigree and an unmatched knowledge of the industry.

Dan’s grandfather, John D. Mooney, famously rode Black Gold to victory in the 1924 Kentucky Derby and later trained 1962 Canadian Horse of the Year Crafty Lace. His father, John J. Mooney, was president of the Ontario Jockey Club and the CTHS Ontario, as well as head of racing at Laurel and Delaware Park. A member of the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame, his legacy lives on through Dan. Even Dan’s brother, Mike, made his mark in racing media, serving as publicity director at Hollywood Park for over two decades.

Under Dan’s guidance, Carmichael’s purple and silver silks were frequently seen in the winner’s circle. One of Mooney’s favorite purchases was Diva’s Debut, a sweet-natured mare who went on to become Canada’s Champion Older Mare in 1990. She later produced Capdiva, winner of the 1993 Woodbine Oaks.

Tragically, just as Carmichael’s stable was hitting its stride, he passed away from cancer. In 1996, the horses were dispersed, and Mooney leased the farm from the Carmichael estate. Eventually, he and his partners—including his brother Pat, George Farr, and Dom Romeo—purchased the property outright.

Huntington flourished. With the addition of the nearby Pine Valley Training Centre, Mooney’s operation was constantly at full capacity.

“We were jammed all the time,” he recalled. “I had people begging me to break their horses or foal their mares. We’d have 50 mares and 90 horses in training.”

Over the years, Huntington has been home to dozens of stakes winners and champions. The 2020 Queen's Plate winner, Big Red Mike, bred by Romeo's Terra Racing, was born there. So was Fashionably Fab, a top contender to be named 2024's Champion Older Mare at this year's Sovereign Awards.

Mooney has also worked with many top-tier clients, including Syd Cooper's R.M.C. Stable, Ivan Dalos' Tall Oaks Farm, and longtime owner George Bigliardi.

"I've sold homebreds at U.S. sales for \$100,000 to \$150,000 (USD). That really helped keep us going over the years."

Today, only a handful of horses remain at Huntington. But among them is Samsal, one of Mooney's prized mares. Purchased from Adena Springs for \$18,000 in 2014, she's produced standout foals—including Scorching, a 2023 stakes winner and contender for Champion 2-Year-Old Male. Mooney sold him for \$100,000 at the 2023 CTHS sale.

"He's a gorgeous horse," said Mooney. "I hope he makes it to the Plate this year." Samsal is currently back in foal to Mo Town.

Although Mooney and his partners sold the land to developers back in 2005, construction has been delayed for nearly two decades due to environmental concerns and uncertainty surrounding Highway 413. Now, development finally appears ready to begin.

Even as the chapter closes on Huntington's client services, Mooney's heart remains in the industry. And he remains optimistic about its future.

"I really appreciate what the CTHS has been doing," he said. "I know [President] David Anderson is working hard to look after everyone. The Breeders' Awards program is essential for small breeders. Those awards keep people in the game—and that's exactly what we need."