



Vicki and Jeff Tebow

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The Tebowski

Jeff and Vicki Tebow are partners in industry and life.

By Richard Chamberlain

JEFF TEBOW IS GOING INTO HIS SECOND SEASON AS GENERAL manager of Heritage Place Sale Company, which through three annual auctions sells more American Quarter Horses than any other sales company. This year's September 18-20 Heritage Place Yearling Sale has cataloged 875 head. The Oklahoma City auction house also will conduct its Fall Mixed Sale on October 24-25, and opens each year with its Winter Mixed Sale in January, where a First Down Dash embryo out of the stakes-placed Runaway Winner daughter and 2005 broodmare of the year Runaway Wave topped this year's venue at \$125,000.

In addition to being the host site for American Quarter Horse racing's world champion fete, the sale company also promotes the Grade 1 Heritage Place Futurity and Derby. At \$1,084,194, the June 1 Futurity was the richest race in Oklahoma history.

Jeff, 41, and his wife met about 25 years ago in Waco, Texas, where both were showing horses, Vicki in western pleasure and hunter under saddle, and Jeff in pleasure and halter.

"We showed horses together," Jeff said. "It was a great meeting. The neat thing is we stayed friends and kept in contact through the years. In 2002, she decided sell her farm

in North Carolina and move to Oklahoma. We've been together ever since."

Jeff grew up in Edmond, and he and Vicki have daughters Ann Elizabeth, 10, and Meg, 8. The family lives at Piedmont, in Canadian County and the farthest northwest corner of the Oklahoma City limits, a 20-minute commute to Heritage Place.

"We have a nice little horse operation," Jeff said. "It's 20 acres, with a 13-stall barn. We built the facility four or five years ago. We have some broodmares of our own and also some customer mares that stay there year-round, and we foal out some mares as well. Vicki is an AQHA Professional Horseman and she trains some outside horses, and we have our own personal horses."

Altogether, the Tebows keep about 20 horses year-round on their place. It is a for-profit operation, but that is not what is most important to the family.

"We have the kids' horses, of course, and I enjoy roping and riding ranch horses," he said. "Our next-door neighbor is a friend I grew up with, and he has his horses and a roping pen, so between our facilities and cattle and all that, we're roping or doing something all the time out there. Our kids love it, and so we really enjoy it."

The Tebows recently met with *The American Quarter Horse Racing Journal* to discuss their lives, their family, their vocations and their passions. Excerpts follow.

AQHRJ: First of all, give me the nickel rundown of what Heritage Place Sale Company is doing right now.

Jeff: We announced over a year ago that we would be making significant changes in the way we do business at our facility. We extended the Heritage Place Yearling Sale to a three-day sale, and we moved the entry closing date to the day after the Heritage Place Futurity, which was the last day of Remington's meet, and we got what I believe to be an overall better quality of horses coming this year. We are very excited about the quality and number of horses we are offering. It'll be the second-largest yearling sale in our 30 years in business. The sale will be September 18th through the 20th, with the evening of the 17th being our pre-sale party and the grand opening of our newly renovated restaurant and club.

I also want to mention the Fall Mixed Sale in October, which we consider the best time of year to sell broodmares, especially mares due to foal early, as well as long yearlings and open or maiden mares. The Mixed Sale allows buyers sufficient time to establish a game plan prior to breeding season – and the Oklahoma weather is wonderful at that time of year.

And we in the horse business have new tax advantages, since Congress recently passed the farm bill that is a great improvement over the previous tax laws. Here in Oklahoma, but also in many other states, we have seen significant purse increases due to gaming. Now is a great time to be in the racehorse business. Our business is strong. Our January mixed sale was up more than 25 percent and so right now everything seems to be getting better and going up.

AQHRJ: How did you wind up at Heritage Place, whose bread and butter is racehorses?

Jeff: I used to be in the hunting and fishing retail business. I had a business called Outdoor Outfitters in Oklahoma City. I got out of that 4 1/2 years ago, and that was when I was approached by Ted Moore, who is on the Heritage board and

asked me to look at Heritage Place. I interviewed with Clayton Keyes, who was the general manager then, and worked as director of operations under Clayton for three years until a year and a half ago when Clayton retired and they promoted me to general manager.

AQHRJ: In your view, what are some of the bigger problems and opportunities facing horsemen in Oklahoma?

Jeff: The great opportunity is that it appears, with the purse levels that we've had over the past couple of years with the passing of House Bill 712 that it certainly has been a success. We're seeing people moving back into the state and buying farms and ranches. From what I understand, the numbers of breeding farms are up. That part is doing well.

The purses are at record highs, even for the overnights. We are running at a little over \$200,000 a day at Remington Park. Those numbers are unbelievable, and I think the regenerated horse business here also is the result of the Heritage Place Futurity reaching a million dollars. There was \$300,000 added to the Futurity as well as the payments that the participants made that allowed us to reach that, and with over a million-one this year, we are really excited not only for Heritage Place but also for the horsemen and Quarter Horse industry in Oklahoma. I think it is great that horsemen came together to accomplish this and make this a wonderful opportunity, not only for the horsemen in Oklahoma but also the industry nationwide.

AQHRJ: The Shawnee Tribe has proposed building a casino a couple of miles north of Remington Park. How would the Shawnee casino affect the horse business?

Jeff: It is hard to understand how that could come about – the land is not the Shawnee's tribal grounds, so the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington would have to put the land in trust for them. We think that the casino would certainly have a negative impact on what we in this industry have worked so hard for. Hopefully, that will be defeated.

AQHRJ: It seems that we in the horse industry are always facing one problem after another. And another problem is that it appears that Blue Ribbon Downs at Sallisaw once again is on the market.

Jeff: We look at problems as opportunities. There is a lot of uncertainty right now about what is going on with Blue Ribbon Downs and the Choctaws. It is rumored that the Choctaw Indians are going to divest themselves of that racetrack, and I understand that the Cherokees are negotiating on the possible purchase of it.

Any time that there is any uncertainty, you can only hope that it is for the best. Any time there is change, much like what we've gone through at Heritage Place, you certainly hope that it will be better for the industry.

AQHRJ: What is your involvement – other than being affected by running Oklahoma's largest horse auction – in these issues?

Jeff: I am the vice president of the Oklahoma Quarter Horse Racing Association, and so I am becoming more and more involved in that side of it. It certainly has a lot of political angles to it, so it has been very interesting to get more involved in that. It is a big task to represent the horsemen in this state,

and so I am excited about all the things that are going on. I certainly hope – and am sure going to do everything I can – to make sure that it is for the best for the horsemen.

AQHRJ: Do you enjoy, if that be the word, negotiating the halls of power? Is that a little different deal for you?

Jeff: Well, it is. It is a tremendous responsibility, I think. I've always said that I would rather spend my money than someone else's. It seems like you have this fiduciary responsibility that you're dealing with. This is such a huge industry in this state, and there are lots of peoples' livelihoods that are dependent on it. But it is exciting, and I am enjoying the challenge.

AQHRJ: Speaking of all the people dependent, OQHRA says there are something like 25,000 jobs at risk. What are y'all doing?

Jeff: The 25,000 jobs are an estimate by a group of economists. We think that will be the number of jobs lost if the Shawnees are capable of putting in their casino in Oklahoma City. There are something like 50,000 jobs attributed to the horse racing industry in the state of Oklahoma, and we think it obviously would affect about half of those jobs.

A number of people have come out in opposition. Mary Fallon, our representative in Congress; Oklahoma City mayor Mick Cornett; governor Brad Henry; lieutenant governor Jari Askins and some others have come out opposing that. Everything now has moved to Washington. There still will be some hearings and periods of public comment, so we certainly can't rest at this point. We have to keep trudging forward into the new frontier out there and keep trying to grow the business.

AQHRJ: What other problems or dark clouds can you identify?

Jeff: Nothing other than what we've talked about. It is an election year, and the economy on a nationwide basis is not so good – we keep hearing the word recession and there is a lot of uncertainty. We know that we can be affected by those things that in some regards are out of our control, so we are choosing to concentrate our efforts on the things that we really can control.

AQHRJ: What is your involvement with AQHA?

Jeff: Trey Buck, the AQHA director of racing, notified me that I have been elected to the Racing Committee and the Racing Council. I was just thrilled, really excited, to be on those groups, and I look forward to those opportunities. Hope they don't recount the ballots.

AQHRJ: What would you like to accomplish on the committee and council? What direction would you like to see them go?

Jeff: I'll be honest with you: I think it is my responsibility to be a good listener, especially as a newcomer to the committee and to the council. I do not have any specific agenda other than to further the cause of racing and continue to promote it, strengthen it and make it better. I have no pet projects – let's just put it that way.

AQHRJ: What do you view as the biggest issues facing the national industry, as opposed to only Oklahoma?

Jeff: I think that like with any sport, you have to continually look for ways to promote our industry and get people involved. Let people know the product we have. I think that's our biggest challenge, to continue to build public awareness, to allow people to understand what we do so that they can come and enjoy it, participate and be a part of it.

That can be done in a lot of different ways, I'm sure. I think that is the greatest opportunity that racing has. We who are involved in it know how much fun it is – and that's the entire Quarter Horse industry, whether it's show, performance or racing. Horses are horses.

We have the world's greatest athlete, and that's our product. It's a passion for all of us and so that's the fun part of it, doing something you love and something you believe in. It's a neat thing. Every day I wake up and thank the Lord that I get to be involved in this industry. Or that both of us do, I should say.

COURTESY OF SPEEDHORSE




AQHRJ: You won the Oklahoma Ringman Championship earlier this year. Tell us about that.

Jeff: That is put on by the Oklahoma Auctioneers Association. I am a member of that. I went to auction school about 2 1/2 years ago, so this year I competed in the ringman's contest and somehow, some way, ended up winning the state championship and was third in the bid calling. We had a lot of fun supporting the local auction association, and I'm involved in the national association as well.

Obviously, the auction industry is what Heritage Place is all about. There is so much more in the auction industry than just being a bid caller or being an auctioneer. We certainly realized how important the auction industry is to us and so I'm very much involved in both local, state and national associations as well.

On the other hand, I don't believe I would actually call one of the big sales at Heritage Place. We've got the greatest auctioneers in the industry with Keith Babb and Danny



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Green and Scott Caldwell. It's just fantastic to get to be the person who manages the sale. I have and do on occasion get the chance to call bids, whether it's at real estate deals or fund raisers or things like that, and I did call the special sale that we did July 19 for the Oklahoma Horse Racing Commission, where we sold horses and tack and equipment that the commission confiscated at Red River last year, and I enjoy doing that.

I'm currently involved in a three-year program called the Certified Auctioneers Institute. It's a week-long program at Indiana University. Last year, I went for a week to the university, so next year and the following year I'll go, and once you graduate from that, you have the industry's highest designation as an auctioneer, being CAI. And I guess I could fill in when one of those guys has to take a potty break or something.

AQHRJ: What are your kids doing with horses?

Jeff: Ann and Meg are riding horses and helping us in the barn and naming all the babies and very much involved in our horse operation. They are learning to ride very well. It's unbelievable watching children develop. It's just a treat. The little one, Meg, last weekend went from walking and trotting around the barrels to loping her first barrel pattern all by herself. She was second in the pole bending and got a check, so now she expects that every time – she's got that lesson to learn.

Vicki: When she rode back, you could see the look on her face and she was so excited. It was great. She was grinning ear-to-ear. She was like, "I did it, I did it!" And we had tears in our eyes.

Jeff: And Elizabeth is doing poles and barrels and goat-tying now. So we have a lot of fun at the little local youth rodeos around here.

AQHRJ: Vicki, had you ever been around races and racing before you came out here?

Vicki: No, never. I think it's awesome. What's amazing to me – or what was so amazing in the beginning – was that as a Professional Horseman in North Carolina, I thought I knew everyone in the business. But when we got involved in the racing, I didn't know anyone. It was a whole new group of people. We've met some great people and made some great friends. It's been a whole new experience.

AQHRJ: As an educated newcomer, then, how as your view of racing changed? Or has it?

Vicki: I am amazed by all of this. The good news is that the horses do have things that they can do after racing. They're not idiots. They are *tremendous* athletes. My appreciation for the horses and the people has definitely increased, now that I've become involved. They are fascinating animals.

AQHRJ: How do you like Oklahoma?

Vicki: (laughs) Jeff told me it's always 70 degrees and the wind never blows. (laughs again) And I bought it. But it's wonderful. We're very happy. This is exactly where I want to be.

Jeff: We can't imagine being any other place or doing any other thing, not anymore. There is something to be said about being where you want to be, doing what you love and finding success with it all. It's like Charlie Russell said: The man who can make a living doing what he likes is damn lucky. And I feel damn lucky. 🐾