

Quality OVER Quantity

Alfredo Lichoa and his team are aspiring to enhance Northwest Stud

by building it into a distinguishable, full-service stallion farm.



By MICHAEL COMPTON

Nelson Jones Training Center, once part of the legendary Fred Hooper's Hooper Farm, has long been a prominent training facility in Ocala, Fl. Alfredo Lichoa and his team at Northwest Stud are aspiring to enhance Nelson Jones Training Center's already lofty reputation as a preeminent complex known for producing some of the industry's leading racehorses by building Northwest Stud into a distinguishable, full-service stallion farm that does the same.

Among the Grade 1-winning graduates developed at Nel-

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son Jones in recent years include the likes of Florida-breds Jackson Bend and Awesome Feather, Hard Spun, and Midnight Lute, just to name a few. Back in Hooper's day, the ground that houses the training center and next door neighbor Amy Tarrant's Hardacre Farm, produced celebrated homebred champions Susan's Girl and Precisionist, as well as countless others who carried Hooper's famed red, white and blue silks to glory on the racetrack.

Lichoa, stallion director at Northwest Stud, has respect for

the history and the land. He has defined a direction for Northwest Stud and shared the farm's philosophy on a recent spring morning.

"Our goal is to establish the best breeding operation we can for Florida's breeders," Lichoa said. "Breeders are relying on the stud farms to offer quality stallions. We want to find the best horses and stallions for Florida. We're committed to the Florida program and we want to be here for Florida breeders and help improve the industry."

Originally from Venezuela, Lichoa is no stranger to Ocala. He went to work for John Franks at Franks Farms as resident veterinarian in 2001. Franks, a multiple Eclipse Award-winning owner, passed away in 2003, and Lichoa then moved to Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds in the role of stallion manager.

"I learned a lot from working at both of those farms," Lichoa said. "At Franks Farms, I learned how to handle and manage a large number of horses. You can't do anything by yourself, especially in the horse business. It takes a team to get things done right, and I worked with a lot of talented people there. You must have a responsible team around you that you can trust and bank on to work together to achieve success."

"A good team is a necessity," he added, "and we had a great team at Hartley/De Renzo. I spent five breeding seasons there and Dean (DeRenzo) and Randy (Hartley) were great to work for. Working for them also allowed me to forge strong relationships with a lot of Florida breeders."

It is the trust Lichoa has earned with the Ocala community that he hopes to parlay into success with Northwest Stud.

"This is such a competitive business that you have to do things right," Lichoa said. "You have to be knowledgeable about what you do, but you also have to care about the breeders. I've been fortunate to have established trust in working with many breeders in Ocala for years."

Lichoa broke ground on Northwest's stallion barn and main office in December of last year. Arthur Rutenberg Homes designed and built the structure in 65 days.

"We had a Feb. 15 deadline to coincide with the start of breeding season," Lichoa said. "The builders and their crew didn't stop until it was ready for us. I can't say enough about them."

Among the amenities in the stallion barn is cushioned Polylast flooring in the stalls. Made with recycled rubber with a combination of binders, the Polylast flooring increases comfort and safety and reduces odor.

"It's great flooring," Lichoa said. "It's safe and is more comfortable to stand on."

Nestled on 120 acres, Northwest Stud is home to stallions Gone Astray, Flashstorm, United States and Pleasant Strike. Northwest Stud owns all but Pleasant Strike, who stands as the property of Mighty White Stallions.

The farm held its first ever stallion show in January, and Lichoa was encouraged by the turnout and response he received from breeders who attended the show.

"You have to have the horse," Lichoa said. "That's No. 1. Our stallions have been very well received this year. I'm happy and pleased with our first breeding season. The support we received for our stallions shows me that Florida is the best place to base a breeding operation."

Gone Astray is a millionaire son of Dixie Union—Illicit, by Mr. Prospector. His dam is a half-sister to champion Smuggler and his second dam, Inside Information, also was a champion and a winner of six Grade 1 races. Gone Astray captured the 2009 Pennsylvania Derby (G2) and Ohio Derby (G2), as well as the Salvator Mile (G3) the following season at age four. An earner of more than \$1.1 million in his career, Gone Astray stood his first season at stud this year for a \$4,500 fee.

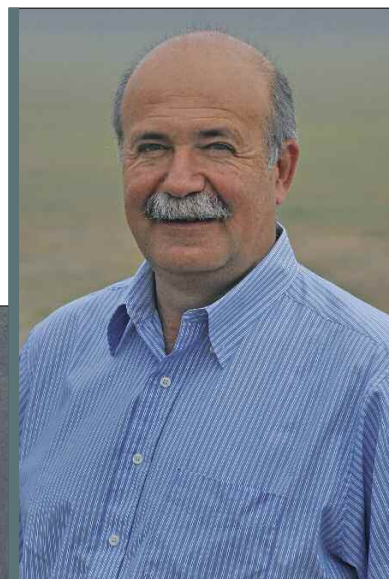
"We closed his book at 120 mares," Lichoa said. "I believe that's the best number to work with. We want to focus on quality not quantity

here. We want people to fight over his babies at the sales."

"Gone Astray has fantastic conformation, a strong body and he is an excellent breeder," he added. "He's a very laid back horse, unbelievably quiet, actually. He's very smart. He learned his new role as a stallion very quickly, and I'm glad breeders have been receptive to him."

Flashstorm is a 2004 son of Storm Cat—Kristi, by St. Jovite. He placed in the Iowa Derby and the Indiana Derby (G2) en route to career earnings of \$261,819. His dam is a half-sister to millionaires Geri and A.P. Arrow and his third dam, Far Flying, is a half-sister to champion Sacahuista.

"He is one of the best looking Storm Cat's around," Lichoa said of Flashstorm. "When Overbrook dispersed



Alfred Lichoa (inset) let Gone Astray frolic during the early morning hours.

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their stock, they kept this one. That says a lot about the promise he had as a racehorse.

“Flashstorm has good conformation,” he added. “His babies are well behaved, which is really good for Storm Cat blood. We’re excited about him.”

United States is a 2006 son of A.P. Indy—Blithe, by Unbridled. The stallion’s second dam is Angel Fever, a sister to Pine Bluff and dam of Kentucky Derby (G1) winner Fusaichi Pegasus.

“United States is the most enthusiastic breeder of the bunch, but not in an aggressive way,” Lichoa related, “more like showing off. We bought him privately from Coolmore.”

Pleasant Strike rounds out the stallion battery. A son of Smart Strike—Colonella, by Pleasant Colony, Pleasant Strike won the Arlington Classic Stakes (G3) as a 3-year-old in 2007 and was multiple graded stakes-placed throughout his career to age six. All told, he won six of 36 and earned \$455,203.

“He is a nice horse and we’re proud to stand him here,” Lichoa said.

Some key members of Lichoa’s team are consultants David Seguias, Alex Rendon and Nerio Vargas.

“We go to sales, divide horses up by groups and at the end of the day we compile our short lists and discuss,” said Lichoa. “When we put everything together, we check the individuals again together and then decide what to buy. It’s always a team effort.

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“In fact, it was David who turned us on to Gone Astray as a stallion prospect,” Lichoa added.

Northwest’s broodmare population currently stands at 40. Lichoa says he wants to have 50 mares in the program and ideally, six stallions.

“When we look for broodmare prospects we pay attention to produce records and then look at families that will fit our breeding program,” Lichoa said.

With paddocks still being put together and work continuing on a driveway to the main office, Lichoa is looking forward to building on the history of winners the property is known for and establishing Northwest Stud’s own, unique legacy of producing Florida-bred winners

at the highest levels of the industry.

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Northwest Stud may be the new kid on a well-established block, but led by Lichoa’s commitment and a focus on quality not quantity, the farm is certain to drive home its branding message in the coming years.

“We want to offer Florida’s breeders the best breeding operation we can,” Lichoa said. “We will always focus on quality not quantity. Believe me, we are going to be around for awhile.” ■

Foals and mares enjoy their surroundings at Northwest Stud