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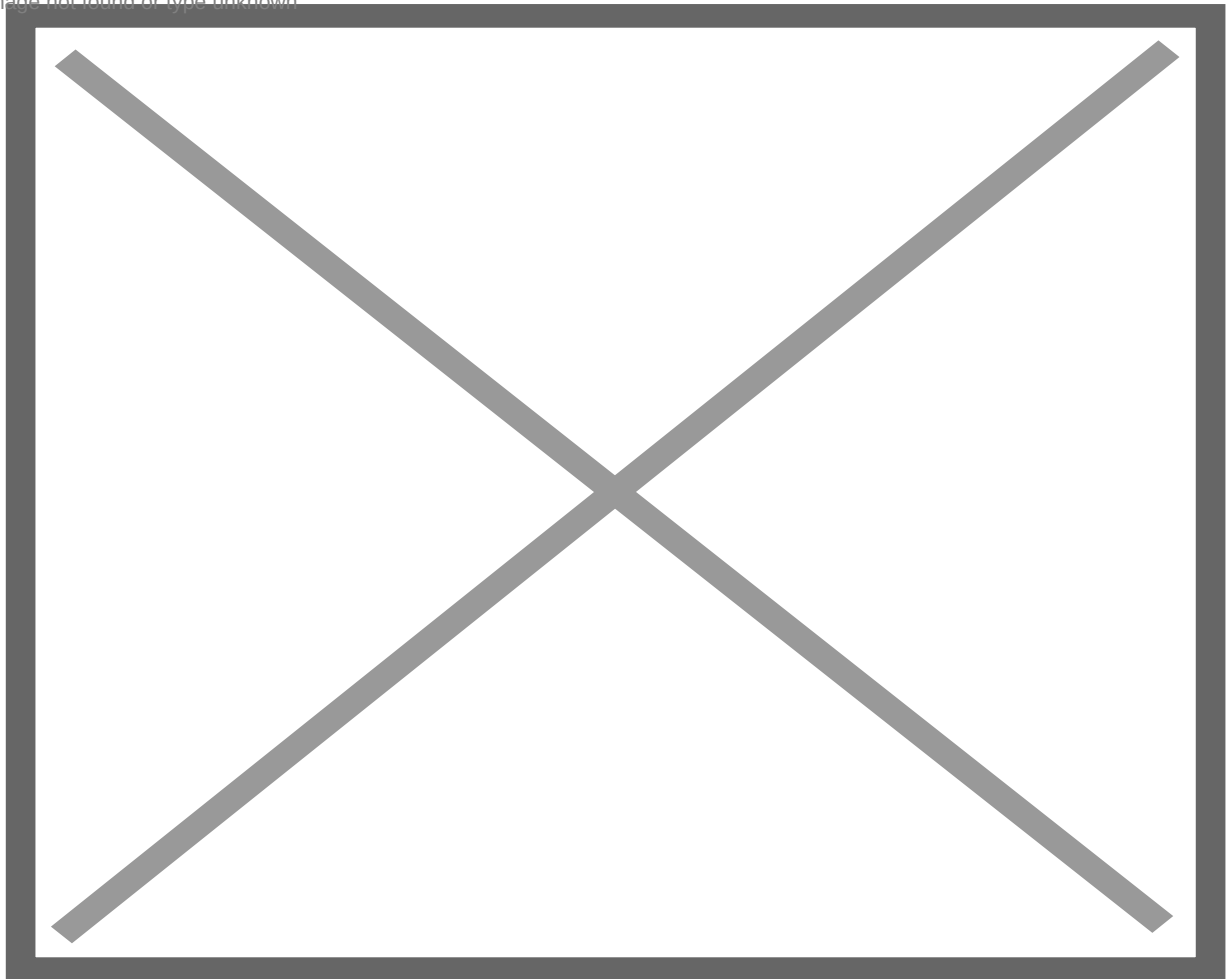
Countdown to Carnival Horse Race: Phipps Racetrack Gears Up for First Event Since 2017

Racetrack upgrades progress smoothly, with May 3 target for grand carnival event

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Work on the Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack will continue up to the day before the Carnival race, which will likely be after the Children's Parade on Friday May 3.

That's what members of the St. Thomas/St. John Horse Racing Commission during a meeting on Thursday, as Southland Gaming representative David Edmonds and Department of Sports Parks and Recreation Commissioner Calvert White discussed the progress being made in bringing horse racing back to St. Thomas in a big way.

Mr. Edmonds noted that since the grandstands at the racetrack had been fully completed in October of last year, work has been ongoing on the “accessory buildings”, which are now themselves about 40 percent completed. Even with a Monday through Saturday work schedule already in place, “the real push will begin in mid-February” Mr. Edmonds noted, with multiple crews being scheduled to work simultaneously on various aspects of the project, including utilities, stormwater drainage, and grading.

“Everything is moving along really well...we’re excited with what our contractors are doing for us,” he told commission members.

As construction continues, Southland Gaming says it will provide financial support to horsemen on St. Thomas, with a \$1000 subsidy for prospective race horses and approximately half that for non-thoroughbred pony horses that are exercising at the racetrack. The funds are scheduled to be distributed this week “to the approved and reviewed list of the registered horses and their respective owners,” Mr. Edmonds said.

Asked for an estimated timeline for completion of what he referred to as the second phase of works, Mr. Edmonds quipped, “We’re going to be working every day, all the way up until the day of Carnival race.”

Realistically, substantive construction is anticipated to be completed by mid-April, leaving time for inspections and approvals, with “finishing touches” proceeding up until race day. After that, work will shift to phase three.

Meanwhile Mr. White, the Sports Parks and Recreation commissioner, disclosed that the Carnival race would likely take place on May 3. Admitting that the date had not yet been fixed, he nevertheless informed that was “highly potentially” the chosen date. “We heavily considered Thursday, which is J’Ouvert, but we had some safety concerns,” he noted, specifically the necessity of VIPD officers having to go straight from working the daybreak jump up to having to be on duty at the horse track.

“I know there’s going to be some pushback on the date,” Mr. White acknowledged, saying that DPSR would work closely with the Division of Festivals to ensure that the Children’s Parade starts “as early as possible” so that it could conclude well before race time at 1:00 p.m.

“If you want to see the Children’s Parade and go to the horse racing after, you do have the opportunity to do so,” he assured. Barring a natural disaster or some other unforeseen calamity, Mr. White said that he was “pretty confident that we will see carnival races for the first time since the 2017 storms.”