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Stakeholder Training Set Before May Horse Racing Restart in USVI

Comprehensive preparation for May 3rd race day with six scheduled events

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With horse racing set to return to the U.S. Virgin Islands for the first time in seven years, ensuring proper veterinary care for the animals was a key discussion item during Tuesday's emergency meeting of the St. Thomas-St. John Horse Racing Commission.

While Dr. Jennifer Palminteri was not present at the meeting due to an emergency that had arisen, Commission Chair Hugo Hodge Jr. said she confirmed arrangements for training on best practices, duties, responsibilities and safety for all personnel handling horses during the upcoming race day on May 3rd.

The full-day training session will take place on April 28th and cover topics important for stewards, placing judges, gate handlers and outriders. Mr. Hodge emphasized the importance of the training, noting the lack of horse racing over the past seven years and inexperience of many workers, while Commissioner Sheldon Turnbull encouraged anyone interested in these roles to contact the commission.

Noting that several race officials and workers may have practiced in the past without formal training, Calvert White, commissioner of the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation, said the restart of racing on St. Thomas gives the industry incentive to adhere to best practices. “We want to give everybody the opportunity to get that training and know that we did it the right way,” he remarked.

Mr. White also noted that preparations for race day included the removal of seven rescue horses that had been stabled there. He thanked the Department of Agriculture for its assistance in finding new homes for the animals, and said that the stalls previously occupied by the rescued animals would now be made available for racing horses.

With several horses scheduled to arrive in the territory ahead of the races, proper facilities and protocols will need to be in place to care for the equines and monitor their health as racing resumes. Mr. Hodge stressed the importance of a fair competition between participating horses and evaluating their abilities based on established classification standards.

Mr. Hodge listed the six races that are being planned for May 3. Apart from the Governor’s Cup, the premier event of the day, the Albert “Boysie” Benjamin Cup is scheduled to take place, as is the Bonnie Bonita Classic for mares and fillies. A race specifically for native horses will be run on that day, as will two open races - a six furlong sprint and one of seven and a half furlongs. Mr. Hodge indicated that there was some contemplation of a seventh race, but that is yet to be decided.