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Carnival Races Success Sets Stage for Pre-Emancipation Day Event on June 30

Following a successful race day on May 3, St. Thomas's Clinton E. Phipps racetrack prepares for another exciting event on June 30

Sports / **Published On May 26, 2024 09:46 AM /**

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“I’m still smiling ear to ear as I look back on photos and talk with everybody about it,” said David Edmonds, representative of Southland Gaming, as he reflected on the Carnival horse races at the Clinton E. Phipps racetrack.?

Edmonds was speaking at Friday’s meeting of the St. Thomas/St. John horse racing committee, providing a synopsis of the May 3 event. He noted that through a vigorous and concerted team effort, which culminated with a round-the-clock work schedule leading up to race day, all promised infrastructure was in place for the first official race day in eight years.

Now, Mr. Edmonds says, attention is focused on Phase 3 of the project. After the immense push to ensure that things were ready for the races, “we took about a week to recollect ourselves,” he said, “but we’re all back on site.” There are still a few “button up” tasks to be completed – finishing touches to the grandstand, jockey and vet areas – but once those are out of the way, the next bit of work to be done is the equipment storage facilities for the isolation barn. This will begin “sometime in June,” according to Mr. Edmonds, followed by the secondary barn and lastly the main barn.?

Department of Sports Parks and Recreation Commissioner Calvert White, who served as de facto race promoter in the absence of a private sector player in that role, reflected that the experience was “one of the most stressful times and undertakings that I’ve had” in his 17 years at DPSR. Noting that naysayers were plentiful – “we had people out there in the community betting that this wasn’t going to happen” – Mr. White said he felt vindicated by the success of the day’s activity. “I feel for them because I know they lost their money,” he said of the doom-mongers. Despite not having a clicker for a more accurate count, Mr. White estimated that between 5500 and 6000 people attended the races on May 3.

“It honestly went better than I envisioned it going, knowing all the things that had to be done leading up to the opening day,” Mr. White continued. Meanwhile, the search for a permanent promoter is underway, with a request for qualifications currently being drafted as the first step in the process.?

With one successful day behind them, industry stakeholders are now looking forward to the next event – pre-Emancipation Day races on June 30. According to Mr. Hodge, several races were on the cards that day, including the mile and 16th Lieutenant Governor’s cup, and a mile Administrator's Cup race for mares and fillies, among other races for different classes. Entries will close on June 21, with gate positions pulled on June 24, said chairman of the V.I. Horse Racing Commission, Hugo Hodge. “It’s still a work in progress but we’re getting there.”

As a final pending matter from the Carnival races, Shaine Gaspard, Southland Gaming’s chief operating officer, noted that three horsemen – Augustus Raleigh, Lesmore Smith, and Rafael Braithwaite – have yet to collect their winnings. “We have no contact information for them,” he said, urging the three to submit the necessary paperwork so that the company can process their payments. Everybody else, Mr. Gaspard said, had their payments processed within one business day of submitting the required documentation.