

Stable Views--Voices and Stories from the Thoroughbred Racetrack
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2012-2013
(AFC 2012/034: 00483)

Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Patrick Bovenzi interview, 2013-02-17 : interview conducted by Ellen E.
McHale**

INTERVIEW LOG

Interview with Patrick Bovenzi Tampa Bay Downs Racetrack Interview recorded in the Track kitchen. 2/17/13

00:10 Originally from Canadaigua, NY, not far from the Finger Lakes Race track. He started out walking hots at the Finger Lakes Race track when he was 14 years old. He has been in Florida 23 years. He has no other family members in the horse business. He was a kid who always had the Racing Form with him in high school, studying it in High School study hall. He started walking hots in 1968 when he was 14 (he had lied about his age, saying he was 16 years old). He worked at Finger Lakes Race Track in the summers through high school and college.

1:38 In 1968, he started working for Marty O'Neill, a former jockey turned trainer.

1:50 [equipment tested by EM]

2:10 He worked with the horses during college, worked the horses in the morning and evenings and went to RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology] during the day. It took him a little bit longer to finish because of that – 5 years instead of 4. He majored in criminal justice in the College of General Studies. He learned about law and when he's not a horse identifier, he is a [race] steward so that is relevant to his degree.

4:10 Pat has done everything in the horse business – stable boy to steward: groom, hot walker, assistant trainer, jockey agent, paddock judge, placing judge, patrol judge, clerk of scales, horse identifier. He has been a horse identifier the longest. There are only 51 horse identifiers in the country. He works with four breeds and is very busy.

5:12 A horse identifier determines the identity of horses. It is his job to determine that each horse entered in a race is the correct one. He checks markings and color. He examines their teeth. He

looks at natural markings – legs, cowlicks – and then refers to the registration papers and the tattoo.

6:22 When a horse walks up to him, Pat looks at the horse as he walks up and then he examines her teeth and then the tattoo. It is a quick look.

6:57 He says that the horse identifier is the hardest job to fill in the Racing Office. He was a placing judge and an entry clerk in Detroit when the horse identifier got elevated to the position of Steward and Pat was moved into the job of horse identifier. It's a job that you grow in to. There is no training and he had no apprenticeship. It's a job you learn on the job.

8:20 He has about one instance a year when the wrong horse shows up. He talks about trainers trying to mix up horses on purpose. Pat talks about a case in Indiana when horses were mixed up early on and ran for several times – it was a mistake that wasn't caught early. Because of that, there was redistribution of purse money and sanctions levied.

10:15 Pat is one of 59 tattoo-ers in the country. Not all identifiers are tattoo-ers, but he is. At tattooing, he looks at the horse's papers and determines that a horse is correct, then he places an alphanumeric tattoo on their upper lip. A horse has to be at least 2 years old. They are tattooed prior to racing and are typically 2-4 years old. Most state commissions require a tattoo before racing (New Jersey and New York allow one race prior).

11:50 Most of the time he works in the Tampa Bay area and Ocala, Florida. He rarely travels outside of the area.

12:25 There are so few tattoo-ers because the horse industry (with approx. 23,000 horses) only needs 59 people, so there are not so many dies out there. Dies are controlled with serial numbers for security purposes.

13:27 He prides himself on doing good work. Tattoos have to be legible. Some are not as clear.

14:24 Tattoos are made with a die, which is composed of clusters of needles shaped in the forms of letters and numbers. That is dipped into ink and then buried into the tissue of the horses lip. 85% of the horses take it and about 15% have to be tranquilized. He has occasionally been bitten. Pat's concern is for safety .

16:20 Racing has good, hard-working people. It's professional athletics. It is a way of life. He's always done it. Pat says about racing, 'It is the greatest game played outdoors.'

17:00 He's been at Tampa Bay Downs for 23 years. Prior to that, he was at Detroit, Canterbury Park in Minnesota, Virginia, New England, Saratoga.

17:40 He has seen the business change. When he started in the business, it was professional horsemen only and now there are many hobbyists training horses. [He would not elaborate as he was afraid to be condescending]. The horse identifying business hasn't changed since it started in 1946. Now they are starting to microchip the horses. They microchip in Europe. Pat would like to see that technology here. It will be additional expense, but he will be out-of-harm's way.

19:20 He talks about a specific incident: On January 21, 2001, a horse named AWOL trained by Kathy O'Connell, kicked him in the ribs and he was out of commission for seven weeks. That is his only real injury.

19:54 If they microchip, Pat still will be tattooing as a back-up. The additional expense will be in doing both a microchip and tattoo. Right now microchipping is not mandated in the US, although there is a lot of it in California. Chips are mandated in Europe, so if a horse races overseas, it has to have a microchip.

21:18 There are a few women tattoo-ers, Sharon Gunther in Delaware and a few out west.

21:40 End of Interview