

## Ownership group offers high hopes for low stakes

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When a group of high school buddies from upstate New York, over beers at a Memorial Day get-together, decided to pool their money to purchase an affordable thoroughbred racehorse, they probably never imagined that one of their horses would make them millionaires and celebrities in the racing circuit.

The group, who called themselves Sackatoga Stable, each put down \$5,000 toward a horse. When that horse turned a profit, the group used the extra income, in 2002, to buy a then unknown gelding for \$75,000 — Funny Cide. The horse went on to win the first two legs of racing's triple crown, the prestigious Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes, and captured the country's imagination in the process.

Like the members of Sackatoga Stable, those in Westchester County with the itch to get into the horse racing game that don't have millions of dollars to invest in a prize horse can do so at Hibiscus Stables in Somers.

For a \$5,000 to \$10,000 investment, a person can enter a partnership with several other people to own his or her own racehorse.

And while you may not unearth the next Funny Cide, buying a horse on the low end of the price scale doesn't mean it can't be successful, said Mike Oliveto, of Mahopac, part of the ownership group at Hibiscus. The other owners are Doris Ann Hayes and John Manna, both of Mahopac, and Al Schwab of Hawthorne.

"In the horse racing game, you can spend \$50,000 and end up with a (Kentucky) Derby winner, and you can spend a million and end up with a dud," he said. "Funny Cide was a low purchase, and hit huge. (The ownership group) made millions of dollars on the Derby win alone."

This is the second year the stable is offering racing partnerships, and Oliveto believes the program will be successful.

"We're trying to grow more aggressively,"



Thoroughbred racehorse Salt Water Reign.

he said. "We set a goal of raising \$200,000. I think we're going to beat that."

Hibiscus generally purchases thoroughbreds in the \$50,000 to \$100,000 range, depending on how much a particular partnership group is willing to invest. A full share of ownership in a horse is \$10,000 per person. There could also be ongoing fees for general horse upkeep.

### GETTING TO KNOW YOU

"Typically, investors don't know each other and at the first race they meet and get to know one another," Oliveto said. "But if a group of

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— Mike Oliveto,  
Hibiscus Stables, Somers

friends want to do it, we can accommodate them also."

Hibiscus takes 10 percent of the purse earnings and 10 percent of the sale price of a horse to cover administrative expenses.

The horses generally run at the state's three largest thoroughbred race tracks: Aqueduct

Racetrack in South Ozone Park, Queens; Belmont Park in Elmont, Long Island, and Saratoga Race Course in Saratoga Springs, along with smaller tracks in the state. And if a horse shows great promise, Oliveto said, running it in prestigious races regionally and nationally would be an option.

He said Hibiscus set out to give its investors all the perks of horse ownership, in order to set itself apart from other partnership opportunities.

"We treat our clients as if they're an owner like everyone else," he

said. "They can come into the paddock on race day, talk with the jockey and trainer, and with a little luck get their picture taken in the winner's circle."

Oliveto said ever since Funny Cide's unlikely success, racing partnerships have been gaining popularity.

"It's an affordable way for a fan to get into the game without ponying up 100 grand," he said.

One such fan is Tom Consaga, owner of Re/max Ace Realty in Pleasantville.

Consaga is part of a partnership group that formed last year at Hibiscus Stables. He always had an interest in thoroughbred racing, and heard from a friend about the partnership opportunity at Hibiscus.

"It sounded like a very interesting investment, and a whole lot of fun also," he said.

Consaga plunked down his share of the \$57,000 to buy the horse and became part of an ownership group of six people who purchased Salt Water Reign.

The owners have high hopes for the three-year-old horse, which recently won a race at Aqueduct.

The horse is currently running in allowance races, and Consaga and the other partners are hoping to move her up to graded stakes races, which have the largest purses.

"We have very high hopes for her," he said, adding, "I don't even care about the investment part of it, with the amount of fun I'm having."