



# Old Friends

## **NEW VISITORS CENTER COMING**

**GEORGETOWN, KENTUCKY**



# Old Friends

## VISITORS CENTER: A NEW CENTERPIECE IS COMING

Plans are now underway to construct a modern Visitors Center which will be a sparkling new centerpiece at Old Friends.

The new Visitors Center will include a museum, video center, gift shop, restrooms and potentially a bourbon tasting room that will allow Old Friends to increase attendance, expand daily capacity and stage more and bigger special events.

Fashioned out of a vintage tobacco barn, the Visitors Center combines a historical exterior with modern interior — climate-controlled and with permanent restrooms.

Total cost is estimated at \$750,000. The goal is for construction to start by the end of 2022, with a completion date of April 1, 2023.



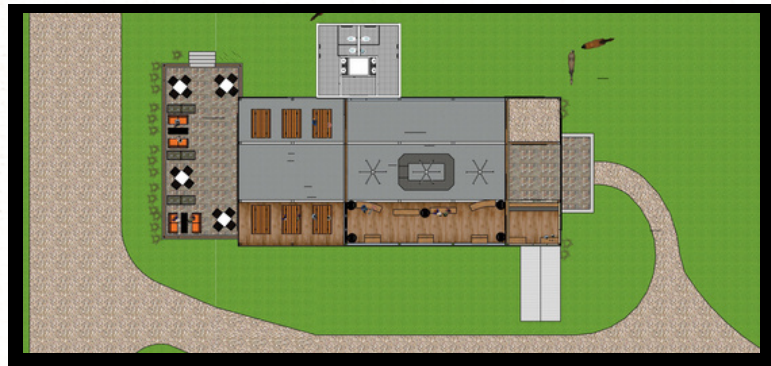
*Kentucky tobacco barn to be repurposed as showplace Visitors Center at Old Friends.*

Design and planning teams include Kansas City, Mo.-based Populous, a global architectural and design practice specializing in sports facilities, arenas and convention centers; award-winning broadcast consultant G.D. Hieronymus; and general contractor Derek Engineering of Louisville.



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## VISITORS CENTER: RENDERINGS





# Old Friends

## HORSE RACING'S LIVING MUSEUM

As a film critic for the Boston Globe, Michael Blowen had seen a lot of far-fetched plots in the movies when he came up with his own unlikely script after taking a buyout from the newspaper in 2001.

Blowen moved to Kentucky with wife Diane White, who also had accepted a buyout from her post as a Globe columnist. His seemingly crazy idea of founding a retirement home for horse racing's aging stars began in 2003 with one horse — a mare prophetically named Narrow Escape who didn't get a single bid at auction and was abandoned by her would-be seller — and a rented paddock.



*Old Friends founder Michael Blowen at Old Friends with 1997 Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner Silver Charm.*

The sense of urgency to get Old Friends operational escalated when news broke in 2002 that 1986 Kentucky Derby winner Ferdinand had perished in a slaughter house after his usefulness as a stallion in Japan ended. Blowen wanted a place where racing's equine heroes could spend the rest of their lives in dignity — adored by their admirers who might even be able to feed them a carrot (or, and this came later, get a selfie).

Today Old Friends Equine is the forever-home to more than 240 retired racehorses and former breeding stallions at its main property Dream Chase Farm just off Interstate 75 in Georgetown, Ky., a nearby adjunct operation enjoying a unique relationship with a senior-living facility and Old Friends at Cabin Creek, the Bobby Frankel Division located in Greenfield Center, N.Y., just a few minutes from Saratoga Race Course. Old Friends is unique among major Thoroughbred retirement venues in that it welcomes stud horses, which even in their later years can require more space and be difficult to handle.

Blowen's vision of a living history museum of horse racing came to fruition. Old Friends got its first Triple Crown race winner in 2012 with 2002 Belmont Stakes winner Sarava, whose \$142 win payoff remains a Belmont record. The facility got a huge boost in 2012 when trainer Bob Baffert sent Blowen \$6.5 million-earner Game On Dude and two months later 1997 Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner Silver Charm, whose stud career had waned in Japan.

Old Friends' paddocks now are graced with Triple Crown and Breeders' Cup winners and Eclipse champions. It recently was announced that the Hall of Famer Lava Man, who after earning \$5.2 million on the racetrack became the stable pony and "coach" to the much-younger elite stock in trainer Doug O'Neill's barn for more than a decade, is retiring to Old Friends at age 21. (But first, Lava Man will accompany the standout 4-year-old Hot Rod Charlie in the post parade and to the starting gate for Saturday's \$6 million Breeders' Cup Classic at Keeneland.)



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## HORSE RACING'S LIVING MUSEUM

Old Friends annually attracts tens of thousands of visitors, who come to get up-close-and-personal with racing's superstars. In the process, they meet a few who never saw the inside of a winner's circle but have a story to tell all the same, which Old Friends' employees and volunteer tour guides delight in sharing. The Dream Chase property also includes two cemeteries serving as the final resting place for its residents as well as other iconic horses, with the Old Friends Hall of Fame Cemetery created in 2011.

Said Blowen: "I had a guy come on a tour one time who said, 'You know, I just came back from the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. It was fun, I learned a lot of stuff. But I didn't see one football player. I come here, and I get to see them.' I thought that was a great way to put it."



*Michael Blowen with Little Silver Charm doing what he loves, giving a personal tour of Old Friends to a group of horse lovers.*

The revenue that rock stars like Silver Charm help Old Friends raise supports hard-knockers such as Popcorn Deelites, a low-level claimer who became one of eight horses to play Seabiscuit in the 2003 movie.

Old Friends earns its money on donations, tours of the farm and money earned at the gift shop, also benefiting from many discounted and donated services and products such as veterinary work, medication, feed supplements, shoeing and shipping. Supporters sponsoring paddocks, run-in sheds, barns, barn stalls, fencing or horses have their names sprinkled throughout on plaques.

In 2013, Old Friends was part of the first group of racehorse retirement, retraining and rehoming programs to be accredited by the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance, a transformative industry collaboration that also raises money to help fund the facilities it certifies.

In 2014 Old Friends was honored with a Special Eclipse Award, an industry accolade for extraordinary service to the sport of Thoroughbred racing. But Old Friends considers perhaps the greatest reward to be the respect and support of the owners, trainers and fans who not only donate to the cause of protecting these amazing athletes but come out to the farm often to visit with all of their old friends.

"It's expensive to take care of a horse—even one," said former Kentucky Governor and horse breeder-owner Brereton Jones, who started out a skeptic but became one of Old Friends earliest supporters with both his checkbook and donation of retired stallions. "Somebody starting a group of horses that will never have the ability to win another race or to put money into the pockets of the people feeding them, it was a different approach. But most really important happenings in the world come about because some people are determined to make them come about."



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## A NATIONAL STORY



**Thoroughbred Daily News Sept. 20, 2022**  
**Old Friends hosting Breeders' Cup celebration**

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**America's Best Racing – June 26, 2022**  
**Old Friends Farm a decades-long journey for Michael Blowen**

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**Bloodhorse.com Video – April 20, 2022**  
**Beyond the Headlines: Catching up with Silver Charm**

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**Paulick Report – Aug. 20, 2022**  
**"Everyone's a star at Old Friends"**

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**Bloodhorse.com – Oct. 2, 2020**  
**Old Friends Extension Takes Horses to People (Ashton Grove)**

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**Louisville Courier-Journal/USA Today – Dec. 19, 2014**  
**Ky. farm saves retired horses from slaughter**

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**Bloodhorse.com – Feb. 10, 2021**  
**Paddock Pals and Other Old Friends (video blog with Michael Blowen)**

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**Late Night Riders podcast – Apr. 8, 2022**  
**Michael Blowen: Old Friends Equine**