

RILLITO PARK PRESERVATION GROUP SETS UP WEBSITE

March 19, 2008 -- A Tucson-based group wanting to preserve Rillito Park Racetrack has established a website, www.SaveRillitoRacetrack.com.

Live racing is guaranteed at Rillito until 2010. Officials for Pima County, which owns the track and the land it sits on, are considering turning the grounds into youth athletic fields, which would require razing the grandstand and barn area.

An earlier proposal to relocate the track to a site in nearby Marana is apparently dead.

"Part of our racetrack is designated a National Historic Site," said a statement on the website's homepage. "Innovations and procedures implemented here have been adopted at racetracks throughout our country and around the world. Part of the movie Seabiscuit was filmed here. (Former U.S. Congressman) Mo Udall flew here in a helicopter so that he could be the first person to sign our initiative to preserve this facility. He understood history.

"We have a rich Hispanic culture and history," the statement continued. "The racetrack is a microcosm of our community – you need only read the names of the trainers, jockeys and owners to realize the historical significance of the site. We have set up this website to provide the history of the track. We will provide data that nobody has written about, including attempts to sell the track, and bogus efforts to condemn the facility."

Rillito's eight-day 2008 meet ended on February 24, registering a 34-percent increase in American Quarter Horse purses but a 25-percent decline in handle on sprint races. According to Patricia White, secretary of the Pima County Horsemen's Association, average attendance during the meet was 5,250, and the average daily handle on all races – including Thoroughbreds – was about \$95,000.