



**HISTORIC RILLITO RACETRACK**  
AN ARIZONA NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

TO: RILLITO FANS & FRIENDS                      DATE: 9/3/08  
FROM: PAT WHITE , PCHA PRESIDENT              SUBJECT: RILLITO HISTORY

The following is submitted in response to recent remarks, rumors, and questions concerning RILLITO RACE TRACK, Pima County Horsemen’s Association (referred to as “PCHA” or the “Horsemen”), and Pima County Fair Horse Racing Commission (referred to as PCFHRC).

Rillito has been my second home since 1987 when Howard King formed PCHA and asked me to help restore racing to Pima County. The track was leased to the Pima County Fair Horse Racing Commission and they contracted PCHA to run it. Due to poor health, Howard resigned in the mid-90’s and asked Dr. Dale Shirley to take his place. As you probably know, both Howard and Doc are deceased. It was their goal to have Rillito Race Track remain in its present location and I will do all that I can to attain this goal. It has not been a bed of roses.

In 1987 and 1988, prior to PCHA’s first race meet, Howard King and friends contributed labor and material in the amount of \$176,000.00 so that the facility would be ready for racing. (There are documents, and Minutes of Meetings, substantiating these expenditures). Several weeks were spent cleaning and hauling off trash before renovation could begin. Barns were repaired; electric, phone, and speaker lines - in the barn area - were installed; a guard shack was purchased; and a new Fontana rail was purchased and installed on the track. The track was ripped and re-surfaced. A large roto-tiller belonging to John Condon did the work on the track. Many loads of material were hauled in. A dirt bank or

dike was built just north of the back-stretch of the track – the wash was running onto the track. New 6’ chain link was installed in some areas, and admission booths and turnstiles were either built or repaired. Portions of the grandstand and clubhouse were painted, the roof was fixed, new carpet was installed, and some bathroom fixtures were replaced. Electrical repairs and improvements had to be made to accommodate the tote room and other necessary equipment.

The 1988 race meet was a huge success and, after all expenses were paid, \$242,000.00 was deposited into the Pima County Fair Horse Racing Commission account at 1<sup>st</sup> Interstate Bank – to be used only for future racing at Rillito.

Later in 1988, Pima County leased the track to a group of men who planned to have year-round horse racing. After 2 years, they shut it down saying they were in the hole \$750,000.00. Their plan was to trade Pima County a ranch at Benson for the 88 acre race track parcel. Contingent upon the rezoning of the race track property, they planned to build a mercado or traildust town on the 88 acres. Some members of the group were developers. When this did not work, and Pima County leased the track to PCFHRC again, they sued Pima County for \$1,400,000.00 and won. During the time this group leased the track, they spent \$200,000.00 of the funds we had deposited in the account. Howard worked with them as a consultant – also he was a member of the Pima County Fair Horse Racing Commission. Part of this money was used for furniture and kitchen equipment which we still have.

In 1992 when Pima County leased the track to PCFHRC and PCHA was contracted to run it, there was approximately \$40,000.00 left in the account. It took a great deal more than this to prepare for the 1993 race meet. Our water truck, tractor, harrow and disk had mysteriously disappeared so we had to buy new equipment. Also, all the furniture had disappeared. However, someone told us where the furniture was and, with legal assistance, we were able to get it back. The 1993 race meet would be only the 2<sup>nd</sup> meet for PCHA because the other group ran the track for 2 years and then it was closed for nearly 2 years. Howard was immensely happy to be “off and running” - in spite of the fact that it had cost the initial \$176,000 plus the \$242,000 and now another \$50,000 for equipment.

Every year we take possession of the track approximately 3 weeks before racing starts. This is not only for the benefit of the horses but necessary to get the facility ready for racing. Contrary to what you may have heard, the County does not maintain everything at Rillito. They do maintain the River Park and the soccer fields. When we move in, we spend 3 weeks making repairs to the grandstand, clubhouse, barns, track, and rail. We also cut weeds and patch the parking lot. This year the County patched the parking lot. Several years we have raced only 4 weekends but lease the track for the usual 3 months because we need time to get the facility ready, and time to clean-up and leave everything in good repair when the meet is over. During the ten year period (1999-2008) we spent \$554,757.00 for maintenance labor and supplies. This does not include equipment rental, fuel, or the repair of our equipment. This averages out to \$55,476.00 per year. This adds up to far more than it costs to just clean the grandstand, clubhouse and parking lot after 8 or 10 days of racing. I am very tired of hearing remarks and seeing letters indicating that we are free-loaders. Does Soccer pay for maintenance or utilities? I'm sure the Tucson Electric bill is astronomical for the Soccer lights. I heard they pay \$5.00 per hour. We pay for all our own utilities – including full price of \$25 per ton to dump manure at the Pima County Land Fill.

Some time ago, I saw a memo showing expenses incurred by the County on behalf of racing. The major part of these expenses was due to storm damage repair. This storm damage was covered by insurance and, aside from the deductible, the County would have received payment for it. Also, it showed that the race track causes an expense of \$4,000 each time the 12'x40' asphalt walkway is put down or taken up. This is not put down for the benefit of racing – this is put down for the benefit of soccer – so they can walk across the track and into the infield. The only expense on this list for racing alone, was to beef-up the steel in the grandstand.

I was asked if it is true that we picked up the tab for the storm damage in excess of what the insurance covered in 2007. Actually, we picked up the tab for all of the storm damage in the barn area and an additional \$10,000.00 of electrical upgrades and repairs, which Rafael Payan asked us to do. The total is

\$65,530.00. I heard there was money from the insurance company but I guess it went someplace else. After a phone call, from Attorney Burt Kinerk to Chuck Huckelberry, we were allowed to begin repairs at Thanksgiving time. There was barely enough time to accomplish what had to be done – the horses were in the stalls 2 days before we had lights. However, we were thankful that Pima County replaced the windows in the grandstand.

One cement block barn remains to be repaired. Hopefully we can get this work done this fall, as we definitely need it for the 2009 race meet. It was evident, on race days in 2008, that we were short on stalls.

Over the years, bond money has been earmarked for Rillito but it has gone other places. That is one reason why it is in the shape it is in. The original initiative (or referendum) of 1984 stated that Pima County would maintain “Rillito Race Track”, but only the River Park and soccer fields are maintained.

Another interesting point is that during the time we pay rent, Pima County has other activities also paying rent. That includes the Pow Wow, Manufactured Home Show, and others. This does not make any difference to us and we will be glad to pay whatever is required. Although, I would think that the raise in rent would come after 2011 because the 3 year lease has already been negotiated with the help of Pima County’s Legal Department. Since Mr. Davidson stated that the track is on the land 365 days per year, please remember that the soccer fields are also on the land 365 days a year and charge accordingly.

The question has been raised as to what other Arizona counties charge to have racing at their facilities. Truth of the matter is that racing is part of the annual festivities, same as the fair and rodeo, in most counties. The difference is that Pima County has two associations – one for the fair at the fairgrounds and one for racing at Rillito. We are separate from the fairgrounds and pay all our own expenses. Other counties even furnish County equipment and County employees to prepare the facility for racing. These counties also absorb some of the other expenses incurred, such as insurance and utilities. Six counties sell their dates to Turf Paradise in Phoenix because they do not have tracks they can use. Turf pays

each county for these dates and uses them. Turf receives a tax break from the State on County Fair Race Days as opposed to commercial days.

Speaking of commercial days brings up another subject. PCHA does have a commercial permit even though we are not running commercial race days. The law requires that PCHA must have a commercial racing permit in order to receive the simulcast signal at the OTB parlors. Our track receives a small portion of this OTB handle and that is what enables us to pay all of the expenses at Rillito. We are able to pay for insurance covering jockeys, exercise riders, and pony riders as opposed to putting them on Workmen's Comp. At our track they are independent contractors not employees of the track.

Racing at Rillito has become one of Arizona's best spectator sports. Where else do you have average daily attendance of over 5,000? We receive calls year round requesting our racing dates. Some calls are from winter visitors planning their vacations, some are from local residents planning birthday or anniversary parties, and others are employers or clubs wanting to plan for groups to attend the races. Whoever said we are running this track for a select group of horsemen is dead wrong – we are running it for the 9,300 spectators who were with us on closing day 2008. The select group of horsemen, involved with running Rillito, does not race at Rillito. Their horses run out-of-state at much larger tracks and even in foreign countries. Rillito horses are strictly County Fair horses. Occasionally, a horse or two from out-of-state comes to Tucson to try to take a special purse away from our local horses. Also, we are running the track for those who started Quarter Horse breeding and racing in Tucson during the 1940's and 1950's. These were the original members of the American Quarter Horse Association and their horses were the foundation sires and dams of the breed. The American Quarter Horse Association is one of the largest livestock associations in the world.

This is part of our heritage in Tucson, Arizona, and should not be forgotten. Politicians, and newcomers to the southwest, are doing a great job of getting rid of all of the important memories Tucson has. The University of Arizona has the Race Track Industries Program – the only one in the country. Graduates from this

school are working at large tracks all over the world. Please help preserve the track where Quarter Horse racing began.

Please remember that we agreed to move, contingent upon another track being built for horseracing in Pima County. Also, it was agreed that we would remain at Rillito until that time. At the same meetings, it was specified that one sport would not die at the hands of another – let's not forget this. If those trying to destroy us would spend that same amount of time in a positive manner, this could be worked out.