



Breeding speed: Idaho man raising thoroughbreds, has plans for future Kentucky Derby

Author(s): Matthew K. Jensen **Date:** June 15, 2009

Some future Kentucky Derby prospects are penned up in stuffy stables in New York and Florida. One, however, is breathing fresh air, overlooking the Bear Lake at a ranch in St. Charles, Idaho. This scenic spot, with black painted horse fences and rolling green hills between the shore and a patch of national forest, could even become a major hub in the multi-million-dollar thoroughbred industry.

Ogden native and St. Charles resident Patrick O'Keefe says he plans to turn his 240-acre property near Bear Lake into a state-of-the-art equestrian facility for raising champion race horses. O'Keefe started **Kentucky West** about seven years ago with a goal to create the ideal farm to raise horses until they're old enough for track training.

Teaming up with world-class breeders, **Kentucky West** obtained champion mare Rita Rucker. She was bred with Kentucky-born Point Given, who during his racing career earned nearly \$4 million. Out of Rita Rucker, Point Given sired two colts — Point Encounter and Point Defiance, and while Point Encounter is on furlough after suffering a minor injury, Point Defiance could be the next great even before his older brother.

"He's the man," said O'Keefe about the playful yearling. "He'll be the most talked about 2-year-old in the nation when he gets to California. I expect to take him to the Kentucky Derby and I expect him to win."

Point Defiance, who playfully gallops up and down his paddock, is headed for Hidden Springs, Ariz., in September where he'll undergo four months of pre-race training before going to Santa Anita Park in California for track training with legendary horse trainer Carla Gaines.

Kentucky West's business model is set up more like a playground than a nursery. O'Keefe says he prefers to have the horses bred and born in Kentucky before they come to the Mountain West. Once foals are weaned from their mother, however, they're treated to a one-year stay in St. Charles.

O'Keefe says several factors make the Bear Lake area ideal for raising horses. A limestone belt similar to that in Kentucky runs through the southern Idaho area that enriches the soil for more fortified hay. The **Kentucky West** farm is also home to one of the largest artesian wells in the area and O'Keefe says cold winters help kill parasites, eliminating the need for injections.

"We have no disease at Bear Lake," said O'Keefe. "I wouldn't even have to give them shots if I didn't ship them." The 6,000-foot elevation also helps the horses build stronger lungs and hearts and a 180-degree view of Bear Lake is something horse experts say is just icing on the cake.

"The lake has a calming effect," said O'Keefe, explaining that horses often stress over a lack of water. "Anything you can do to calm a horse will make him eat better, grow better and become a better potential race horse."

Also on the farm is star racing horse Private World. The chestnut-colored mare was the prototype for the **Kentucky West** philosophy and has already won \$166,058 in prize money. Before her second birthday, Private World won races at Del Mar, the Anoakia Stakes and Hollywood Park.

O'Keefe, however, says the gambling aspect of the thoroughbred industry isn't what drives him.

"I wasn't going into the racing business; I was going into the breeding business," he said. "We don't go out spending millions of dollars buying horses because we can raise those kind of horses."

He added, "We're up here in this funny little area of Idaho, but we might just have the most fantastic area in the world to raise a race horse. Period."

More information about the farm can be found at kentuckywestracing.com