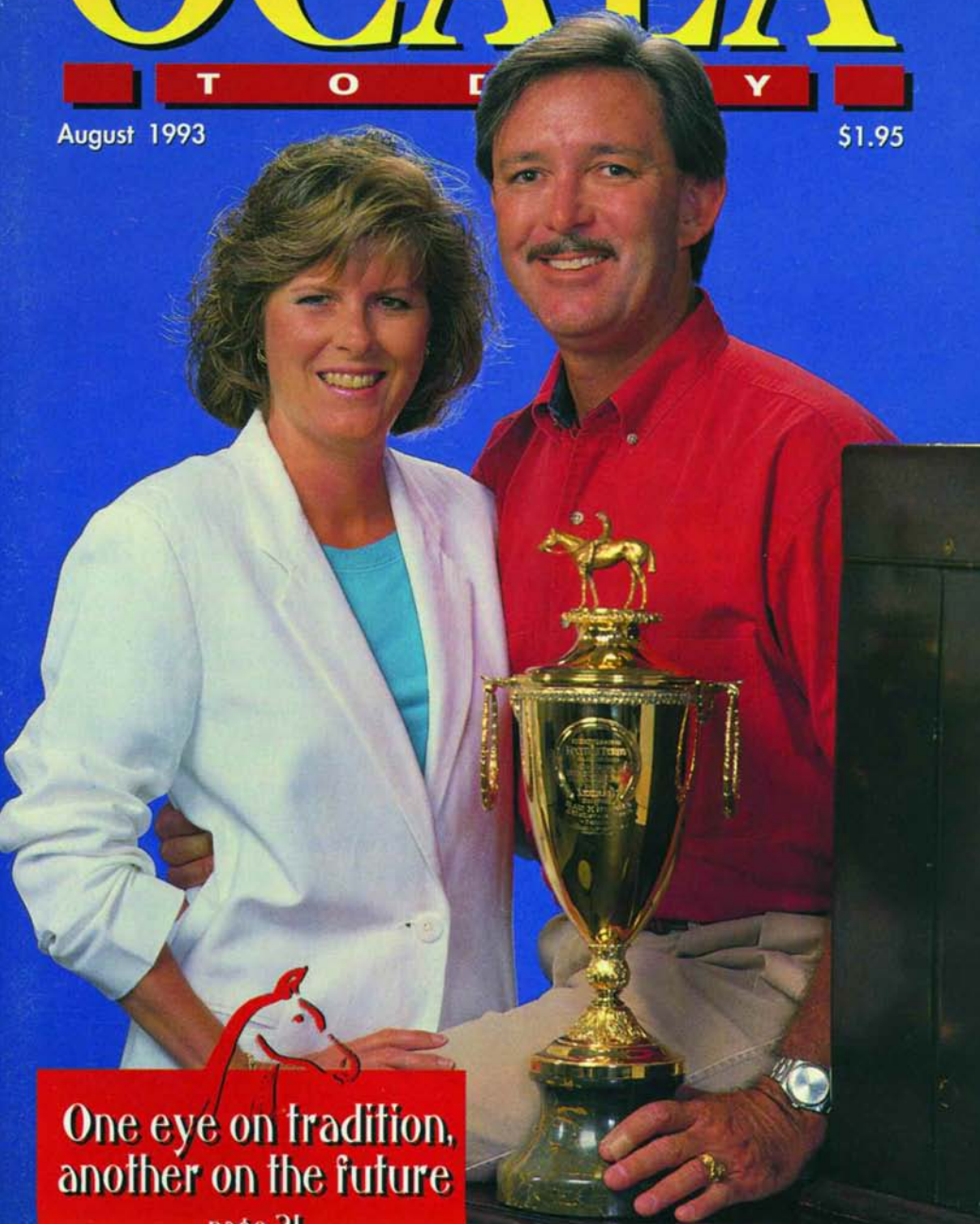


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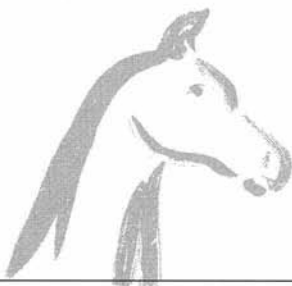
August 1993

\$1.95



One eye on tradition,
another on the future

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O C A L A ' S H O R S E P E O P L E

One eye on tradition, another on the future

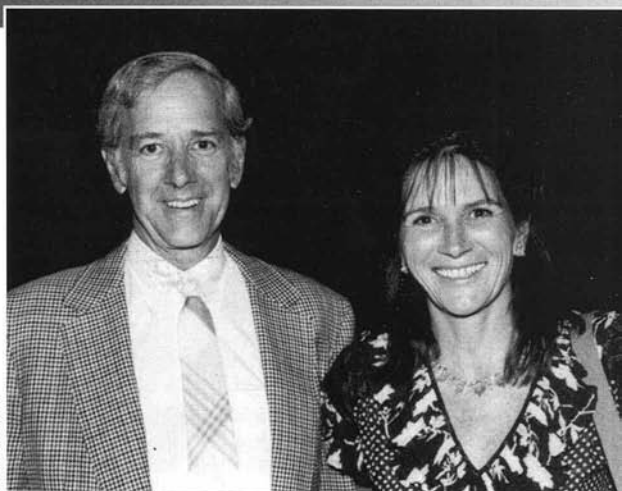
by Charlene R. Johnson

The Millers

Tradition got Leverett Miller into horses. He is fourth generation in a family well known in Thoroughbred circles. "My whole family either owned horses or was in racing in one form or another," he said. "My sisters and brother and I all showed as kids and went hunting in various parts of the world.

My uncle, C. V. "Sonny" Whitney was one of the leading owners and breeders of stakes winners in the country for many years. He had the best finish in the Arc de Triomphe by an American horse shipped to France about 1956 for the race when Career Boy was fourth. It's still the best finish of an American horse. My grandfather was another leading owner; he owned Regret, the first filly ever to win the Kentucky Derby (1915)."

C. V. Whitney died recently, but



Lev and Linda Miller

about five years ago when he retired, he gave his nephew his colors, or racing silks, an honor little understood by those outside of racing. "The colors are solid Eton blue and a brown cap, one of the few solid colors in existence. They came from England, originally. They were my great grandfather's colors, William C. Whitney," Miller explained. "The first



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horse he ever bought was a stakes winner and that was what got the family hooked into it. Then his son, Harry Payne Whitney, inherited the colors."

When Miller's grandfather died, C. V. inherited them. The luck associated with the colors appears to be holding true for this fourth generation. The first horse Miller ran under his new silks, Curia, turned into a stakes winner also when she won the Tampa Bay Juvenile Stakes. But with all of this tradition behind him, Lev is actually the first one to work hard at making a living with horses.

Lev Miller grew up in Long Island and Aiken, S.C. He graduated from Columbia Architecture School in New York and worked for the architect of the United Nations in Lincoln Center. He

helped design the Metropolitan Opera House, then went out on his own with a firm which had been his father's, Noel and Miller. This firm was responsible for a couple of the pavilions at the '63 New York World's Fair.

In 1966, Miller moved to West Palm Beach where he opened a small design-consulting firm. His architectural background is reflected not only in the design and layout of his Thoroughbred farm in Ocala, but in its name: T-Square Stud.

Linda Miller had no equine background whatsoever and was dubious, to say the least, about getting involved with horses. She, too, was from upstate New York, but attended Foxcroft School in Virginia. It happens to be a heavily equine-related school, though she didn't participate in the equine aspects.

Linda and Lev didn't meet until Palm Beach, when a building moratorium rendered architecture a nonentity. Lev bought a restaurant in order to make ends meet, and Linda arrived as a waitress, also a niece of an old friend.

Somewhere along the line, Lev and Linda became better acquainted. A wedding soon followed. By the time the Millers had built their business up to four restaurants, they decided they didn't care for the business and wanted out.

Two things brought them to Ocala. Lev had always bred and raced a few horses. "We couldn't afford Kentucky, and I was impressed with the performance of Ocala-bred horses over Kentucky horses despite lesser breeding," Lev explained. They decided that Ocala was where it made sense, financially and with a view to breeding a good horse.

Seventeen years ago they bought some land in Ocala, but still didn't have the money to build. About four years later, the building finally started. Now

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the horses provide the only income for the Miller family.

"The last designing I did besides my own farm was the John Nerud house at Tartan," Miller said. The Millers stand several stallions, board and race and stay very busy with an average of more than 100 horses on their 126-acre farm. Their most recent stakes winner, Silver Conquest, was bred and still is partially owned with his aunt, C. V. Whitney's wife, Mary Lou. Jerry Shields, an old family friend, is partner on many of the horses.

Lev has an older daughter in Los

Angeles with a family of her own. He and Linda have two children, Whitney and Penelope, 15 and 12. For fun, he and Linda both play tennis in a league in Gainesville. He also is on the board of Cody Museum in Cody, Wyo. "We love to go out West," Miller explained. "The museum was partially started by my uncle, and my grandmother did the sculpture there. She was a sculptor."

For 32 years, Lev played polo, another tradition he inherited from his grandfather who apparently influenced the game quite heavily. Lev recently quit because of a bad back. ■

The Heaths

Tradition also is a key word for another young couple even though they have been operating as a couple for a short time. Bonnie Heath is a very recognizable name in the history of Florida, for it was Bonnie Heath and Jack Dudley who raced the famous Needles to the first Kentucky Derby win for the state of Florida in 1956. Bonnie Heath III (son of *that* Bonnie Heath) and Kim, his wife of five years, are now the managers for Bonnie Heath Farm.

Young Bonnie moved with his famous father to Ocala when he was 7 years old. He grew up on the farm walking hots, whitewashing fences, and had his own horses along the way with his father or



Bonnie and Kim Heath

with the second generation Dudley, Scott. He attended his father's alma mater, Oklahoma State, then became a stockbroker in town for Hutton and a few others.

Kim grew up in Jacksonville until she was 15 when her family moved to Orlando. She went to Florida Tech University,



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University of Central Florida and University of Florida, studying fine arts. She decided at long last that she was never going to earn a living with her art work so an alternative was necessary.

She started with racing quarter horses, quickly realized that Thoroughbreds was the only way to go if a living were to be earned and made the switch in 1978. She worked for Julian Serna at what was then Murty Farm for the next couple of breaking seasons and was a foaling attendant at a farm in Gainesville while she was attending college. "One year I foaled 115 mares," she added.

She then worked at various times as a vet's assistant for several of the equine vets in town. She showed Tennessee Walkers in Plantation Pleasure

classes and pleasure rides them when she has time. She also acquired her American Horse Shows judging license and had her own little Windemere Farm. She was doing some bloodstock agenting about the time she and Bonnie met and began dating in 1987. They were married in 1988 and took over operation of the farm in January 1991.

"It's great!" Kim enthused. "Some of the people that have been here for years and years are still here, and we've brought some new people in. We've been really lucky with our stallion. We're still getting things rolling, but it's going even better than we thought it would. We have been blessed."

Bonnie and Kim are totally revamping the older farm, although they are maintaining the traditional appearance and style. A new breeding shed, unnecessary for Needles, has been added. All of the fencing is being replaced and the barns are being overhauled. Along the way they have met with a few surprises.

"The fences have been in the ground for 35 years," Kim laughed. "And so have the water lines. There are no charts or maps of the lines, so every other day or so we bust another water line."

The farm is home to some 95 horses including the new stallion, Honor Grades. About a third of those belong to the family while the rest are boarders. "Before we took over, the training was generally done elsewhere. But we've started doing our own training on the farm, so that's new." Bonnie and Kim own about 20 horses themselves, most of them in partnership with other people.

Since they are virtually launching the farm in some new directions, Bonnie and Kim have little time for recreation. At the time of this interview, they had just returned from the first week off

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they have taken in a year and a half.

"We went to Key Largo, went deep-sea fishing and snorkeling and just laid around," Kim said. "No horses." They both enjoy skiing as well and manage a trip to Colorado in the winter where they enjoy Copper Mountain and Beaver Creek. When at home Bonnie is an avid swimmer, a workout he sticks

to morning and evening.

While the elder Bonnie Heath has stepped out of the day-to-day operations, he still has some say in the major decisions. He and wife Opal still live on the farm while young Bonnie and Kim live about 10 minutes away. The one-time rumors that the farm was for sale were never true. "Mrs. Heath told Bonnie's father that if he ever sold the farm, she'd divorce him," Kim laughed. "After 58 years of marriage, selling the farm was never a consideration!" ■