



*Thoroughbred Farms  
In California*

## Winner's Circle Ranch: Cutting-Edge Care

Article and Photos by EMILY SHIELDS

At first glance, one might consider Winner's Circle Ranch to be one of Southern California racing's most surprising success stories. A closer look, however, reveals that the Thoroughbred mecca in Bradbury has an impressive clientele, including trainers Barry Abrams, Bob Baffert, Craig Dollase and Bobby Frankel. The pristine little farm, nestled in the foothills and tucked out of public view, plays the welcome host to racehorses in need of rest and rehabilitation year round.

Dr. Don Shields DVM, and his wife Janet, purchased the previously empty property in June of 2004. A graduate of U.C. Davis, Dr. Shields has been around the Southern California tracks for more than 20 years. Winner's Circle Ranch started with just 11 horses, but now there are always at least 50 horses residing on the farm, which is so popular that there is even a waiting list of animals trying to get in.

What sets Winner's Circle Ranch apart?

"We're not quite a hospital, but we're a little more than a typical layup facility," explained Leigh Gray, Shields' farm manager. The ranch is home to several impressive medical technologies, including on-site digital x-ray, diagnostic ultrasound and shock wave therapy capabilities. A three-horse EuroCiser and the use of Stall Skins, which help stall drainage and keeps the horse's bedding dry, also add to the farm's appeal.

A miniature medical lab is situated at one end of the airy barn, which allows for Gray and Dr. Shields to treat injuries with Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP). Blood is obtained from the horse and PRP is drawn out of the sample, then is injected back into the injured area. The process helps to heal tendons, ligaments and damaged suspensorys in horses. It is less invasive than stem cell treatment, which comes from the bone, and there are fewer negative reactions after the process. The PRP treatment works: a recent graduate of the Winner's Circle Ranch has run well in allowance and stakes company since returning to the track.

Another impressive technology founded and developed



by Dr. Shields himself—under the brand Statison Medical—is Statison V, a device that gives a low intensity pulse ultrasound directly on a damaged area, such as a soft tissue injury. It has been reported that this can speed up repair on an injury by 38 percent. Renowned for its ease of use, the technology is being used by racehorse trainers all over California and is drawing rave reviews.

Dr. Shields explained, "We do the cutting edge stuff up here that no one else does. We are the only farm doing PRP, and we want to be able to combine both that and the Statison therapy. We send the horses back to the track looking like they haven't lost conditioning. That's why people

keep coming back, because of how the horses come in to the track.”

Winner’s Circle Ranch runs seamlessly with a staff of 11, headed by Gray and her assistant Liz Anderson, while Claudio Rojas Sr. and his son Claudio Rojas Jr. share the barn foreman duties. With their dedication and care, the farm has rehabilitated horses such as recent Cal-bred stakes winner Spenditallbaby and West Point Thoroughbreds’ 2007 grade II winner Awesome Gem.

Mending injured racehorses isn’t the only way that Gray, a former exercise rider, makes an impact on the racing world. After 20 years of rescuing and retraining one off-the-track Thoroughbred at a time, Gray founded a non-profit organization, the Thoroughbred Rehab Center, five years ago. Supported by her board of directors, Pam Mabes, Cindy Wilson, and Mary Knight, Gray now rehabilitates around 50 horses a year. Once donated, they are primarily placed at either Winner’s Circle Ranch or with Gray’s

at Fasig-Tipton’s 2004 Calder Selected Two-Year-Olds in Training Sale in Florida, Fusaichi Samurai once thrilled racing fans by winning his debut race in December of 2004, and immediately being stamped as a Kentucky Derby contender. Sidelined through most of his career by injury, the colt never won again while only making a single start in each of his next three racing seasons. Now in Gray’s care, he has been gelded and will be retrained as a riding horse for Japanese translator Mikki Tsuge. Fusaichi Samurai shares a paddock with the gelding Ears Johnnie, a six-year-old California-bred son of Mr. Broad Blade, and We All Love Aleyna, a popular multiple stakes-placed runner in California who earned almost \$450,000 during a six-year career.

Gray credits Dr. Shields for helping her have the space to run such a program. “Dr. Shields allows me to do this with the benefit of his knowledge and medication,” she said. “He gives me time to raise funds to make payments.” The foundation relies on fundraising via raffles and private donations, as well as the sales of good horse show prospects. The Thoroughbred Rehab Center’s website is [www.tbrci.org](http://www.tbrci.org).

Gray lives on the farm with her husband, just up the road from the main barn. She joked about getting the job as farm manager: “Dr. Shields had asked me if I knew of anyone qualified to work at a farm. I thought it would be out of the way, but when I saw it and saw that it was so near the racetrack, I called him back and said, ‘I think I might want that job!’”

Just a few years later, with the help of Dr. Shields’ medical knowledge, Gray is now able to meet the challenge of both returning horses to the racetrack and finding homes for them afterwards. 🐾



**Winner’s Circle Ranch Manager Leigh Gray with retired geldings Fusaichi Samurai, Ears Johnnie and We All Love Aleyna.**

friend Shirley Aronson in Northern California to be retrained for three day eventing (dressage, cross-country and show-jumping), trail riding and other disciplines. “Famous” graduates of the program include two prominent Cal-breds: 2005 Sunshine Millions Classic winner Musique Toujours, now a riding horse; and \$1,044,354-earner Echo Eddie, a dressage horse in Sonoma who is also delving into the world of eventing.

Possibly the most well-known horse to be retrained by Gray will be Fusaichi Samurai, who recently arrived at Winner’s Circle Ranch. Sold for \$4.5 million



**Saqueo Catalan, Jose Loera, Byron Raymundo, Barn Foreman Claudio Rojas Sr., Estuardo Catalan, Barn Foreman Claudio Rojas Jr., Office Manager Liz Anderson (standing, left to right) and Hector Calderon, Leonidas Pineda, Tiger and Ranch Manager Leigh Gray (kneeling).**