

## Newsday

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### A run for the tracks, workers

Workforce housing has found its way to the backstretch. And a group jockeying for the franchise to run this area's thoroughbred racetracks is hoping to ride developer **Michael Dubb's** proposal to victory.

Dubb, founder of the Jericho-based Beechwood Organization, is a member of Empire Racing Associates, one of three competitors (including the incumbent New York Racing Association) for the right to run Belmont, Aqueduct and Saratoga. What made Dubb attractive to Empire, and vice versa, was not Dubb's status as a horse owner, but his desire to improve the living conditions of the estimated 1,000-plus backstretch workers.

"There's no question he's a major player on the track side of the operations, but what was most compelling from our perspective was his demonstrated commitment to backstretch issues," said **Jeff Perlee**, Empire's chief executive. "We sought him out, and boy, it was a great pickup on our part substantively."

Perlee said he was not allowed to go into details of Empire's submission to a state panel, but he said he believed one feature making Empire's different is its plan for what Dubb termed a "smart-growth-like" community for track workers, including apartments, shops and recreation areas. "Some of the best minds in racing hadn't thought of it, and Michael did," Perlee said.

Dubb has been interested in the backstretch workers' plight since, at jockey **Jerry Bailey's** urging, he built a day care center at Belmont several years ago. He said he couldn't interest NYRA in doing more, so when Empire's organizers approached him, "I fell in love with the concept and believed in the group."

The effort taps into what Dubb called his "double-edged passion. It's a passion that I have for thoroughbred racehorses and a passion I have for taking the gift that I have of being able to change people's lives with hammer and nails and doing it where it's really appreciated."

Of course, the backstretch living conditions are only part of the equation. Money is, too, including deciding who can best operate, and profit from, the slot-machine-like terminals that have been approved, and from which the state will get a cut. The battle is bound to get tied up in politics and legal wrangling, including a NYRA bankruptcy filing 10 days ago.

But that's for the other people in his group. "My involvement is because of what I believe is best for racing," Dubb said. "I'm not trying to throw NYRA under the bus. I happen to like the people at NYRA, but I like the people at Empire better."



Michael Dubb, right, a horse owner and a member of Empire Racing Associates, which is competing to run the state's top three tracks, proposes to improve housing for backstretch workers. Above: workers' dorms at Belmont.