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# THE WINNER'S CIRCLE

*Street Sense, the winner of the 133rd Kentucky Derby, is now a legend. It would never have happened without the wisdom and perseverance of owner and Barrington resident James Tafel.*

— BY MARY KLEST —

James Tafel, a long-time resident of Barrington Hills and former CEO of Technical Publishing in Barrington, watched excitedly as his horse came from behind to take the lead and win the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs in Louisville. The race wasn't even close. Street Sense won by 2½ lengths. ••• The win affirmed a decision Tafel had made four years earlier to breed an untested sire named Street Cry with a mare he owned, Bedazzled. "A few of my friends weren't too enthusiastic about the breeding," he said of his decision. Yet something about the colt stirred him. "This colt, every time I would visit him in Lexington, he got better and better. He was different. He was beautiful with a strong mental attitude, even as a baby."

**T**HAT COLT IS NOW A CHAMPION, being the first horse to win both the Breeders' Cup Juvenile and the Kentucky Derby. The team that Tafel brought together, including trainer Carl Nafzger and jockey Calvin Borel, was saluted at Churchill Downs by the third-largest crowd in Derby history. Nafzger and Tafel shook hands at the sign of victory. Tafel's family also shared in the glory, including his wife of 51 years, Ida Mae ("Gus"); his daughter, Julie; his son, Jim; and three grandchildren.

James Tafel grew up in Pittsburgh during the Depression. His father died when Tafel was young, and as a teenager, he exercised polo ponies for a relative. He described himself as aimless before spending three years in the Army Air Corps during World War II, where he learned discipline and began to focus. He went to college on the G.I. Bill and graduated from the University of Pittsburgh business school in 1950. He took a job as an advertising salesperson for Dun & Bradstreet.

He came to Barrington in 1960 when his company opened an office here. By 1967 he was president, and when Dun & Bradstreet acquired Technical Publishing in 1978, Tafel was asked to serve as chairman and chief executive officer until his retirement in 1982. During those years he enjoyed visiting Arlington Park.

After retiring, Tafel became interested in racehorse partnerships. He said he had been broke before, so he moved into horse racing very cautiously. He liked the auctions. He bought his first horse, named Hipshot, for \$40,000.

It was through a friend who owned a breeding farm that Tafel met Carl Nafzger. He interviewed Nafzger at Arlington Park and hired him. The two have been described as a comedy team, able to finish each other's sentences

while still respecting the lines drawn between their areas of expertise. "We've stuck together for 20-something years. There have been some lean times, but we've hung in there," Tafel says.

Over time, Tafel developed his own program to breed and race. His fastest horses have come from that program, including the 1998 national champion three-year-old filly Banshee Breeze. Unshaded won the Travers Stakes, and graded winners include Coolawin, Til Forbid, and Metfield.

Tafel has 18 horses in training on several farms in Kentucky, but he has recently reduced his brood mares to ten. "It's not how many horses you have, but who," he says. "The breeding side sustains the racing operation in lean times. We breed to race, with an option to sell." A shrewd businessman, he applies good business practices and allows knowledgeable people to influence his decisions—sometimes.

Usually, owners like to breed an unproven mare to a proven stallion. Tafel's mare Bedazzled won the first race of her career at Keeneland with jockey Calvin Borel on her back, yet she had not won a stakes race and was retired at the end of the 2002 season. When it came time to breed her, Tafel remembered watching Street Cry win the 2002 Stephen Foster at Churchill Downs. Street Cry was retired at the same time as Bedazzled. Tafel bred Bedazzled to this untested sire. Street Sense was born in 2004.

After his win at the Derby, 83-year-old Tafel became a public figure. In an interview on WGN Radio with Spike O'Dell, Tafel said he was wiped out after the Derby race. He went to the podium in the infield for the trophy presentation, then to the media room to face reporters and writers, then on to a press conference in the Derby museum. Exhausted, he then drove back to Lexington, Kentucky, with his family.



PHOTO: HORSEPHOTOS.COM/NTRA

Barrington Hills resident James Tafel (far right), his wife, Ida Mae (center), and their children celebrate the 2007 Kentucky Derby win of their horse, Street Sense.

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Tafel's son, Jim, who attended Elgin Academy and is a Barrington High School graduate, owns a professional road racing team. He is quoted on the Web site [theracesite.com](http://theracesite.com) as saying: "Competition is bred in both of us. My dad's horses are not unlike my race cars. They both require careful preparation by a team of professionals to be able to perform at their peak come race day. There are many variables in each—the track, other competitors, weather, etc. I have tried to run my race team like he manages his horses, by providing the proper resources and hiring the best help possible." Whether a horse or a race car, the Tafel men share team colors: blue, yellow, and white.

After the Derby win, the world watched with bated breath as Street Sense took on the Preakness to see if he had a shot at the Triple Crown. He was the

odds-on favorite, but in a thrilling race, he lost by a nose to Curlin, dashing any hope of a Triple Crown win this year. Tafel has sold Bedazzled, but he's keeping her daughter, Elusive Sparkle, providing a prospect for the future.

Tafel's friends describe him as a kind and generous man. A large monetary gift to his alma mater one month before the Derby attests to this. Yet what he gave America on that first Saturday in May is something else. His life story reminds us that we don't buy the American dream, we build it.

Bound by their love of the race, a successful retired businessman, a respected horse trainer, and a determined Cajun jockey show that it's never too late to pursue a dream. Who cannot smile while remembering jockey Calvin Borel at the White House, meeting our president and the Queen of England? Or stay dry-eyed when the ever-gracious Carl Nafzger embraced Borel after the Preakness, saying, "It's okay." And the Barrington Hills man who was comfortable and smart enough to bring it all together, working in an arena filled with stable boys and wealthy international magnates. This horseman did not begin life in the lead, he came from behind and ended up in the winner's circle. U

*Mary Klest is a writer who mixes information from subject matter experts with human experience to create her work.*



# The Barrington Area's Tradition of Derby Winners Began in 1928

— BY MARY KLEST —

**I**nterestingly, James Tafel is not the only resident of our area to step foot in the winner's circle at Churchill Downs. Nearly 80 years ago, Cary residents Mr. and Mrs. John Hertz—of Hertz Rent-a-Car fame—shared the honor when her horse, Reigh Count, won the 54th running of the Kentucky Derby in 1928. Days before the Derby, Fannie Hertz was reportedly offered \$200,000 for the favored horse, an offer she turned down. The big chestnut horse won the race by four lengths before a crowd of 80,000 spectators. In 2007, Derby attendance reached 156,635. Mrs. Hertz received \$55,375 in prize money for the win in 1928, while this year's prize reportedly amounted to \$1.45 million.

John Hertz began his career as a sportswriter and became an automobile salesman. In 1903, he married Fannie Kesner. Their many friends described Mrs. Hertz as a devoted and understanding wife who participated in all activities and shared in her husband's hobbies and love of horses. In 1915, John Hertz founded the Yellow Cab company and later the Hertz Rent-a-Car company. He started buying property in the countryside in 1920, developing a racing stables on his thousand-acre Leona Farm at Cary. He also joined the Barrington Hills Country Club during this time.

Eventually, Hertz had a house designed and built specifically for Fannie's prize horse, Reigh Count. Hertz hired an architect from England to design the Tudor-style building, which included a shower, yellow and black tile walls (a tribute to his Yellow Cab company), and a private space for the horse's live-in groom. He also added a polo arena to the grounds.

Over time, John and Fannie Hertz became very successful breeders and owners of thoroughbred horses.

They were described as leading market breeders in the United States and were recognized as helping to develop Arlington Park into a premier racetrack in the 1930s.

The Hertz family had three children: Leona Jane, John Jr., and Helen. After moving to Paris, Kentucky, to raise horses, another Hertz-bred horse, Count Fleet, won the Derby in 1943. He went on to win the Triple Crown and sired many renowned offspring. The Hertz farm was sold that year to Otto Schnering, founder of the Curtiss Candy Company. Curtiss Farms continued as a successful bull breeding farm until the 1960s and eventually became the current Cary housing developments known as Brigadoon and Trout Valley. The land still contains residual structures from the Hertz time period, and today the current Cary Village Hall is located in one of the Hertz buildings.

Barrington resident George Van Hagen knows all about the Hertz story, as his parents were friends of John and Fannie Hertz. He also helped in the 1956 sale of Reigh Count's home to Paul and Virginia Tegel, who raised their eight children in the former barn.

The Hertz legacy lives on throughout Cary and through the Fannie and John Hertz Foundation formed in 1957, which supports applied sciences education. The board holds an annual, national competition for Hertz Foundation graduate fellowships as a means of identifying future leaders and offering them support.

So if you're ever in Trout Valley and wondering about the story of those old farm structures, take a moment to wander back to the 1920s and remember the legendary Reigh Count and his owners, the rent-a-car magnate John Hertz and his horse-loving wife, Fannie.

Our area is certainly full of the Derby legacy, both past and present.