

West Virginia Horse Racing Industry Brings Local Jobs

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CHARLESTOWN, WV - Business is booming for horse breeders in West Virginia and a new study out this week certainly confirms it.

A report released by the Charlestown Horsemen's Benevolent & Protective Association shows the thoroughbred industry generated \$173 million to the local and state economy in 2005 and produced almost 3,700 jobs. This has helped raise the state's horse racing industry to 12th in the nation.

"They are jobs dealing with horses. Some are on the horse farms, people taking care of the horses. Others are jobs at the racetrack that are directly related to the horse-racing industry. They are riders, groomers, trainers and people that take care of the horses," says Charlestown HBPA president Randy Funkhouser.

One major reason for the jump is the Charlestown Racetrack, which has attracted people who want to race their horse in-state to breed them here as well.

"They built a wonderful facility here, and as they have grown our purses have grown, our breeding awards have grown, and what's that's done is for the other people who want to race their horses here also see the wisdom of foaling their horses here," says Funkhouser.

With the addition the slots to raceways in neighboring states, breeders in Charlestown say now it's more important than ever to continue producing thoroughbreds in the state of West Virginia.

"We need to continue to provide these financial incentives and large purses because we're going to be in competition with Maryland as they get slot machines and with Pennsylvania who currently have them," says Funkhouser.

But for now, industry experts say they will continue what they've been doing in West Virginia, with the hope that breeders and spectators alike will continue to appreciate what the state has to offer.

The study took six months to complete.

SOURCE: <http://www.nbc25.com/content/fulltext/?cid=9973>