

Beat: Sports

The Future of the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration?

The future is not looking very bright...

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USPA NEWS - The future of the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration seems a little "iffy" as the event rolls into its second half in Shelbyville, TN. Past National Headlines concerning the treatment of the animals may need to lead to a total restructuring of the way the TWHNC is run in the future.

The Future of the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration?

SHELBYVILLE, TN, AUGUST 26, 2014- Over the past week, I have had numerous conversations with both attendees as well as participants in the 2014 Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration, which is currently running here in Shelbyville, Tennessee. Out of every one of those conversations, there has been one underlying theme, they feel that this may in fact be the last Celebration, or at least the last in the format it has held for the past 76 years.

Attendance to both the daytime, as well as the evening shows, held in the Celebration Stadium which seats 30,183 people, has been "way down" over years past. "We all knew that this would probably occur, but the rate of the decline is faster than we thought it would be," stated one attendee.

Area businesses in Shelbyville are also feeling the effects, hotels still have rooms available, even for the final weekend, which in years past, has never occurred before. The Shelbyville Police Department posted the traditional warning to expect much higher traffic volumes during the event, but this too seems to be down, over years past.

We are all aware of the changes in the operation, and enforcement of the prevention of soring which has been in the national headlines for the past years, and we have all been aware that this may make some dent into the attendance as well as the participation levels of the Celebration, as well as the much publicized withdrawal of numerous corporate sponsors,

but it seems that all of it is "snowballing out of control" as another visitor quoted earlier today.

Other participants and attendees have also stated that they were unsure if a World Grand Champion would even be crowned this Saturday night. If this happen, it will be only the second time in the Celebrations 76 year history, the last was in 2006 which started the downward spiral in the industry.

What does the future hold for an event that has been a staple in our calendar for 76 years?

Only time will tell, but it leaves us to wonder if the changes made in order to protect the animals, which we fully support the protection of any creature who is unable to defend themselves, has in fact changed the entire structure of how the Celebration can move forward. Quite a few individuals stated today, that the Amateur Categories are the only thing keeping the show alive as it stands right now, they are the ones who are paying the fees, and in turn keeping it going, with this, will we see a dramatic change in future events?

Only time will tell, but we do hope, for Shelbyville's sake that this discussion starts now, and not in nine months as we have seen in the past, since this industry is the only draw for our city as it sits today, the "eggs have all been in one basket" for many years now, and if this year's Celebration is any indicator of the future, it is time for our leaders to start scrambling to come up with other options to draw events, like the Celebration, into the city and into the Celebration Grounds Arena, Stadium, and other venues. The TWHNC.com website has gotten a much needed overhaul, and now actually lists the venues that are available for numerous event types, a first that we have seen in many years.

Kudos to the staff of the TWHNC for this overhaul, we just hope and pray that it will not be too little, too late. It is time for the City as well as the Administrative Staff of the TWHNC to start promoting the grounds and venues to other events, since after all, each and every tax-paying citizen of the City of Shelbyville owns those grounds and the buildings that sit on them. Walk On!

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