



From Canada to Puerto Rico and back home again, Neil's Diamond returns to his birthplace, thanks to his breeders, Franz and Danielle Crean

Second Acts

A Path Forward — through — Collaboration

GROUP EFFORT BRINGS NEIL'S
DIAMOND HOME TO CANADA

By **STACIE CLARK-ROGERS**

IN 2017, I hosted a small pizza party for affiliates of the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance who were attending Equestricon in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. During the event, my athletic 2-year-old whippet managed to jump over a not-so-secure three-foot fence and ran down the back alley. At the same time, someone at the party yelled 'loose dog!' and without hesitation, all the affiliated TAA members ran down the alley to find my naughty canine. We later joked that at any other party, one might not have witnessed such a committed group reaction, but it should come as no surprise that these horse-loving heroes worked together.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS IN PUERTO RICO

As the TAA enters its 11th year in 2023, its accredited organizations continue to come together and support one another to ensure horses from the Thoroughbred industry have a soft landing. One example is the cooperative efforts made with the accredited groups to help horses get from Puerto Rico to mainland North America for better aftercare opportunities. With only one racetrack in Puerto Rico, Camarero Race Track, there is only one accredited aftercare group to support Thoroughbreds after their racing careers are over—Caribbean Thoroughbred Aftercare. However, keeping retired Thoroughbreds in Puerto Rico is not always a viable option due to limited space and adoption opportunities.

"The Thoroughbreds are always being imported to the island," said Kelley Stobie, executive director of CTA,

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—VICKI PAPPAS, FOUNDER OF LONGRUN THOROUGHBRED RETIREMENT SOCIETY

“and we don’t have enough homes here in Puerto Rico, and there are not enough places to go.”

Despite limited funding and support from the racetrack in Puerto Rico, Stobie works to find connections that will take horses back to the mainland. Stobie only sends horses that are rehabbed and retrained so they can be adopted within a month under the transferred group. Over the last 10 years, CTA has shipped more than 90 Thoroughbreds to TAA-accredited organizations on the mainland.

NEIL’S DIAMOND

Enter Neil’s Diamond, a Canadian-bred 10-year-old Thoroughbred who had a successful career in Puerto Rico, winning the Clasico Mister Frisky Stakes (G2) at Camarero Race Track in 2020. When Vicki Pappas, founder of LongRun Thoroughbred Retirement Society, a TAA organization located in Ontario, learned that Neil’s Diamond was running in Puerto Rico, she asked Stobie to keep him on the “watch list”



Kelley Stobie, CTA’s executive director shown here with the retired Electronico, is part of the network that orchestrated a soft landing for Neil’s Diamond in retirement

and let her know when he retired from racing, which occurred after his final start Feb. 5, 2022.

Stobie did so and reached out to Neil’s Diamond’s owner, Carlos Casillas, who told her that the gelding’s breeders, Franz and Danielle Crean, had offered to give Neil’s Diamond a retirement home in Canada.

JOURNEY BACK TO CANADA

The next steps were not the easiest but once again the two TAA-accredited organizations worked together to get Neil’s Diamond home after his racing career.

The cost to transport Neil’s Diamond from Puerto Rico to Canada totaled more than \$3,500. The Puerto Rican-based owner covered the expenses to get Neil’s Diamond to Florida, a process that involved 10 days of quarantine, a two-to-six-hour transfer through customs

and onto the plane, and a more than two-hour flight to Ocala. From there, LongRun covered the expenses and, in coordination with Stobie, expertly managed the process. After a month-long stay in Ocala while shipping arrangements to Canada were made, Neil’s Diamond finally arrived at LongRun’s Ontario farm in May. He rested there for a few weeks before shipping to his final destination—his birthplace and home.

A SECOND CAREER IN FOX HUNTING

After gaining weight and recovering from his long journey, Neil’s Diamond was sound enough to start his second career, and Franz Crean introduced him to fox hunting at the Caledon Hunt Club.

“I rode him every day for a month, and I asked our hunt club if I could bring him to the last hunt of the year, to get him

used to everything. He was super!” said a smiling Crean. “He got off the van and went out with the hounds, and he never batted an eye.”

Danielle Crean said, “We are so thankful to the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance accredited organizations who were instrumental in making Neil’s Diamond’s retirement a success, with Long-Run coordinating his transport and rehabilitation and Caribbean Thoroughbred Aftercare facilitating his transfer from Puerto Rico to Canada.”

A NETWORK TO RELY ON

The TAA’s accredited organizations have been working together for 11 years to provide retired Thoroughbreds with the care they need. Networking and collaborating are critical to their efforts, particularly since Puerto Rico has limited space for retired racehorses. Stobie is quick to note that the support given by the TAA organizations comes from all over.

“For example, Jim Rhodes from Equine Rescue of Aiken and Bev Strauss from MidAtlantic Horse Rescue have been particularly supportive of CTA’s efforts,” Stobie said. “Many of the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance accredited organizations offer more than just placement opportunities, as they also provide support for rehabbing and re-training horses, answering questions, and helping with logistics.”

Pappas remarked, “It is wonderful to work with other Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance organizations to facilitate the happy retirement of the horse. This is a big plus of being part of this network. It would have been difficult for LongRun to do this on our own.”

HOW CAN WE CONTINUE THIS SUPPORT

Sustainability is a concern for the TAA and its accredited partners. The work of these accredited organizations to help retired racehorses find new homes should be commended, and the TAA’s efforts have been instrumental in supporting aftercare organizations across



Franz Crean with Neil’s Diamond (left) and fellow retiree, Michael’s Bad, at the Creans’ farm in Ontario



“He got off the van and went out with the hounds, and he never batted an eye,” said Franz Crean of his and Neil’s Diamond’s afternoon spent fox hunting

North America. Second Stride and MidAtlantic Thoroughbreds have significantly increased adoption numbers since becoming accredited, while other organizations have expanded their capacity to provide sanctuary for horses at risk of being euthanized. The TAA has accomplished many goals since its inception in 2012, and it remains committed to providing the best possible care

for retired Thoroughbreds.

The story of Neil’s Diamond’s successful retirement and transition to a new life is a testament to the power of collaboration and support in the TAA network. Even in the face of limited resources and challenges, with the help of TAA-accredited organizations, retired racehorses can find happy and fulfilling second careers. ^B