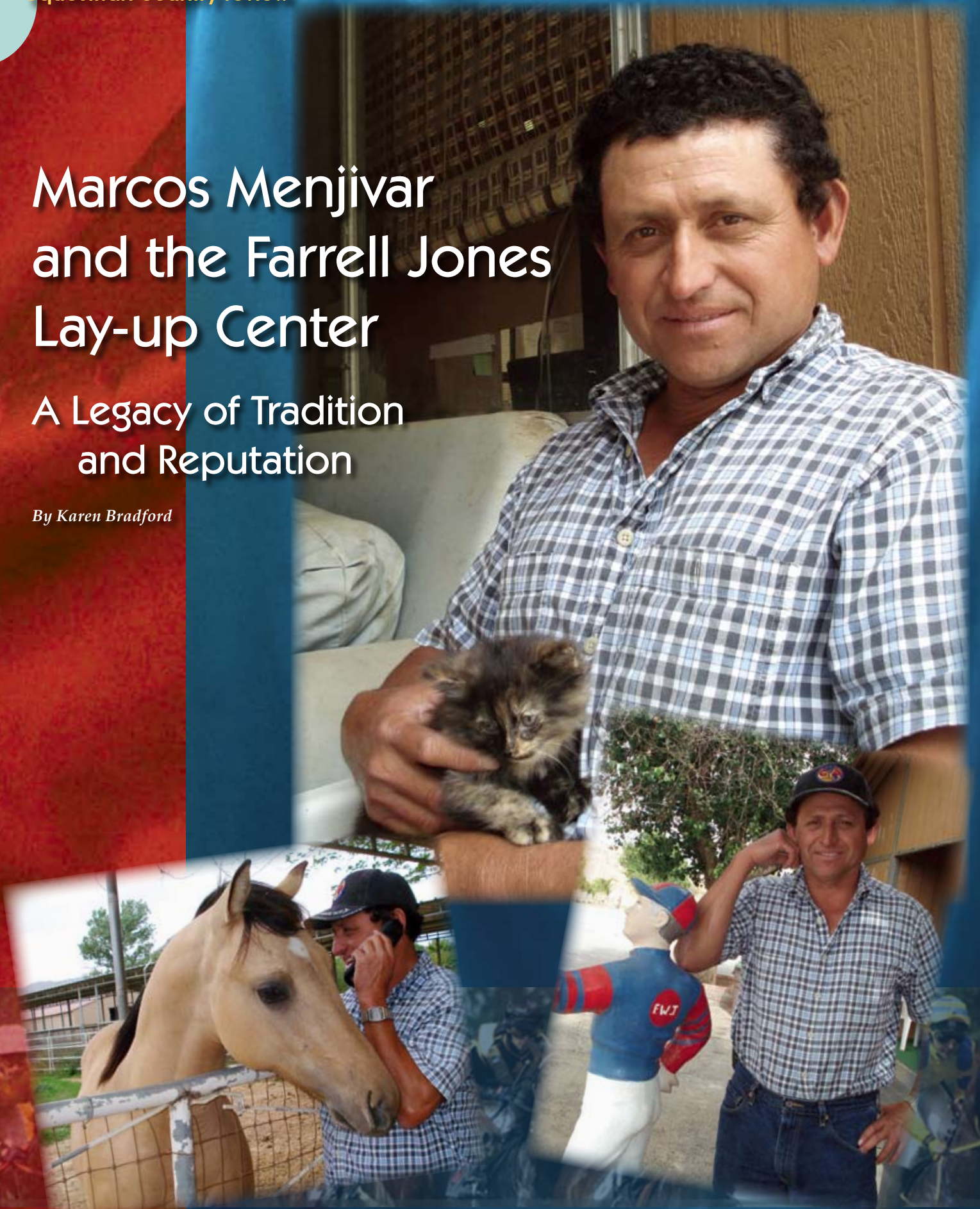


Marcos Menjivar and the Farrell Jones Lay-up Center

A Legacy of Tradition
and Reputation

By Karen Bradford



Looking down into the Hemet Valley often feels like stepping back in time: vestiges of the past are evident in the plowed fields, distinctive California-style weathered barns and long, dusty lanes that sometimes lead to old farmsteads.

Squashed-together tract homes now cover and encroach on acres that once hosted vast alfalfa fields, row crops and fruit orchards; but one very special place still honors the tradition of caring for racehorses that has been a part of Southwest Riverside County history here since the 1880s.

Farrell W. Jones was already legendary when he chose Hemet for his thoroughbred farm, now specializing in racehorse rehabilitation and called the Farrell Jones Lay-up Center on the west side of the valley off Highway 74. But long before that, as a skinny, baby-faced boy from Malad City, Idaho, Jones left a difficult home life at 13 to search for a better place in the world.

Before names like Shoemaker, Longden, Valenzuela and Delahoussaye came to dominate Thoroughbred racing, Jones' dedicated work ethic earned a place in the rarified world of two of the most famous horsemen of that time: C.S. Howard and Tom Smith, the owner and the trainer of Seabiscuit, the underdog Thoroughbred who won American hearts during the Depression. In 1937, at the height of the media firestorm about a match race with the rival fiery and elegant brown colt War Admiral, Jones worked as an exercise rider aboard "the Biscuit." He was just 15 and had become an apprentice rider after leaving home.

Jones' future solidified as a trainer, however, starting with Quarter Horses. At every track in the state --- their names are Santa Anita, Hollywood Park, Bay Meadows, Golden Gate Fields and Tanforan, ringing with history --- Jones was several times their leading trainer. At Del Mar, he was the leading trainer 11 times; his name is Santa Anita's 13th all-time training win-leader at 413 titles.

The man knew his business, and the race world's famous trainers and owners later brought their hurting horses for him to heal.

At the trainer's side

Like that youth from Idaho, Marcos Menjivar left his home, but from El Salvador and at age 21 in 1980 to find a better place in the world for himself. Without a father since he was 12, he already had some life experience as a professional soccer player in his country. He made his way north to Southern California to stay with a relative, then developed his skills in horse management, breeding and foaling as a veterinary assistant.

Through contacts in Romoland in 1985, Menjivar was introduced to Farrell Jones and hired. Thus began their relation-



A winner of Opening Day at Del Mar!

Sam Pazk (friend), Farrell Jones, Mike Mitchell (trainer), Marcos Menjivar, Harriet Hamm (Farrell's employee) c. 2002. As a leading trainer, Jones was invited to lead the opening ceremony before the first race.

ship, sometimes as father to son, sometimes as brother to brother, always as similar spirits who wanted what was best for the horse: to detect problems and cure the horse while helping its trainer.

Menjivar described Jones as a dedicated worker, "a responsible and straight guy who wanted to do something right," but one who "never trusted nobody!" He estimated that Jones finally trusted him after about 10 years. The difficulty was that no one lasted with him: two, three years; that was about it. Except for Marcos ...

Menjivar said: "I know he (Farrell) was tough and mean, but there

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was nothing he could do about it. He was born that way and left home at 13. He was ornery all the time."

After Jones died in March, 2007, racing writer and trainer Jude T. Feld remembered his colleague Jones in a loving eulogy called "A Tale of Two Farrells": "A cantankerous old bastard who alienated everyone who loved him and even many that admired him ... a horrible, self-centered grouch as his days grew short. He fired more trainers than Zsa Zsa Gabor and Elizabeth Taylor have had husbands."

One of the trainers whom Jones previously fired was his own son, Gary (who similarly holds a Santa Anita all-time win record in fourth position with 576 victories, ahead of his dad at 13th).

In his 1997 last will and testament, the blond, fair-skinned Farrell Jones claimed the Central American Marcos Menjivar as a brother and named him as his heir. In an amicable agreement with Jones' sisters, the other named inheritors, Menjivar bought them out of Farrell's estate and became the owner of the 15-acre Farrell Jones Lay-up Center.

He also carried out Jones' last request, which was: "I have one favor to ask. Take me home to Idaho." Menjivar notified the county coroner when he discovered Jones' body, made the arrangements to prepare his remains for shipping out of state and solemnly escorted the casket to be buried next to Jones' mother in Malad City, Idaho, as asked.

"When I lost him, I lost my daddy," Menjivar said. "I lost a really good man."

They had been together day and night for 23 years as Menjivar lived in a trailer on the property; Jones in a spacious home with his dogs, across the yard from his horses in barns and pastures. Each early morning began the same, exactly like a surgeon making hospital rounds with his intern to chart how their patients fared during the night ... except that these very large patients nickered their greetings or extended soft noses to investigate their visitors, look for food and be petted. Some, however, kicked the hands that cured them. (Menjivar showed his hand with swollen knuckles and two

Marcos tends to a competitive Quarter Horse in the spa.

broken fingers, an occupational hazard.) And each day after observing the horses, giving instructions to other staff and starting the various regimens, Jones and Menjivar took their breakfast at Marie Callender's in Hemet or a restaurant in the mall.

It's all in the legs

Farrell Jones had the exceptional ability to look at a horse and see its potential. He was an expert at conformation, how an excellent horse is supposed to look, and then visualize what training or rehabilitation would be required to make it a winner on race day or increase its value for sale. Claiming races at the track were his shopping center, a parade of horses who might not be performing to their potential and purchased on speculation for himself. Business flowed from other trainers' horses who might be experiencing a temporary condition and sent to him for rehab: a bowed tendon, a fracture, suspensory or other lameness problems that need several months to a year off the track and conditioning for healing.

Always, as Jones taught him and Menjivar believes, there is respect and compassion for the animal.

What's the magic?

Leading trainers continue to send their expensive racehorses to Menjivar based on the one thing that was so important to Farrell Jones: trust.

"My reputation on the track comes from Farrell," Menjivar said. "Whoever knew Farrell, automatically they know what he taught me. Farrell was a very honest guy; he knew what to do with horses." (As if to agree and give authority at that moment from the equine point of view, a horse whinnied from outside the barn office.) "The trainers tell me, 'When I send a horse to you, I know he's in good hands. You tell me the truth all the time.'"

Last year's Kentucky Derby winner, Mine That Bird, who then was a long-shot at the \$2 million first prize, has been a Farrell Jones Lay-up Center client. He was treated for inflammation in his tendon sheath. "It was worth the investment. When he left, he was 100 per cent," Menjivar said.

The clients' horses come to the lay-up center by professional transport, each leg in "shipping boots" that look like ski jacket material with Velcro tabs, shaped



Marcos studies a new patient's legs. He looks for hoofs not landing straight or legs that may indicate inflammation or lameness.



Marcos and his staff work well together. His co-worker knew just what Marcos was thinking and helped clean the horse's hoof.

to allow the freedom of movement yet padded enough to reduce bumping, bruising or additional injury during the haul. On delivery at the farm, Menjivar or his staff put the horse into a comfortable stall with plenty of soft wood shavings for bedding, and the horse is allowed to settle and relax overnight. If later a horse is scared or skittish in his new surroundings, he will sometimes be offered a gentle goat as a soothing pas-

ture-mate or companion, which is not at all unusual.

In the early morning when the weather is coolest and the horse's legs are likely to have the least amount of inflammation, another staff member will walk and jog the horse as Menjivar looks for sore spots or signs of lameness before deciding the course of healing.

Horse rehabilitation is a combination



Horse *Stolen Loot* takes owner Farrell Jones (in gray suit) to the winner's circle in 1993 with trainer Dick Mandella (tan jacket), who stills sends his horses to the Jones center; Marcos Menjivar (white jacket, black tie); the famous jockey Eddie Delahoussaye is "up."



Marcos shows us his newest personal horse. He plans to race this horse next season.

of rest, diet, attentive care, and physical therapy. The Jones lay-up center is a state-of-the-art facility, including three weekly visits by a veterinarian to attend to the various horses; the farrier as well visits several times each week to inspect

and perform corrective shoeing and other hoof health needs.

Two specialized pieces of equipment at the property are uniquely equine. One is an underwater treadmill: a long one-

horse-wide spa with a nonskid ramp leading down into and up out of it. The horse is buoyant enough to take stress off sore areas as 32 Jacuzzi-type jets massage the legs with water heated to 80 degrees, warming muscles and tendons while stimulating the healing blood flow.

The second exerciser is a variation on the theme of a hot walker: instead of the horse being haltered to a revolving arm leading it, however, the horse moves freely within a slowly revolving stall-size space as an outside wall encloses the area, much like a revolving door at a hotel except larger. Menjivar said horses have the opportunity to play as they are gently exercised through walking.

Planning for succession

Menjivar quietly described Jones' last few years as erosion of the great man while Marcos became his caretaker. Jones accepted that the farm could go on without him (finally trusting Marcos!) as they made plans to continue into the future. Jones had become the father figure whom Marcos lost when he was so young; Marcos was the trainer who finally lived up to Jones' exceptionally tough standards. By their planning, the dream would persist.

**"He told me many times,
'I'm too old,
I'm gonna pass away,'"**
Menjivar said.

Menjivar sees his own future --- and the continuation of Farrell Jones' dream --- as being there to help horses and people: "A lot of lay-up people charge so much money. If a trainer needs help, I help in one way or another. We're here 24/7. We have four staff and an office manager. At the end of the day, I'm alright if I have helped people...."

Menjivar moved into the big house after Jones' passing, and several of the staff live on-site to monitor the horses as colic, a very common equine affliction and swift, very painful killer of horses, is Menjivar's worst fear. To avoid this, he provides attentive, knowledgeable, and caring supervision at all times and only the best hay, feed and water.

He continued to reflect on the ups and downs of horse racing. "This has been a very difficult last year. My dream is to keep this place open as long as I can," he said. "The horse racing business is very

low right now, and people go to the track less. A lot of owners have quit the business; breeding is down by 50 to 60 percent. It's sad."

Additional evidence of declining times for racing attendance (and the value of open pasture land for housing tracts) is the number of Thoroughbred farms in Riverside County that no longer exist: The highly visible Mira Loma Thoroughbred Farm next to Interstate 15, of which Jones was a part owner and where Kentucky Derby winner Snow Chief was foaled, has been bulldozed, as was Emerald Meadows, next to Highway 60 in Rubidoux, in which Jones also was a part owner.

What the future holds

"Ornery all the time" behavior and cussedness stopped with horses (and dogs) when the "other Farrell Jones,"¹ as writer/trainer Jude T. Feld described him, became evident in Jones' tender care of animals.

"The best thing about Farrell was how he cared about them, how he tried to see and correct the problems with the horses that were sent here," Menjivar said.

Horse racing is called the sport of kings, but it is also a metaphor for life: competing, helping where one can, always looking for improvement in the next generation and showing that nice guys don't always finish last.

Menjivar says that he felt he learned all there was to running the farm aspect of management from Farrell, but how he misses the everyday "learning by doing," soaking up Jones' more than 60 years of observation and careful, caring judgment that benefitted their horses and clients: the ability to spot a \$10,000 horse, turn him into a \$25,000 horse and win; the knowledge that changes an injured horse into one who is sound, happy and returns to a productive, pain-free life.

A lasting legacy

Menjivar feels he is living the American dream, but once in a while, he gets the feeling he is being observed, as if someone is checking up on him: Ferrell Jones,

of course, the opinionated trainer who was so hard to satisfy.

"I feel his ghost. I think I'm going to turn around and see him there."

Perhaps what Marcos Menjivar feels is the respect that runs deep in this place created by Farrell Jones: respect for tradition, history and knowledge that is passed from father to son through everyday teaching and behavior that a man follows. Maybe he feels the code of ethics that Jones believed, when truisms were basic facts rather than wistful remembrance: A man's word is his bond. Always tell the truth. Give more than is expected. Like father, like son.

The son who was not his son has become his legacy.



Horse factoid

The birth date of each Thoroughbred in the Northern Hemisphere is entered as New Year's Day (in the Southern Hemisphere, it is August 1). The trick for breeders, then, is to time the foal's delivery date as close to early January as possible so the foal will be the oldest, biggest, and strongest in its age group to be a winner. The bad news would be for the foal to be born in late December, thus theoretically being the youngest, smallest and weakest in its age group.

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- Hitting your stride
- Down the home stretch
- A dead heat
- It's a horse race
- Win, place or show
- Out of the money
- Also-ran
- Finish in the money
- Give someone a run for their money
- Neck and neck
- Inside track
- By a nose
- Odds-on favorite
- Photo-finish
- A dark horse
- Homestretch
- Down to the wire
- To jockey for position
- Wire to wire
- Trifecta
- Across the board
- Triple Crown
- Handicapping
- Scratched before the race

¹"A Tale of Two Farrells" quoted with permission by writer Jude T. Feld