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***SUFFOLK DOWNS ENTERS AGREEMENT TO LEASE GREAT BARRINGTON
FAIRGROUNDS;
PLAN TO REFURBISH HISTORIC PROPERTY, PRESERVE LIVE RACING IN
MASSACHUSETTS***

Great Barrington, MA — Sterling Suffolk Racecourse, LLC (SSR), the company that operates Thoroughbred racing, wagering and simulcasting at Suffolk Downs, and Fairgrounds Realty LLC and Fair Grounds Community Redevelopment Project Inc., the entities that own the Great Barrington Fairgrounds, have reached an agreement for a long-term lease of the historic race track property in Great Barrington to commence racing as soon as 2019, the companies announced today.

Under the agreement, Sterling Suffolk Downs would refurbish the Fairgrounds property and operate a commercial race meeting at Great Barrington while continuing to operate simulcast wagering at its current location in East Boston. Suffolk Downs, the New England Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association (NEHBPA) and the Massachusetts Thoroughbred Breeders (MTBA) are seeking modifications in state racing and simulcasting laws, which are set to expire at the end of July, to accommodate the new arrangement.

"This is a very exciting opportunity for us to help preserve and refurbish an iconic property in the heart of the Berkshires, to boost economic development in Great Barrington, continue live racing and preserve the hundreds of jobs, associated agribusinesses and working open spaces associated with the Massachusetts racing industry," said Chip Tuttle, Sterling Suffolk Racecourse's chief operating officer. "We are confident that we can do this consistent with Fair Grounds Community Redevelopment's vision for sustainable preservation of the fairground property as a space devoted to community recreation and with a strong connection to its agricultural heritage."

"We are excited to enter into this partnership which offers potential benefits to so many people and organizations in our community, western Mass. and the surrounding area," said Bart Elsbach, Chairperson of the Fair Grounds Community Redevelopment Project, "Finding a group to partner with us in a meaningful way to continue use of our site in keeping with its history while continuing to offer the area valuable recreational and economic benefits without aggressive commercial development is consistent with our ongoing vision for the fairgrounds."



The Great Barrington Fairgrounds has a rich history. It was the host of the longest continually operating agricultural fair in New England. Horse racing started on the property in 1859 and it was regarded as the centerpiece of the Massachusetts fair circuit. Pari-mutuel wagering began at Great Barrington in September of 1940 and continued through 1983. The track last offered Thoroughbred racing 20 years ago in 1998. The grandstand, barns and track facilities still stand, though they will require restoration and repair. In addition to improvements to the track surface, grandstand and other facilities, SSR officials indicated that they would be looking at expanding the racing surface at Great Barrington.

“In its current condition, we are confident that we could conduct racing as soon as next year, should we need to, and we plan to explore with Bart, his team and the town options on expanding the racing surface to accommodate racing at longer distances. There was traditionally strong support for racing here and we hope to attract fans from across New England and New York.”

Suffolk Downs is scheduled to host three live racing and food truck festival weekends this summer on Saturday and Sunday, June 9-10, July 7-8 and August 4-5. Track officials have said that they hope to continue racing at the site in 2019.

In December 2012, the 57-acre fairgrounds property was purchased by Sheffield couple Bart and Janet Elsbach with the vision to preserve and restore the environmental health of the site. The Elsbachs created the not-for-profit Fair Grounds Community Redevelopment Project which has provided agricultural, educational, recreational, and other beneficial opportunities to the local community and visitors through the preservation and sustainable development of this historic fairgrounds site.

The revival of racing at Great Barrington has the support of the NEHBPA and the MTBA. The two organizations entered a joint agreement with Sterling Suffolk Racecourse in November of last year to seek alternative venues for continuing Thoroughbred racing in the state and to pursue changes in the state’s racing and simulcast laws that would facilitate the continuation of live racing. SSR sold the Suffolk Downs property to a development company in May of 2017 and has continued to operate under a lease agreement since then.

“Our membership is made up of hundreds of small businessmen and women and local family farms who want to continue the chance to earn purse monies and to make a productive contribution to the Massachusetts’ economy,” said Anthony Spadea, president of the NEHBPA. “Many of us raced at Great Barrington in 1997 and 1998 and would enjoy the opportunity to make it the seasonal home of racing here. We appreciate the support of the Legislature, the Massachusetts Gaming Commission and the Suffolk Downs team to keep this industry active and vital.”