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ISSUE #188 - JUNE 13, 2025



Ciera Pruitt wins the seventh race on Tuesday aboard longshot Dragon Drew for trainer Tom Gardipy, Jr. resulting in a huge Pick 4 payoff. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia Photo)

Trainers Steve Keplin, Jr., Devon Gittens hot, Pick 4 Pays 9K!

Trainers Steve Keplin, Jr. and Devon Gittens were about as hot as a trainer can get this week. Keplin scored a hat trick at ASD, while Gittens won three races at Woodbine and another locally.

The hot jockeys on the week were Sven Balroop and Prayven Badrie, while Ciera Pruitt once again rode the winner of the last race in a monster Pick 4.

CLICK HERE to see the payoff!



Premachuk Claims Record Eighth Handicapping Title at Assiniboia Downs

Randy Premachuk won the monthly handicapping tournament at Assiniboia Downs for what has to be a record eighth time on Tuesday night, taking home the \$3,500 first prize once again for his astute handicapping.

ASD Handicapping Challenge
tourney winner Randy Premachuk
(left) at a Winnipeg Jets game.

The recently retired former co-owner of Dave's Quick Print built his \$60 bankroll to \$108.10 to win the ASD Handicapping Challenge by a nose over Kathy Phelps (\$106.60) followed by Darcy Penner (\$93.00), Brandon Barter (\$92.30) and Myron Fedoruk (\$90.50).

[CLICK HERE](#) to read more.



Live Racing this Tuesday & Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

Live racing is in full stride every Tuesday and Wednesday evening, with special Monday night cards on June 23, July 14, August 4, August 25, and September 15. Post time is 7:30 p.m.—and as always, admission and parking are free! New to racing or need a refresher on how to bet? Visit Shannon and Brad at the Fan Education Centre on the main level—they're happy to help and answer all your questions.

[CLICK HERE](#) for schedule



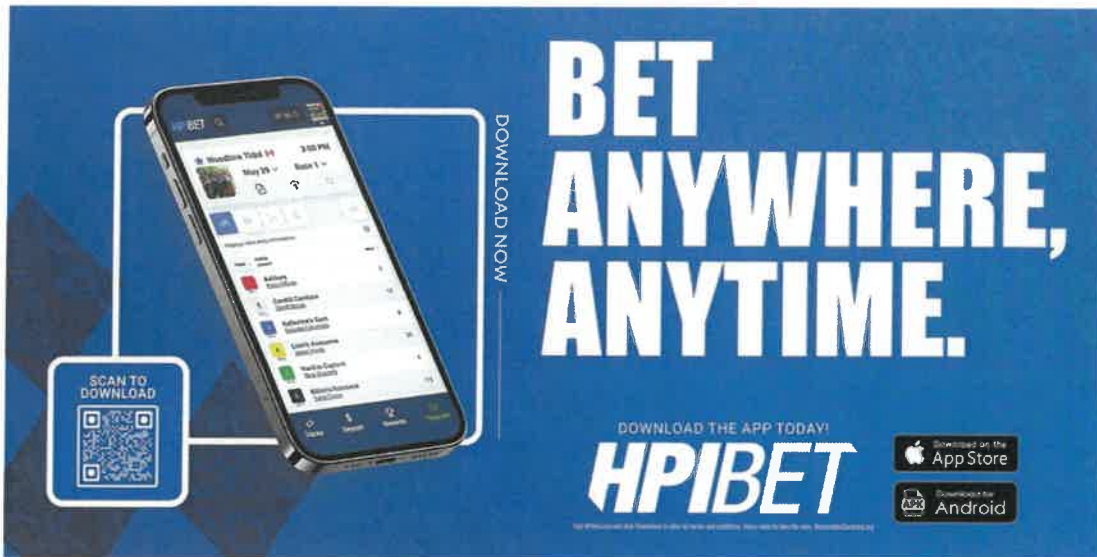
ASD Player Portal

- Free ASD Live Racing Programs
- Race Night Selections
- Links to Player Podcasts & more



Live Racing Prime Rib Buffet

Get ready to indulge in the ultimate dining experience at the track. Savour melt-in-your-mouth Certified Angus Prime Rib carved to perfection, plus a delicious variety of chicken and seafood dishes, rotating entrée selections, and so much more! Adults: \$59.95, Seniors (65+): \$54.95, Kids (6–12): \$34.95, Kids (5 & under): \$22.95. **Call 204-885-3330 to reserve your table .**




Venti is led into the winner's circle after winning the second race on Wednesday for trainer Devon Gittens and owners Larry Falloon and Maddy Derksen. Rachaad Knights up. It was the fourth win in five days for Gittens, who also won three races on the weekend at Woodbine. Well done Devon! (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia photo)

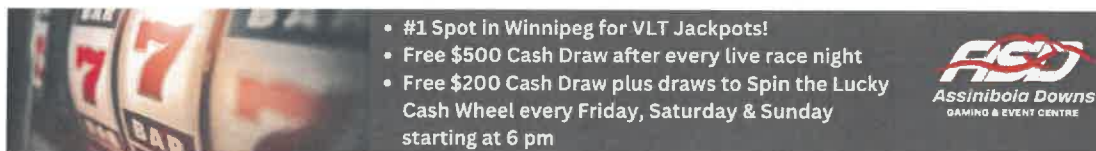
Looking for a Special Photo?

Track Photographer Jason Halstead may have just what you're looking for

Looking for that extra-special photo of your big horse, one you might not find in your win pictures?

Track photographer Jason Halstead takes numerous photos during the races, and not all of them can make it into the win photos. If you're looking for something frameable from your big race, or of your special horse, email Jason at jjhphoto@gmail.com.

Prices are excellent! Almost as good as his photos 😊



- #1 Spot in Winnipeg for VLT Jackpots!
- Free \$500 Cash Draw after every live race night
- Free \$200 Cash Draw plus draws to Spin the Lucky Cash Wheel every Friday, Saturday & Sunday starting at 6 pm

Assiniboia Downs
GAMING & EVENT CENTRE

A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates



Click photo to enlarge

This week's Snapshot in Time photo features Whittier Park Racetrack on July 1, 1927. The racetrack—which included the grandstand, clubhouse, and barns—occupied the entire expanse of present-day Whittier Park, home of Fort Gibraltar. The track was bordered on the north and east by the Red River, the CNR main line to the south, and Rue St. Joseph to the west. The grandstand was located on the north side of the grounds, and the barns to the east were wedged between the river and the railway tracks. Any evidence of the racetrack is long gone, but the old elm tree around which the track was built still stands. (Assiniboia Downs Archive photo)



- \$13.95 Daily Lunch Special
- Happy Hour (3 to 5pm & 9pm to close)
- Crazy Hour after Live Racing! Beer, Shots & Wine \$5 plus 25% off all appetizers



Manitoba Connection to Kentucky Derby

Manitoba Jockey Club Vice Chair Darrell Stephansson at Saratoga last Saturday with Hall of Fame trainer Bill Mott, who won this year's Kentucky Derby and Saturday's Belmont Stakes with Sovereignty.

Stephansson described his visit to Saratoga as an amazing experience, and said that Mott had fond memories of his time in Manitoba as a teenager working on a farm in St. Laurent.

Another Manitoba connection to the Kentucky Derby!

Darrell Stephansson (left) with Hall of Fame trainer Bill Mott.



- Wager on Top Tracks
- Simulcast Schedule
- Off-Track Betting Locations



MANDATORY PAYOUT ALERT: Gulfstream Park will have a mandatory payout of the Jackpot Pick 6 on Sunday, June 15. The carryover as of Thursday, June 12 is \$79,881.



Kentucky Derby winner Sovereignty wins the Belmont Stakes (G1) at Saratoga Race Course on Saturday, June 7th. (NYRA)

Sovereignty Rules the Headlines After Belmont Victory

In one of the most anticipated showdowns in recent racing memory, Godolphin's homebred Kentucky Derby-winner Sovereignty stormed home a radiant winner over Preakness-winner Journalism and Baeza in Saturday's Grade 1, \$2 million Belmont Stakes presented by NYRA Bets at Saratoga Race Course, replicating the precise order of finish from the first Saturday in May in a race worthy of the silver screen.

-- *Canadian Thoroughbred*

CLICK FOR FULL STORY



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Kentucky Derby winner Sovereignty was awarded a career-best 109 Beyer Speed Figure for his Belmont Stakes victory. The Jim Dandy could be his next race. (EquiSport)

'Trainer's Dream': Sovereignty In Good Order Following Belmont Win

For many in horse racing, success is all in the family, whether it be the connections of the sport's star athletes or the pedigrees of blue-blooded horses. For the trio of Godolphin, Hall of Fame trainer Bill Mott, and jockey Junior Alvarado, "family" is the best way to describe the close-knit connections of Saturday's Belmont (G1) winner Sovereignty.

"I do my best for everybody, but you feel the power when you get those blue Godolphin silks on," Alvarado said. "You know that it could be something special. If it's a horse that's never run, you always think this could be a good one."

-- *Paulick Report*

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Bob's Blog

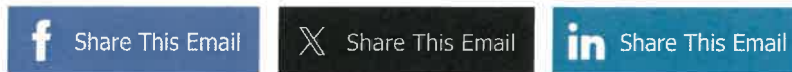
A Small Tribute to a Big Big Man

It's always tough when we lose a member of our racetrack family, and this past April 25th was one such day. This week's honouree was a gentle giant. Together with his partner for life, he raced horses and built a life on the backside for more than 40 years. Sure, our racetrack needs the large stables, but it's equally important that the barns house as many small stables as possible. These smaller stables may not carry the same big stick, but they are the backbone of any racetrack. Click [here](#) for Bob's tribute to a big, big man.

Feedback & Inside Track Archives

We would love to hear from you! Email your comments and/or suggestions to theinsidetack@ASDowns.com.

Did you know that past issues of The Inside Track are available on our website?
Click [here](#) to read them now.



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Trainers Steve Keplin, Jr., Devon Gittens hot, Pick 4 Pays 9K!

Jun 12, 2025 | The Inside Track



Dragon Drew (\$43.10) and Ciera Pruitt win the seventh race on Tuesday night at ASD for trainer Tom Gardipy, Jr. resulting in a massive \$1 Pick 4 payoff of \$9,039.10. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia Photo)

By G.S. Thompson

Trainers Steve Keplin, Jr and Devon Gittens were about as hot as a trainer can get this week. Keplin scored a hat trick at ASD, while Gittens won three races at Woodbine and another locally.

Keplin won two races on Tuesday and another on Wednesday to move to a commanding lead in the trainer standings. He won the first race on Tuesday with Sumitup (\$11.20), and the third race with Judo (\$8.60). He also won the fourth race on Wednesday with Joe's Had Enough (\$3.20). Keplin is winning at an amazing 37% clip and tops the standings with 11 wins, followed by Tom Gardipy, Jr. (7) Lise Pruitt (6) Jared Brown (5) and Wendy Anderson (5)



Joe's Had Enough wins the fourth race on Wednesday, giving leading trainer Steve Keplin, Jr. a hat trick on the week. Prayven Badrie up. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia Photo)

Gittens, who conditions horses both locally and at Woodbine, turned some heads at Woodbine on Sunday, winning with two first-time starters, both ridden by former ASD jockeys. Gittens teamed up with jockey Keveh Nicholls to win the second race at Woodbine on Sunday with So Delicious (\$25.60) and the ninth race with Dontgobackonurword (\$23.80) and Juan Crawford.

Gittens also won a race on Saturday at Woodbine and another at ASD on Wednesday with Venti (\$3.40) for owners Larry Falloon and Maddy Derksen. All three Woodbine winners were owned by Canada's leading owner Bruno Schickedanz. Gittens is now fifth in the Woodbine trainer standings with a record of 7-5-2 from 28 starts, a 25% win clip.



Venti (#6) on his way to victory in the second race on Wednesday at ASD, giving trainer Devon Gittens his fourth winner on the week, three of which came at Woodbine. Rachaad Knights up. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia Photo)

The hot jockeys on the week were Sven Balroop and Prayven Badrie, who each scored hat tricks. Balroop now leads all jockeys with 11 wins, followed by Badrie and Damario Bynoe with 10 wins apiece. Antonio Whitehall and Rachaad Knights round out the top five with nine wins each.

Tom Gardipy, Jr. won a pair of races on the week including the seventh race on Tuesday with Dragon Drew (\$43.10), ridden by Ciera Pruitt. Dragon Drew combined with the winners of races four through six – Corredor (\$34.20), Smackoverlime (\$13.10) and Thatswhathesaid (\$3.00) – to cap off a massive \$1 Pick 4 payoff of \$9,039.10 from a Pick 4 Pool of \$139,377, which boosted the total wagering handle to \$1,597,466.



Longshot Corredor (#4) and jockey Damario Bynoe on their way to winning the fourth race on Tuesday at ASD for trainer Norbert Keshane. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia photo)

The huge Pick 4 payoff on Tuesday resulted in a huge influx of cash into Wednesday's Pick 4 pool, which came in at \$198,789. Wednesday's \$1 Pick 4 paid \$301.55, and the total wagering handle for the evening was a whopping \$1,947,741!

Racing continues next Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. See you then!

Premachuk Claims Record Eighth Handicapping Title at Assiniboia Downs

Jun 12, 2025 | The Inside Track



Randy (left) at Winnipeg Jets game.

By G.S. Thompson

Randy Premachuk won the monthly handicapping tournament at Assiniboia Downs for what has to be a record eighth time on Tuesday night, taking home the \$3,500 first prize once again for his astute handicapping.

The recently retired former co-owner of Dave's Quick Print built his \$60 bankroll to \$108.10 to win the ASD Handicapping Challenge by a nose over Kathy Phelps (\$106.60) followed by Darcy Penner (\$93.00), Brandon Barter (\$92.30) and Myron Fedoruk (\$90.50).

For Premachuk, who retired from his printing business at the end of May, the victory provided the perfect start to his newfound freedom. "I needed to have some revenue coming in," he joked about his first month of retirement.

Premachuk snatched victory from defeat in the final race on Tuesday when Dragon Drew (\$43.10) rolled home for trainer Tom Gardipy, Jr. under jockey Ciera Pruitt, not

only winning the contest for him, but also pumping out a huge \$1 Pick 4 payoff of \$9,039.10.

The veteran handicapper's strategy proved crucial in a contest that came down to the wire. Entering the final race with about \$40 in his bankroll, Premachuk knew he needed a horse that would pay around \$30 to have a chance at victory.

"I had about three horses really to choose from at that time, and I liked that one the best out of the three," said Premachuk. "Even if a horse doesn't have as great a chance in your mind, there's always a chance." Dragon Drew, who should have been about 6-1 according to most observers, inexplicably went off at over 20-1, creating the massive overlay Premachuk needed to win.

The handicapping champion's approach throughout the evening focused on exploiting the betting patterns he's observed in live racing. "Some favourites become massive favourites and it creates huge overlays with all the other horses," said Premachuk. "Right from the opening race, I was playing long shots with chances."

Premachuk found value throughout the card, including Bossy Holiday in the second race and Smackover Lime in the fifth, a selection he described as pure "process of elimination."

Luck also played a role, as Premachuk benefited from a double disqualification in race 6 that moved his fifth-place finisher Twilight Ride up to third, adding a crucial \$6 to his total.

The victory adds to an already impressive resume for Premachuk, that includes being named the 2024 Handicapper of the Year at ASD, five previous wins in the live contests, and two in the off-season events. Yet Premachuk remained modest about his latest triumph, acknowledging the role of fortune.

"There was nothing magical about this win," said Premachuk. "It was just maybe a little bit of experience on navigating to the end. That was about it."

But we all know it was more than that.

A Small Tribute for a Big, Big Man – Michael Thomas Olito

Jun 12, 2025 | The Inside Track



Mike in the paddock with Souvenir Zone in September 2009. (Bob Gates photo)

By Track Historian Bob Gates

The news came via social media: Mike Olito had passed away on April 25th.

As the date for his celebration of life on May 19th approached, I found myself thinking of Mike frequently. The feeling of loss seemed disproportionate to the "relationship" we had over the past 15 years or so. The truth is, we hardly knew each other—save for a single moment we shared more than a decade ago.

More on that in a bit, but first I'd like to share some thoughts about Mike and his wife and soulmate, Verla. You can't talk about Mike without speaking of the love of his life. You'd be hard-pressed to find another couple as perfectly matched as these two. To the surprise of absolutely no one, Mike and Verla celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in December 2019.

Who was Mike Olito?

Talk about a loaded question! Mike wasn't an easy person to describe. He danced to the beat of his own drum and was anything but a mainstream kind of guy.

You weren't going to find his name in the sports pages, but thanks to his background in the arts, it popped up from time to time in the entertainment section. There, he was described as a writer, visual artist, performance artist, and leader of the Independent Rogue Rhinoceros Party of Manitoba.



She's the Fashion wins on June 30, 2009 (Gerry Hart photo)

In addition to the arts, Mike had a passion for horse racing—one that he and Verla shared. In the 1970s, Verla worked for seven-time Assiniboia Downs leading trainer Clayton Gray. She formed a close bond with Clayton and learned a great deal about horses and hard work. It wasn't long before she and Mike owned their own horse and built a life together on the backside of the Downs for more than 40 years.

Theirs was always a small stable, and more often than not, their hopes and dreams rode on the back of a lone thoroughbred. Verla was the trainer of record, and Mike was always at her side. The last year they raced was 2019. A quick peek at the stats from 2009 to 2019 shows that Verla recorded just eight wins—two in 2015, one in 2010, and five in 2009. The wins may have been few, but they loved life at the Downs.

Their final win came courtesy of Pierre Lapin on July 17, 2015. Pierre was a horse “gifted” to Verla by her old boss, Clayton Gray, upon his retirement.

Pierre was an eight-year-old bay gelding who found his stride while racing in low-level claiming ranks in 2015. From July 3rd to August 12th, he put together a solid four-race streak, with one win and three second-place finishes.

Sadly, on August 12th, Pierre and the Olitos experienced a familiar fate for well-performing lower-level claimers—they lost him via a \$2,500 claim. But such is life in the claiming game.



Final win - Pierre Lapin, July 17, 2015 (Gerry Hart photo)

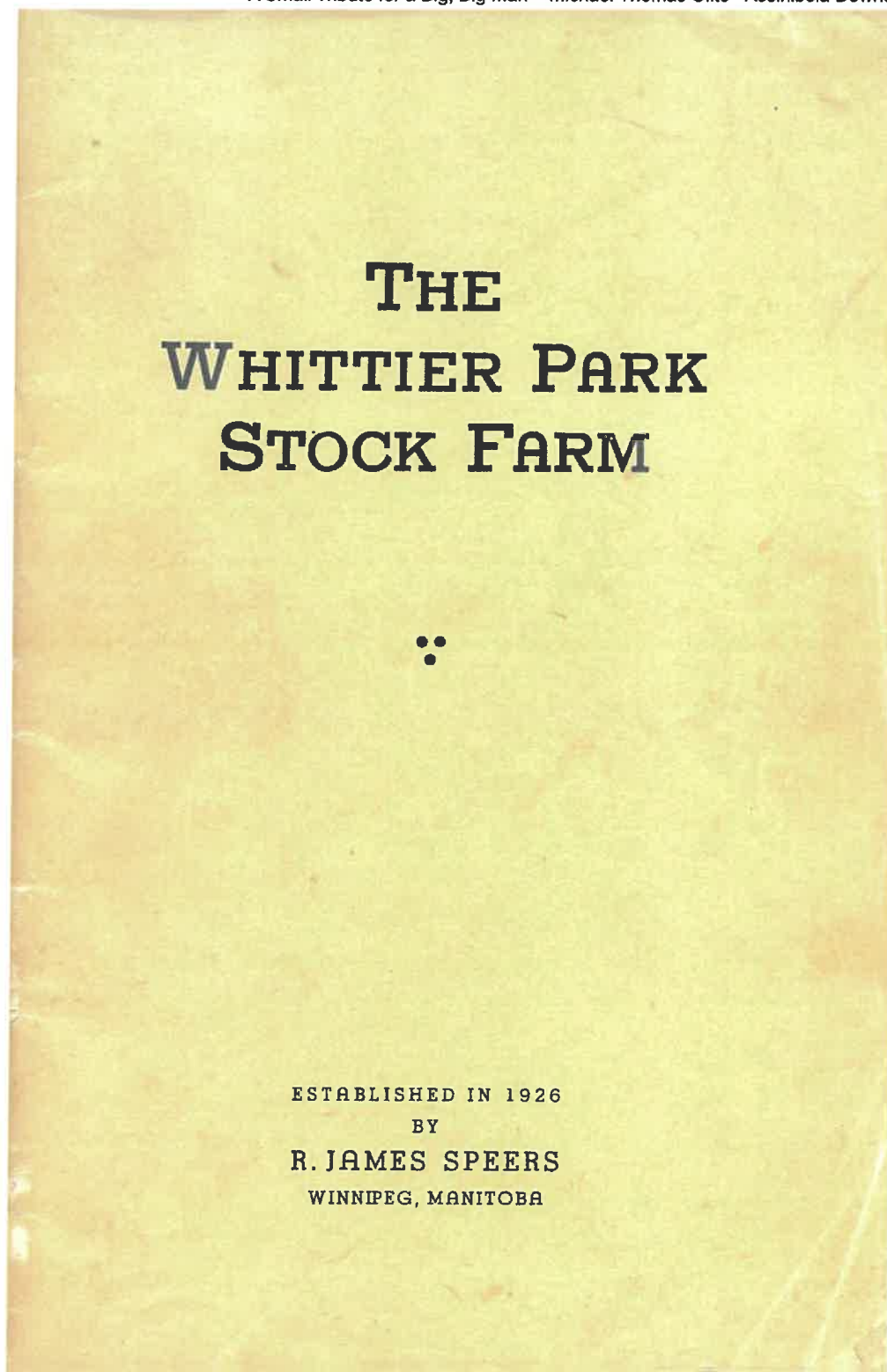
As for my Mike Olito moment...

In August 2012, I wrote the blog story "A Derby Tale Out of This World," which recounted the 21st running of the Manitoba Derby on July 19, 1969. That day was a special one, shared by an unlikely pair.

For me, it was a father-and-son day at the racetrack. It remains one of my most cherished memories—perhaps the most special day my dad and I ever experienced. He's been gone for a dozen years now, and the memory hasn't faded with time.

Sometime after the story was published, Mike approached me and said that the 1969 Derby was special for him as well. Keep in mind, we had never met before, yet he felt comfortable enough to share his Derby memory. Mike told me that July 19, 1969, was the day of his first date with Verla—a dinner at the Beachcomber restaurant.

He also gave me the booklet *The Whittier Park Stock Farm* (pictured on this page), which told the story of Jim Speers' Whittier Park Stock Farm. It was a publication originally prepared for "the convenience of guests."



Whittier Park Stock Farm - Booklet Gift (Olito Family photo)

Random comments from people who've been around the Downs for a long time echoed similar sentiments about Mike and Verla. They were good people who kept to themselves, looked after their horses, and were always together.

Mike's service was attended by many family members, some of his racetrack family, and a great number of friends. His remembrance card was simple—just eight words capturing the “dash” between his birth and passing:

March 25, 1942 – April 25, 2025

**Mike Olito: Artist, Writer, Thinker, Friend, Husband, Brother, Uncle, Horseman
– Loved and missed by all.**



Cover of Mike's card of remembrance, May 19, 2025 (Olito Family photo)

I'm glad Mike shared his memory of the July 19, 1969 "Out of This World Derby." It's one we'll forever have in common. Mike was a good man, and the world was a

better place with him in it.

May you rest in peace, Mike.