



Seelster Farms and the Van Bussel Family

Through innovation and hard work, Seelster Farms is today Canada's largest standardbred breeding operation.

It all started with a small farm and one retired mare. That mare was bred and her offspring proved to be winners. Over time, that hobby grew into a thriving and successful horse-breeding business. In recognition of his leadership and dedication to the horse racing and breeding industry, Chris Van Bussel, one of the driving forces at Seelster Farms, was elected to the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame in the "Builder" category. As well, he has been inducted into the Western Fair Raceway's Wall of Fame.

For over fifty years, the names Van Bussel and Seelster farms have come to represent the best in Canada's standardbred breeding industry.

Seelster Farms & the Van Bussel Family

Frank and Gerarda Van Bussel emigrated from Holland to Canada in 1950. Along with their family of 12 children, 4 boys and 8 girls. Two years later they purchased a 50-acre farm which in subsequent years would grow to house Canada's most flourishing standardbred breeding operation.

This enterprising family established a construction company, Frank Van Bussel and Sons Construction, which over the years built numerous schools, community complexes and churches across southern Ontario. On the sideline they began their involvement with standardbred horses which over the years grew from a hobby into a thriving and successful enterprise.

Their introduction to harness horses came when Frank purchased a Standardbred named Louella Brogue for his children to ride. After she retired from her riding days, the mare was bred to a local stallion, Ideal Song. The foal that resulted from that mating, Sharon Song, proved a success on the racetrack and in the breeding shed and became the foundation mare for the fledgling Seelster Farms operation. The Seelster name came from their grandfather who used the name for his draft horse business in Holland.

The family gradually built up a broodmare band and then decided to stand a stallion at their farm. The first was Scarlet Wave followed by Goodnuff and Tarport Count. Other stallions were added over the years including Worthy Bowl, Ambro Splurge, River Rouge, Cold Comfort and Totally Ruthless. Their roster currently includes the formidable group of Big Jim, Federal Flex, Justice Hall Artistic Fella, Holiday Road and the incomparable Camluck.

It was Camluck who truly put Seelster Farms on the map and made them a leader in harness racing throughout the world. A winner of over one million dollars during his racing career, the now 26 year-old son of Cam Fella quickly became the leading pacing sire in North America once he was retired to stud. At this writing his progeny have won over \$202 million in purses.

Frank's son Chris Van Bussel was the leader of the farm for many years, taking over the role of farm manager from his father, and he also served in many capacities on industry boards. His sudden death at the age of 61 from a brain aneurism in 2002 left his survivors reeling. But his children and other family members have taken up his mission to breed the best harness horse possible and have continued to operate the farm with great enthusiasm and professionalism. For many years they also ran the Forest City Yearling Sale in London, Ontario, Canada's premier sale of young harness horses.

Chris's daughters Karen Favacho and Anne Straatman, serve as Farm Manager and Reproduction Manager respectively, while cousin Tina Marie Howard is the farm's registered veterinary technician. In addition to operating the farm, they are also actively involved in industry associations, giving generously of their time and expertise.

The third generation of Van Bussels has shown they have inherited the love for horses and the work ethic required to successfully operate the country's largest Standardbred breeding operation. Even in these uncertain times, they are still

striving to produce the best harness horse possible at their picturesque facility that has become a shining example of a success in the Standardbred world.