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### Inside the Gates at Arlington Park Racetrack

#### Teamsters Starting Horses Behind the Scenes

Horses kick up clouds of dust along the track as starters and assistant starters gallop horses for their daily 5:30 a.m. warm-up. The warm sunshine breaks across the sand-and-clay track and the wind breezes through the center lawn on this early July morning at the beautiful Arlington Park Racetrack.



Located in Arlington Heights, Arlington Park Racetrack is one of the most modern racetracks in America. The 550-acre track is home to 2,140 stalls, 35 barns and a six-story 700,000 sq ft grandstand, which seats more than 30,000 people.

The racetrack also offers profit-making opportunities for fans that play the game, and is the home of the Arlington Million, a Breeder's Cup qualifying event. But there is a lot more to this place than the scenery and betting on horses.

Fast-forward to 9:30 a.m., and the assistant starters are already breaking horses for the afternoon's races.

"The morning is a learning time for the horses," said 10-year Teamster and assistant starter Kevin Willis.



It's a tough job, adds Willis, but he loves it because he and his fellow starters have been around horses all of their lives. All of the starters and assistant starters at Arlington galloped horses, even as many as 15 horses a day, before they were recruited into their current jobs.

The starters work long hours every day, seven days a week. They work on all holidays. Their only time off is during the month of January. They risk danger and personal injuries working with horses that can turn violent in a split second. On the surface, these conditions don't sound like they make up the ideal job that it really is.

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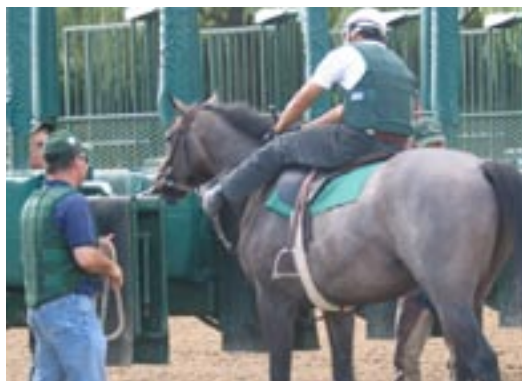
“How can I not like this job—I’m outdoors in the fresh air, I’m helping train these amazing and fast animals,” said Willis. “And it’s such a rush to be where all the action is. It’s exciting every day,” he said, smiling as he leads a dark brown horse past a clanky metal gate.

At the gate, William “Blue” Knot calls the shots. Blue, a 20-year veteran of the horseracing industry, has the job of starting the horses.



“I love coming to work every day. I work the horses in the morning, and start the horses in the afternoon,” said Blue. “It’s the best job in America.”

The daily routine involves jockeys leading horses through the paces to test speed and endurance of each horse. The jockeys use this time to refine each horse’s racing form.



“It’s kind of like a school,” Blue said.

The 11 Teamster assistant starters take the horses in the gate and wait for Blue to call the start of each running.

The assistant starters sometimes refer to Blue as the gatekeeper – very aptly named since no horse can race out of the starting gate until Blue certifies they’re fit to enter safely in the first place. The gate’s steel structure can frighten a horse. The team can spend up

to a few weeks getting the horses used to being in the gates.

“If a horse doesn’t work well, or ‘dwelts,’ the starters have to rebreak the horse in the morning,” said Timmy Marshall, an assistant starter. “If the horse still doesn’t cooperate, it is the starter’s job to say if the horse should participate in the race or not.”



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Another assistant starter, Billy Folds, keeps a book of all the horses. If any horses dwelt, Blue keeps track of those horses in his own book and decide whether or not to let a horse start.

“It’s a training issue and definitely a safety issue,” said Folds. “Sometimes you will get a horse that’s never seen a starting gate,” he said. “You’ll take them and lead them in open doors three or four different times. Eventually you will start letting the doors open a little faster; then eventually they work into breaking them.”

Occasionally a horse has a problem getting in the gate. When that happens, two or three starters lock arms and physically push the horse until it is standing in the gate. If the starter doesn’t like the way the horse is standing, Blue waits until the starter moves the horse. The starters all

agree that this allows each jockey and horse to have a fair race start, or as the starters often say, “fair shake.”

“We all know this job very well. One of the most important things is that we all know what everybody else is doing as far as the job,” said Kevin Shafer, assistant starter. “That is probably why we don’t get a lot of serious injuries.”

By 1 p.m., most of the Arlington staff has already put in a full day.

Blue’s top guy, Jimmy Eilers, is a starter who does multiple tasks at the racetrack. In addition to helping start the horses in the afternoon, Eilers also exercises horses early in the morning in preparation for the day’s nine races.

“Our 11 guys have been together for so long, everyone knows what everyone else is doing as far as the job,” said Eilers. “Most of us have been here for at least 15 years or longer.”



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But it hasn't always been that way. Any of the Teamsters at Arlington can attest to that.

"This job has not always been that great," said Eilers, shaking his head. "There was a ton of turnover when I first started. In the beginning, there were just six of us on our team, only making \$50 a day. But when we got our first Teamsters contract in 1989, that's when this job turned into something really good."

"I love the Teamsters union," said Willis. "The union brought our pay scale up to date, and gave us doctor and dental benefits. Teamsters

Local 727 gave us more than what we would have gotten on our own. And we get a pay raise with every new contract."

Although the pay raises are motivating, being a starter at Arlington is not just about the money.

"I've always believed that if you can't come to work and learn something new or see something new every day, the job is not worth it," said Eilers, wiping sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand. Standing in the horse-trodden dirt in the intense afternoon heat, Eilers thinks for a moment. "I've never had a day like that as a starter yet. I doubt that I ever will."