



» MEMBER PROFILE

First-Class Teamster Valet Service

Behind the Scenes of Teamsters Local 727 Valets in the Horseracing Industry

On an especially soggy race day in August, the horses trample along the mucky track. Dark brown mud flings up from the horse's hooves, splattering the jockey's riding goggles. He struggles to peer through the mud-covered goggles, and as his visibility is reduced, he pulls down the muddy pair around his neck to reveal a new clean pair.



Mike Vinci, jockey valet and Local 727 member, shines boots for a jockey before the start of the race.

Meanwhile, in the jockey's room, Mike Vinci and other jockey valets quickly get out equipment for the next race. Vinci cleans four sets of goggles with a damp rag and layers the goggles on the helmet. He then matches the helmet's flaming red and orange colors with the silks.

"Each horse owner has his own special colors for the silks and helmets," said Vinci, holding up an interesting bright yellow square-patterned silk. "All the rest of the equipment like the saddles and goggles belong to the jockeys."

Vinci started in horseracing as a jockey for three years. He turned to a career as a jockey valet after a horse fell on him and crushed his foot.

"Being a valet is about the anticipation before the race and the nonstop action," said Vinci. "Plus, I already knew the ins and outs of the job from being a jockey."

A jockey valet assists a jockey through a day's racing. Valets take care of many tasks so jockeys focus is solely on winning. As simple as it might sound, it is an enormous responsibility.

"The jockeys would never try to go through a day without their valets," said Vinci. "There is no way they would have enough time to get all of the tasks done and be able to focus on the most important thing—preparing for the race."



» MEMBER PROFILE



Jockey valets (from left to right): Mike Vinci, Phillip Kasperski and Dennis Kucinski.

Vinci begins his day in the laundry room, gathering and folding his jockeys' clean laundry and neatly placing it in each jockey's locker. Then he tends to a number of tasks, including: taking care of the saddle weight; reading the color assignment chart and getting specific silk colors from the color room; shining boots; placing the number on the saddle to correspond with the horse's entry number in the race; assisting the jockey to dress for the race; and cleaning and stacking four pairs of race goggles on the helmet.

One of the most crucial parts of the job is tending to the saddle, otherwise referred to as a tack in the racing industry.



Vinci displays a horse's saddle cloth.

The tack must have enough weight to meet race weight specifications. If the horse is supposed to carry 120 pounds, he puts one to two pounds of lead in saddle until the jockey weighs 120 pounds.

"I always double check everything. I have to be thorough," he said. "If there is a problem with the weight, the jockey gets back on scale. If it is a pound over, I will switch tacks if I can't take any weight off."

The valet also helps the horse trainer saddle the horse before weighing in. After the race, the valet unsaddles the horse and returns riding equipment to the storage area. He or she then cleans the saddles, washes the silks and shines the boots.

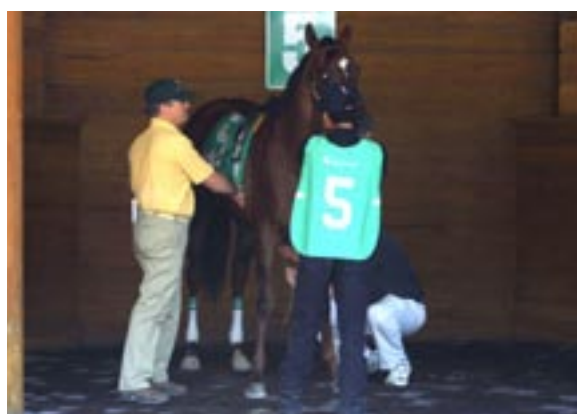
Vinci often works for three to four jockeys a year, and currently works for jockeys Earlie Fires, Jesse Campbell and Randall Meier. He also works for out-of-town riders that come in for special events such as the Arlington Million, and works at Hawthorne and Maywood racetracks.



» MEMBER PROFILE

“It’s a fast-paced and nonstop job,” he said, placing a protective safety vest onto a table for the next race.

Like many other jobs at Arlington Park Racetrack, Vinci and other jockey valets work 10-hour days or more.



“We work long hours but it’s exciting,” said Phillip Kasperski, one of Vinci’s fellow valets, carrying a tack from the scale after his rider weighed out.

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 12 jockey valets at Arlington are also

members of Teamsters Local 727.

“It was a huge change when Local 727 union came in. Every contract we ratify always gets us a nice raise, and it is so much better with the union. There is not a lot of turnover like there used to be,” said Vinci, who is a veteran of the horseracing industry for more than 28 years. “Once you get into this job, you usually stay in a while,” he grinned.

And the best part about the job?

“Every day there is something different,” he said. “I like the thrill of seeing the jockey win the races.”



» MEMBER PROFILE

The Other Valets of the Horse Racing Industry—Parking Valets

Another type of Teamster valet at the racetracks is a parking valet. A parking valet at Arlington Racetrack is a very coveted position in the parking industry. Drivers can be quite generous with the tips they bestow upon the attendants who deliver their vehicles—especially if they came out ahead at the races.



Arlington Park valet attendants greet a racetrack guest at the main entrance.

“I really enjoy it. This is a nice job,” said Jimmy Mesi, Teamsters Local 727 member and car valet. “I wouldn’t have done this job for 35 years if it weren’t,” he laughed.

Job satisfaction is high, which means openings in the field are often few and far between.

Mesi and his 11 full time staff work 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., switching locations between Arlington Park, Hawthorne and Maywood racetracks throughout the year.

The car valets work as preferred parkers and collectors. The racetrack is fully staffed

during the summer with three to four extra temporary employees. The temporary workers become Teamsters after 30 days of employment with Arlington.

“We’re out in the sun and fresh air, and I really enjoy the people that come to the track,” said Tony Marzaro, a parking valet who has worked at Arlington for 18 years. “It’s a terrific working environment.”

The parking valets give a good deal of credit to the Teamsters for their job satisfaction.

“The Teamsters got us all of these benefits and brought our pay up to date. The benefits get better at the end of every contract,” said Mesi. “Plus, management lets us do our job. Teamsters are behind us 100 percent, especially if there is a problem.”



» MEMBER PROFILE



Parking valets Tony Marzaro (left) and Jimmy Mesi (right).

and last person the racetrack guests see. Valets send you on your way with a nice, lasting memory,” said Vinci.

Mesi and Marzaro agree that the best thing about the job is they are never in the same place. They rotate locations where they are at Arlington late spring through end of summer, at Hawthorne March through May and June through August, and at Maywood Thursday nights for three random months throughout the year.

Mesi says that people skills are vital in the job. It’s very important for a valet attendant to be outgoing, friendly and ready with a smile.

“The valet is most often the first