

Growing as if by magic

AbraCadabra Farms finds its niche in pinhooking and moves to a larger property

by JoAnn Guidry

ABRACADABRA FARMS, owned by Barry and Tiki Berkelhammer and located near Ocala, is no illusion. Named for an early 1980s Steve Miller song, AbraCadabra Farms has evolved from a 20-acre make-do operation to a 250-acre full-service breeding facility.

AbraCadabra Farms has grown both in size and in sales volume. As the Berkelhammers' success in the Thoroughbred business increased, the farm physically moved from the north end of Marion County to the southern portion.

From the first modest pinhooking venture in 1983 on borrowed money from Barry Berkelhammer's mother, AbraCadabra graduates now include multiple graded stakes-winning millionaire J J'sdream and 1998 stakes winners Fantasy Lake and Mining Missharriet.

Other successful pinhooks or horses sold with AbraCadabra as agent include graded stakes winner Gold n Delicious, stakes winners Disapproved, Crusader's Poetry, Wayne's Crane, Unzipped, and graded stakes-placed Deeds Not Words. In addition, AbraCadabra was the buyer's agent for the recent auction of graded stakes winner Chip at the Fasig-Tipton Calder sale.

Three years ago, the Berkelhammers moved their growing operation to the property that previously had been Lucas Farm.

"It just came to the point where we outgrew our little farm with the half-mile track," Barry Berkelhammer said. "With the success we were having at the juvenile sales, more clients wanted to do business with us. But, when they'd come out to the farm, they were surprised and I guess disappointed by what they saw. It wasn't anything showy, but we had made it work for us. We had reached a crossroads, and we could either stay where we were or decide to move on."

Launched after college

It was not the first time the Berkelhammers had reached a turning point in their lives. Although relatively young (Barry is 37 and Tiki is 36), the couple had begun their horse careers while still in high school in the Miami area and established their first AbraCadabra Farms right out of college.

Barry, who showed halter and performance horses as a youngster in 4-H, was serving as a veterinary assistant intern when he met Tiki (given name Veronique) on a call to the hunter-jumper stable where she boarded and worked. The duo quickly realized they had much in common and soon began dating.

After high school, Barry enrolled at Florida International University in Miami as an accounting major and Tiki went to Centenary College in New Jersey to major in equine sciences. He also acquired his equine dental license and supported himself plying that trade through college.

When the couple reunited in Miami following college graduation, they

leased a show-horse stable while Barry continued his practice as an equine dentist. "We knew we wanted to be in the horse business, but we just weren't sure in what way," he said. "In my equine dentist practice, I had quiet a few clients on the race-tracks in Miami. We had even started taking a few layups but really hadn't thought about getting into the racing business. My racetrack clients kept telling me about Ocala, so finally we decided to check it out."

During a weekend trip, the Berkelhammers became smitten with Ocala. "We just fell in love with the area and knew that this was the place to be if

the 1985 OBSC February juvenile sale at Calder. Again, not a big return of profit, but it was better than the first. And the colt named Timely Albert went on to become a multiple stakes winner and earner of \$198,880. It was just the kind of advertising that AbraCadabra Farms needed.

"Timely Albert did us a lot of good," Barry Berkelhammer said. "He proved that we could sell a good horse. And by 'good,' I mean a horse that goes on to do well on the race-track. High prices in the sales ring sound good, but if the horse doesn't go on to perform well, you're not going to last long in this business."

of True to Romeo, by Gallant Romeo, for \$32,000 as agent for his breeder, Don Conrad. Scratched from the 1985 Fasig-Tipton Kentucky July yearling sale, the colt had been sent to AbraCadabra to be broken, trained, and prepared for sale. The colt, Wayne's Crane, became a multiple stakes winner and earner of \$339,378.

Definitely on a roll, AbraCadabra in 1987 sold stakes winner Unzipped and graded stakes-placed Impersonator. Unzipped was a \$9,000 OBSC October weanling purchase who sold for \$65,000 at the 1987 OBSC February at Calder sale and went on to earn \$150,560. Impersonator was

Mottola purchased 125 acres of Lucas Farm. Gary Mottola is a New York corporate lawyer; he and his wife have been AbraCadabra clients for some ten years. In addition to the training track, the farm contained two barns with 25 stalls and the main residence.

"The farm basically had everything we were looking for," Berkelhammer said. "It was in excellent condition and we could build on what was already in place."

Built training barn

First on the renovations list was a training barn. The concrete block, 30-stall barn is open and airy, with a high-peaked roof for ventilation, and it is accented with cedar trim. The barn has an extra wide outside shedrow for jogging the horses, two enclosed hot walkers (one for colts and one for fillies), and a high-walled, wooden round pen.

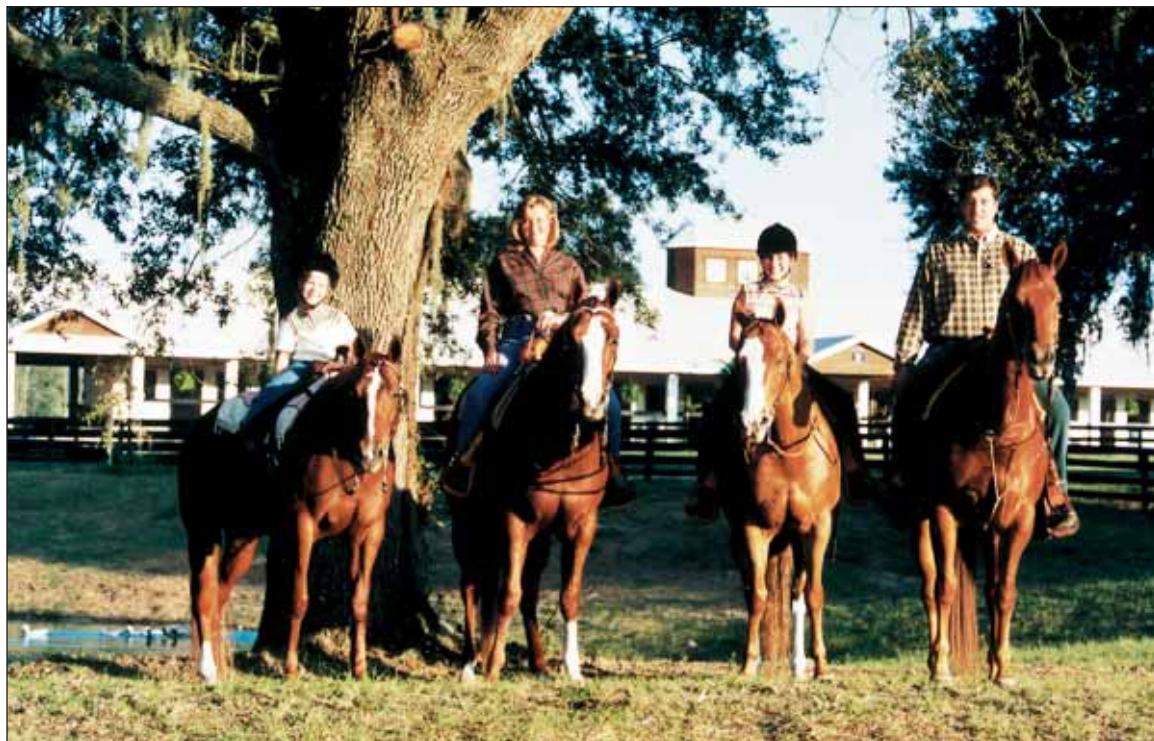
A recent project involved adding 125 acres and expanding the broodmare facilities of AbraCadabra. Shortly after the Berkelhammers and Mottolas bought the training portion of Lucas Farm, Dr. David Menard and his wife, Laurie, acquired the remaining acreage as a breeding-boarding operation. Operating as Magnolia Run Farm, the Menards stood the stallions Bionic Prospect and Stuka. When the Berkelhammers had the chance to buy that operation in late 1998, they decided to expand once again.

The Berkelhammers feel that the focus of AbraCadabra will always be breaking, training, and sales prep- ping. "It's what has gotten us where we are," Berkelhammer said. "Buying the additional acreage and facilities will allow us to provide better service to our clients who have broodmares. But what we're really about is turning out racehorses."

They look, he said, for "a quality, balanced athlete that is correct enough to stay sound. Pedigree is nice but the horse has to be able to perform. Depending on the horse, our price range can be anywhere from \$10,000-to-\$100,000."

The Berkelhammers have watched the evolution of the pinhooking business from the inside. "I feel like we were in on the first wave of pinhookers," Berkelhammer said. "Before, it was the big farms like Ocala Stud and Farnsworth Farms that were dominating the two-year-old sales, but now it's the pinhookers. It's become a big, big business."

"We feel fortunate to have been part of that growth and proud to be considered pinhookers. When you look at the racehorses that are coming out of the two-year-old sales, you see the impact being made. We're supplying quality racehorses and we're proud of that." 🐾



Cindy Mikell photo

AT HOME ON NEW ABRACADABRA PROPERTY

On horseback are, from left, Kaylee, Tiki, Erinn, and Barry Berkelhammer

we were going to be in the Thoroughbred business," he said.

With track and apartment

Not long after that visit, they bought a 20-acre farm that had a half-mile track and a barn apartment where they could live. "We had no money and no horses, but we knew we were doing what we wanted to do," said Barry, who would continue his dentistry practice and acquire a trainer's license. They were married in June 1985.

AbraCadabra Farms' first official pinhook came in 1983 with the purchase of a Break Up the Game filly for \$1,600 at the Ocala Breeders' Sales Co. (OBSC) September yearling sale. Seven months later, the filly sold for \$4,700 at the 1984 OBSC April horses of racing age sale. It was not a pinhooking home run—after expenses, it would be more like an infield single—but from that less than spectacular start the fortunes of AbraCadabra Farms would get better.

At the 1984 OBSC August yearling sale, the Berkelhammers paid \$5,000 for a colt by First Albert out of Timely Moment, by Francis S. He was subsequently sold for \$27,000 at

The first major profit-maker for AbraCadabra was a Shecky Greene filly bought for client Charlie Deters at the 1985 Keeneland September sale for \$7,500. She was later sold for \$48,000 at the 1986 OBSC two-year-olds in training sale. Racing as Highland Greene, she was stakes-placed at Woodbine.

Sells Wayne's Crane

Also that year at the Fasig-Tipton Florida February juvenile sale, AbraCadabra sold a colt by L'Enjoleur out

bought for \$35,000 at the 1986 Fasig-Tipton Kentucky September yearling sales, sold for \$50,000 as a juvenile at the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky April sale, and banked \$347,493 on the track.

"Everything just seemed to fall into place," Berkelhammer said. "We were selling well, the horses were going on to run well, and our client list was growing. Many of our clients wanted to send the horses to us after the sale to freshen and then get ready for the racetrack. But, with our operation such as it was, we just couldn't accommodate them. We made the decision to expand and started looking for another farm."

At the far end of Marion County was Lucas Farm, previously the home of Glitterman. The farm, encompassing approximately 250 acres, had been on the market for several years. It was the six-furlong training track that attracted the Berkelhammers to Lucas Farm.

"It was a very well-built, well-maintained track with a great cushion for young horses and layups," Barry Berkelhammer said.

In March 1996, the Berkelhammers and partners Gary and Irene

AbraCadabra Farms

Location: Ocala, Florida
Owners: Barry, Tiki (Veronique) Berkelhammer and Gary and Irene Mottola
Acreage: 270
Facilities: Six-furlong training track, training barn, hot walkers, wooden round pen, viewing stand, broodmare barns, main residence
Notable pinhooking transactions: Jackpot Julep (first pinhook), Timely Albert, Highland Greene, Wayne's Crane, Unzipped, Impersonator
Stakes horses sold as agent: Gold n Delicious, Disapproved, Crusader's Poetry, Deeds Not Words, J J'sdream, Fantasy Lake, Mining Missharriet