

Southeast

ALABAMA FLORIDA GEORGIA MISSISSIPPI
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Helen and Joe Barbazon
purchased their first
farm in 1983

Pleasant Ways

Barbazons do it all at Pleasant Acres

BY CYNTHIA McFARLAND
PHOTOS BY JOE DIORIO

MANY COUPLES CAN say they were introduced by a friend—or today—even through an app. Joe and Helen Barbazon of Pleasant Acres Farm can legitimately say they were introduced by horses: A shared passion for Thoroughbreds brought them together nearly four decades ago.

Originally from New Orleans, Joe got his trainer's license in the early 1970s and eventually followed the horses to Florida, where he worked at several farms around Ocala, including Grosse Pointe and Irish Acres. It was at Noel Hickey's Irish Acres that Joe, who was working in the training end of the operation, met Helen Longo, who was caring for horses in the lay-up barn.

A native of Long Island, N.Y., Helen and her family had moved to

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Pleasant Acres Stallions.....57, 59
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2020 LEADING SIRES IN FLORIDA


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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2020 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2020 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	KHOZAN (12, Distorted Humor), Journeyman Stallions	\$10,000	43/15	1/1	0/1	(Liam's Lucky Charm, \$109,000)	\$692,742	*108	2	1.43	1.41
2	FIRST DUDE (07, Stephen Got Even), Double Diamond Farm	\$7,500	78/25	1/1	0/1	(Rogue Too, \$67,845)	\$687,193	389	13	1.18	1.21
3	ADIOS CHARLIE (08, Indian Charlie), Ocala Stud	\$4,000	54/16	1/2	0/1	(Jean Elizabeth, \$134,280)	\$521,133	223	7	1.51	1.23
4	BRETHREN (08, Distorted Humor), Arindel Farm	\$7,500	62/15	1/1	0/1	(Cookie Dough, \$92,070)	\$490,919	172	4	1.33	1.55
5	AWESOME OF COURSE (00, Awesome Again), Ocala Stud	\$4,000	36/9	1/1	0/1	(Shivaree, \$238,935)	\$453,094	*267	12	1.31	1.29
6	GONE ASTRAY (06, Dixie Union), Northwest Stud	\$4,500	51/16	1/1	1/1	(Noble Drama, \$123,520)	\$451,891	*272	8	0.94	1.09
7	THE BIG BEAST (11, Yes It's True), Ocala Stud	\$6,000	25/11	1/1	0/1	(Up in Smoke, \$80,500)	\$426,379	75	1	1.05	1.36
8	BIG DRAMA (06, Montbrook), Oakton Farm Stallions	\$5,000	51/17	0/0	0/0	(Bucky's Drama, \$34,600)	\$419,656	257	4	0.87	1.25
9	SONGANDAPRAYER (98, Unbridled's Song)	Pnsd	67/16	0/0	0/0	(Boston Cadillac, \$35,735)	\$390,376	*1050	37	1.08	1.38
10	FIELD COMMISSION (05, Service Stripe), Solera Farm	\$2,500	35/10	0/0	0/0	(Drafted, \$60,011)	\$336,393	162	2	0.83	0.97
11	TREASURE BEACH (GB) (08, Galileo), Pleasant Acres Stallions	\$7,500	75/9	0/0	0/0	(La Renoleta, \$52,800)	\$303,195	*418	2	1.10	1.40
12	HANDSOME MIKE (09, Scat Daddy), Pleasant Acres Stallions	\$4,000	50/15	0/0	0/0	(Real Doozie, \$23,630)	\$294,089	109	0	0.70	0.82
13	OVERDRIVEN (09, Tale of the Cat)	Pnsd	28/7	0/0	0/0	(Sassy But Smart, \$43,150)	\$243,039	160	3	0.94	1.15
14	J P'S GUSTO (08, Successful Appeal)	N/A	22/10	0/0	0/0	(Vinnie Van Go, \$31,440)	\$194,501	92	3	1.05	1.06
15	RATTLESNAKE BRIDGE (08, Tapit)	N/A	33/11	0/0	0/0	(Loriloupies, \$23,900)	\$163,652	137	0	0.49	1.02
16	CAJUN BREEZE (08, Congrats), Stonehedge Farm South	Private	10/5	1/1	0/1	(Cajun Casanova, \$83,918)	\$145,510	29	2	1.72	1.33
17	WINSLOW HOMER (07, Unbridled's Song)	N/A	16/6	0/0	0/0	(Home Run Trick, \$51,968)	\$142,299	73	0	0.77	1.06
18	HIGH COTTON (03, Dixie Union)	Pnsd	24/9	0/0	0/0	(Legacy Azteca, \$24,135)	\$135,168	*411	11	0.94	1.21
19	GREATNESS (99, Mr. Prospector), Solera Farm	\$2,500	17/3	1/1	0/1	(Lady's Island, \$49,400)	\$127,991	*262	8	1.30	1.00
20	FLASHSTORM (04, Storm Cat)	N/A	22/6	0/0	0/0	(Flashndynamite, \$47,700)	\$122,371	120	3	0.87	0.92

Citrus County, Fla., when she was just 9. Determined to find a career with horses, Helen took her early experience with Quarter Horses into her first job working for a Thoroughbred trainer in Ocala in 1981.

After marrying in 1983, Joe and Helen started their own operation, buying a 10-acre farm that they christened Pleasant Acres in the heart of horse country.

"We did all the work ourselves, plus other part-time jobs. Joe would be racing in Tampa, and I'd be here in Ocala. At the time we had a handful of mares and would sell these foals, typically as weanlings.

Any we didn't sell, we would race," Helen recalled.

Through the years, as money came in from horses they sold—many out of their foundation mare, Sightseeing—the Barbazons bought additional land until they owned 100 acres on both sides of the road from their original 10 acres. As the farm grew, so did the number of horses—both their own and clients'. In 2001 they moved to Levy County, purchasing a large equine facility to accommodate their expanding equine population.

Pleasant Acres Farm's current 225-acre location near Morriston provides the space

they need in a striking setting with gently rolling pasture and mature live oaks. The farm features eight barns, generous paddock space and pasture, round pens, and a Eurocizer, which comes in handy both for sales prepping young horses and for lay-ups coming off the track.

Joe and Helen Barbazon were recognized as 2009 Florida breeder of the year and also received the 2008 Needles Award recognizing small breeding operations.

Through the years, boarding clients have included professional golfer Gary Player, actor Nicholas Cage, National Football League legend Bob Griese, and Major League Baseball player Victor Martinez.

As if running a full-service commercial Thoroughbred operation weren't enough activity, for a number of years the Barbazons pursued Joe's long-held dream of owning a restaurant. From 2006 to 2009, the couple owned and operated Barbazon's Bar and Grill in Ocala.

"We were always there, but when foaling season came around, we had to be on the farm," said Helen, "and anyone who's had a restaurant knows you have to be there, so after four years we closed in 2009."

HANDS-ON SUCCESS

The hands-on approach the Barbazons started with almost 40 years ago is still the way they run Pleasant Acres Farm today.

"A lot of people don't understand that the horse rules the show, and they don't



Pleasant Acres, near Morriston, Fla., spreads over 225 acres

always fit your program,” said Helen. “Whatever works best for the horse is what works for us.”

Among the best horses bred by the Barbazons are Presious Passion, Joe’s Lad, Believeinmenow, Becky’s Exchange, Tune Me In, and Fleet Valid.

Presious Passion put them on the map.

“We are lucky and blessed to have had Presious Passion in our lives,” said Joe.

“The dream that keeps people in this business is of having a horse like him, and many never realize that dream, so we feel blessed to have him,” said Helen. “He was out of a mare (Princesa’s Passion, by Marquetry) we received for a board bill,” explained Helen. “She broke her hip in the starting gate, and after a year to heal from that, she was bred to Royal Anthem in Kentucky.”

The Barbazons sold the resulting foal as a yearling to longtime clients Frank and Patricia Generazio.

“The Generazios are like family to us and have put so much into this industry,” said Helen. “They’ve done so well with their own homebreds, including multiple graded stakes winners Pure Sensation (\$1,998,550) and Disco Partner (\$1,487,560), who set a world record for six furlongs (on turf at Belmont Park).”

Indeed, for the 50 years that Frank and Patricia Generazio, of Jupiter, Fla., have been in the Thoroughbred business, they have had horses at Pleasant Acres Farm for almost three decades.

“In the 1990s we were looking for a place to board horses and met Joe and Helen. It grew from there, and now we have about 35 horses with them—mares, foals, and yearlings until they’re ready to break. Then after breaking, the yearlings go back to Pleasant Acres and stay there until they’re ready to ship to the racetrack,” said Frank Generazio, adding that they race mostly in New York and Florida.

The Generazios enjoy monthly trips to Ocala to visit their horses and end the day by going to dinner with Joe and Helen.

PRESIOUS PASSION

Presious Passion, a multiple grade 1 winner, was Florida-bred champion turf male in 2008 and 2009, champion older male in 2009, and 2009 Florida-bred horse of the year. The chestnut gelding, who was trained by Mary Hartmann, started his career in 2005 and raced for



Farm favorite is Presious Passion

seven years, compiling a record of 14-7-2 in 51 starts and earned \$2,694,599. Among his graded victories are the 2009 Clement L. Hirsch Memorial Turf Championship Stakes (G1T); 2008-09 United Nations Stakes (G1T); 2009-10 Mac Diarmida Stakes (G2T); 2007-08 W.L. Mc-Knight Handicap (G2T); 2008 Pan American Handicap (G3T); and 2007 Cliff Hanger Stakes (G3T).

Presious Passion ended his stellar turf career at age 9, and the Barbazons were thrilled to offer the Generazios’ gelding a home for life at Pleasant Acres Farm.

His dam, Princesa’s Passion, was 2009 Florida broodmare of the year.

Presious Passion, now 17, shares his pasture with another pensioned stakes winner, the 24-year-old mare Mop Squeezer.

The personable retiree is a favorite of visitors. Tours of the farm include the stallion barn/operations, nursery/foaling barns and Presious Passion, who loves the carrots and attention.

“He’s the reason we do farm tours and why we’ve created a 501(c)(3) non-profit, The Parade of Retired Equine Champions, which is our way of giving back to this industry that has been so good to us,” said Helen.

STALLION VENTURE

Stallions became part of the full-service farm when the Barbazons launched Pleasant Acres Stallions in October 2013. It was home to 2017 leading Florida freshman sire Poseidon’s Warrior. Today, Pleasant Acres Stallions is one of the largest stallion operations in the state, standing nine stallions for the 2020 season, including:

- Amira’s Prince (Teofilo—Twice The Ease, by Green Desert);
- Buccherio (Kantharos—Meetmeontime, by General Meeting);
- Handsome Mike (Scat Daddy—Classic Strike, by Smart Strike);
- Long On Value (Value Plus—Long Message, by Orientate);
- Neolithic (Harlan’s Holiday—Swingit, by Victory Gallop);
- Ride On Curlin (Curlin—Magical Ride, by Storm Cat);
- Squadron A (Unbridled’s Song—Peaks Mill, by Stalwart);
- Too Discreet (Discreet Cat—To Marquet, by Marquetry);
- Treasure Beach (Galileo—Honorine, by Mark of Esteem).

“We decided something needed to be done to raise the bar,” said Helen.

“We have always liked turf pedigrees, and, of course, Galileo is one of the best, and Teofilo is also turf,” said Joe. “We’re proud to have millionaire sons of Curlin, Scat Daddy, and Kantharos, and the leading money-earning son of Harlan’s Holi-

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in the states featured in this section (stallions that are dead or exported prior to 2016 are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through April 5, 2020. As supplied to BloodHorse by The Jockey Club Information Systems, Inc., earnings include adjusted money from Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Adjusted earnings are put on par with average North American earnings from the previous year. For example, the average North American purse in 2018 is \$25,300 or 50% of the 2018 average purse in Japan. To put earnings on par, all Japanese progeny earnings are multiplied by 53% before being credited to a sire’s progeny earnings. Hong Kong earnings are adjusted by 17%; Singapore by 85%. Current year stakes winners include all Northern Hemisphere black-type stakes results from all available countries. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners include all countries. (A ¶ indicates a sire represented by his first crop to race).

*AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX and COMPARABLE INDEX: Lifetime AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX indicates how much purse money the progeny of one sire has earned in relation to the average earnings of all runners in the same years; average earnings of all runners in any year is represented by an index of 1.00; COMPARABLE INDEX indicates the average earnings of progeny produced from mares bred to one sire, when these same mares were bred to other sires. Only 32% of all sires have a lifetime AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX higher than their mares’ COMPARABLE INDEX.

day. Our stallion roster has it all.”

“Our goal was to bring some of the best sons of the hottest sires. Florida breeders like speed. Buccheri, Neolithic, Ride On Curlin, and Handsome Mike all hit the mark,” said Helen. “The stallions standing here now started their careers here. We’re excited about all of them; you never know where the next champion will come from. Hopefully, this whole business of limiting stallions to 140 mares will help stallions everywhere, including here in Florida.”

While the Sunshine State can boast of launching some stellar stallions, including such notables as Mr. Prospector, Fappiano, and more recently, Kantharos, the tough truth for Florida is that those horses left for breeding sheds in Kentucky.

“We’re trying to remedy the old issue of once a Florida stallion gets hot, he moves to Kentucky,” said Helen. “We’ve been breeders since 1983. Although we have a few mares of our own whom we send to Kentucky stallions, we continue to support our stallions with some of our better mares here in Florida, and we appreciate the continued support from fellow Florida breeders.”

HOT START

The Barbazons note that their stallions have been very well received. For example, Buccheri, the multiple graded stakes-winning son of Kantharos, bred 130 mares in 2019.

After Buccheri had won his second Woodford Stakes Presented by Keeneland Select (G2T) in 2018 and his ownership group, Ironhorse Racing Stable, knew the horse would be retiring soon, the search was on to find the right location for him to stand.

“We looked around and it was kind of a no-brainer to be in Florida and follow up Kantharos. We asked people we knew and after meeting Joe (Barbazon), who is as good a guy as they come, we decided Pleasant Acres would be the best place for him,” said Ironhorse Racing managing partner Harlan Malter, who resides in Southern California.

“We mesh very well with Joe and Helen, and they do an unbelievable job taking care of the farm and Buccheri. It’s been



Buccheri, by Kantharos, is a multiple grade 2 winner

a very unique partnership in that I’ve personally been very active in his stallion career,” said Malter. “A lot of places wouldn’t have been receptive to that, but they’ve allowed a real partnership to develop and working closely with Christine Jones (Pleasant Acres office manager), we have been thrilled with the results.

“When people see Buccheri, he sells himself. For me it’s been a surreal experience because I’ve been in touch with so many of the breeders in Florida,” added Malter, who even launched two Buccheri websites, including one specifically featuring the young sire’s foals (Buccheribaby.com).

“Now that the babies are coming, it’s exciting to share the excitement with these breeders, especially in this time when there’s been despair in the country.”

FLORIDA ACTION

During breeding season Pleasant Acres Farm is home to as many as 150 horses. Approximately 100 mares deliver foals there each year, and in addition to mare/foal/weanling/yearling care, the farm also handles sales prep. The Barbazons rely on a dedicated and talented crew, including son, Travis, to keep everything running smoothly.

Although farm responsibilities remain front and center, in August 2019, Helen obtained her Florida real estate license.

“It was something I always wanted to do, but I never had the time,” said Helen, who enjoys researching property and evaluating its options and potential.

With the massive World Equestrian Center slated to open January 2021, she is excited about the boost this show facility is already bringing to area real estate and how it will impact the future.

“It’s going to change the face of our county. I see it as a good thing for the equine industry here,” said Helen.

“Florida is hands down the best place to raise a foal. Kentucky might be the horse capital of racing, but Florida affords equines the ability to spend most of their lives outside,” she said. “Whether our clients’ foals are born in Kentucky or New York, or somewhere else, once those foals are weaned, they send them to us here.

“The Sunshine State is rich with limestone and minerals, and other than coming in the barn to eat and be checked over twice daily, the rest of the time horses are free to run outside.”

LOOKING FORWARD

Life in the horse industry has been anything but “business as usual” over the past couple of months.

“The trickle down effect of COVID-19 takes a toll on all industries, including ours,” said Joe. “On the positive side, for most farms, we are located in rural communities away from the large populations. We continue to adhere to all CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) regulations. We hope for a quick global recovery.” **BH**

Cynthia McFarland is a freelance writer based in Ocala, Fla.