

Spotlight On: FHBPA Board Member Kathy Davey

“It was fun!”

That’s Kathy Davey’s explanation for the diverging paths she has traveled in her life. But she found her true north when she followed the road that, ironically, led south, to the life she loves now as an owner and trainer at Gulfstream Park.



“I can’t imagine doing anything else,” Davey said. “I’ve certainly done a lot of interesting things, but racing, the horses – that’s it for me. I can’t believe it took me so long to get here.”

The native New Englander arrived on the South Florida racing scene in 2007, and was first elected to the FHBPA Board in 2010. Before that? She spent more than 30 years in Vermont, raising daughter Marnie and son Griffin, and working in education, politics, and even community theater.

Davey was born in Connecticut, moving to Pennsylvania with her family when she was in the fourth grade. She attended Penn State University and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees, then set a course for Vermont with her future husband, poised for a career in academia. Over the years, she worked as a guidance counsellor and as Director of Student Services at New Hampshire Community Technical Colleges.

“My plan out of college was to be a counsellor,” she explained. “And I liked counselling, but it was tough. I thought I’d be helping people, but it involved a lot of other things – a lot of politics.”

That observation sent Davey in a new direction. She became the Town Clerk for tiny Strafford, Vermont, southeast of the state’s capital, and was elected to the Board of the League of Cities and Towns, eventually becoming president of that organization. She nearly went to work for Bernie Sanders, who was Mayor of Burlington at the time, but instead returned to education to serve as Director of Career Services for the Engineering School at Dartmouth College.

“That was a really good job – finding jobs for students, helping them with interview skills, having recruiters come in,” Davey said. “I really enjoyed it. I was at Dartmouth for about eight years, then I quit because I decided to run a theater company.”

Explaining the sudden change of direction, she added, “I was doing community theater as an actor, and I had the chance to take over a theater in White River Junction. We did it for one or two seasons. It was called the Upstairs Stage; it was upstairs in an old hotel. We didn’t make much money, but it was fun.”

After her brief stint in show business, Davey took her last job in Vermont as Coordinator of Academic Services at the Community College of Vermont where, she said, “Everyone was a generalist.” Her duties included advising students, doing administrative work, and teaching courses as diverse as basic algebra, psychology, business and professional writing.

“The pay was terrible – it still is,” she said, but added her constant refrain, “It was fun!”

Through it all, horses were a constant.

“I fell in love with horses early, early, early,” Davey said. “There was a picture taken when I was in nursery school, we had a birthday party and they brought in a pony. I was furious that I didn’t get to ride - only the birthday boy got to do that. I have always been fascinated by horses. I love them.”



She took riding lessons after settling in Pennsylvania, and competed in eventing and show jumping. The budding horsewoman also developed an interest in horse racing.

“Nobody in my family was really into horses, but my Dad was into racing and he got me into it,” she said. “On Saturdays, we would watch whatever races were on TV. We never missed the Derby.”

Her first crush as a teenager was a hard-knocking claiming horse who spent his winter vacations at the stable where she rode.

“That was back when nobody raced year-round, so there were a couple of racehorses staying there for the winter and I fell in love with one of them – Amadis,” she recalled. “I rode him all winter. Eventually he was claimed and the new owner moved him to New Hampshire; I was heartbroken. He was the love of my life for many years.”

She got a step closer to the track when taking a summer job at what was then Keystone, outside of Philadelphia.

“I met Milton Wolfson after I completed grad school, in 1973 – he was a science teacher in Warminster, Pennsylvania, and I was a guidance counsellor,” Davey reminisced. “We were both interested in horses and we became friends. He and his wife had just opened a tack shop at Keystone, and I went to work for them for a few summers. He also trained a few horses, and I’d go to the track to watch them run. I still have a winner’s circle picture with them from when I was 24.”

The friends went their separate ways, Davey moving to Vermont and the Wolfsons relocating to south Florida. Then, by chance, they reconnected.

“One day I was in Vermont, watching TVG, and I heard his name,” Davey said. “It had been 30 years. I thought, ‘Milton Wolfson – is he still around?’

“He was running at Gulfstream Park, and I was planning a trip to Florida for spring training – I was big baseball nut - so I got in touch with him and asked if I could come see him and the horses. I didn’t know if I would hear from him, but he got back to me and said ‘sure!’”

Sadly, Wolfson’s wife passed away over the winter, and Davey was unsure if a spring visit still would be welcome. But the trainer assured her it was.

“The rest is history,” Davey said. “Milt was quite a bit older, but we had been pretty good friends way back, and it took off from there. I went to see him in the spring and came back down to Ocala a few months later. I moved to Florida that July.”

She left the academic world behind, and never looked back.

“I jumped right into racing,” she said. “I became Milt’s assistant.”

The couple worked side by side for more than 10 years.

“Most of the time, it was pretty good,” Davey said with a smile. “We got along very well. If we had a disagreement, it was a big disagreement, but that wasn’t very often at all.”



Not long after joining forces with Wolfson, Davey decided to throw her name into the hat for the 2010 FHBPA Election.

"I'd only been here three or four years and I didn't think I'd get on the Board," she remarked. "But I thought I could make a contribution. I thought I could help keep racing going, and the benevolence that the FHBPA provides to the backstretch is an

honorable thing to do. The workers are such great people."

Davey enjoys listening to the concerns of her fellow horsemen, and trying to make a difference. But even in the relatively short time that she has been in south Florida, she has seen changes that worry her.

"When I was first here, we were stabled at Calder, you'd have a parking lot full of cars, there were so many people there," she said. "It was a great place to watch racing. You could sit in the box, or go upstairs for a fabulous meal. That wasn't so long ago.

"Every year it gets a little more difficult – not just here, nationwide, really," she added. "The horse population isn't as strong and healthy as it used to be. The breed has weakened over time. The breeding industry in Florida has changed quite a bit – every year, there are fewer and fewer mares bred."

As a small outfit, Davey also knows firsthand the struggle of going up against the big stables.

"I wish there weren't so many big, big trainers with 150 horses or more," she said. "The competition is intense, it's very difficult to be a small trainer. You can't blame anyone, it's just the way it is."

Times got even tougher for Davey in 2018. Wolfson developed a rare condition that attacked the nerves in his spine, and became paralyzed. Still, he soldiered on, coming out to the barn more days than not as long as he could.

"He was in and out of the hospital, but he was still able to come to the track for a while," Davey said. "Manny Parra, who had been with him 30 years, and the exercise rider would help get him into the golf cart. He could still be involved, he could still watch the horses train, but he couldn't be hands-on, and he loved being hands-on with the horses. It was a trial."

Wolfson passed away in 2020, and Davey took over the stable. It was not a hard decision to make.

"Milton taught me a lot," she said. "He was an old-timey, hands-on horseman. He really had a system that made sense to me. I hope I continue to use it pretty religiously."

She also relies on Parra, who is still a part of the operation.

"Manny started with Milt in 1991, Milt was like a father to him," Davey said. "I couldn't do it without Manny."

She concluded, "I'm glad I took over the stable, definitely. I didn't know otherwise. Getting up at 4 a.m., I know, it's crazy. And it's expensive – all of the horses I train are my own. But sometimes, when I'm walking back from the track on a beautiful morning, I think, 'this is so good.' More often when Milt was alive, but even now. I really do love it."

Photo 1 – Kathy Davey

Photo 2 – Kathy Davey with daughter Marnie and son Griffin

Photo 3 – Kathy Davey (far left) with the FHBPA Scholarship students