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Churchill chairman selling Hermitage Farm

By Gregory A. Hall • ghall@courier-journal.com • April 28, 2010

Churchill Downs Inc. Chairman Carl Pollard is selling his Hermitage Farm — the historic Goshen thoroughbred breeding operation — to Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, the parties announced Wednesday.

Under a lease, Pollard will continue to live there and operate it as a thoroughbred farm at least through the lease's expiration at the end of 2013.

Brown and Wilson previously bought about 180 acres of mostly unimproved land on the 700-acre farm from Pollard in 2003 and have leased that back to him for the last seven years.

"It's a breeding farm that's (got) great tradition and history in Kentucky and our interest is preserving the farm and making it more vibrant and developing more horse activities in order to save the farm," Wilson said. "We don't want to just make a park out of it."

Pollard said he'll be 75 when the lease

expires and that the sale and lease allow him to protect his employees while not forcing his children to manage the farm.

But Pollard could stay longer if he wants, Wilson said, noting they are friends.

"We would like for him to stay there as long as he wants," Wilson said.

Pollard said he may keep some mares at Hermitage as a boarder if the new owners continue to have a thoroughbred operation and the existing staff remains in place.

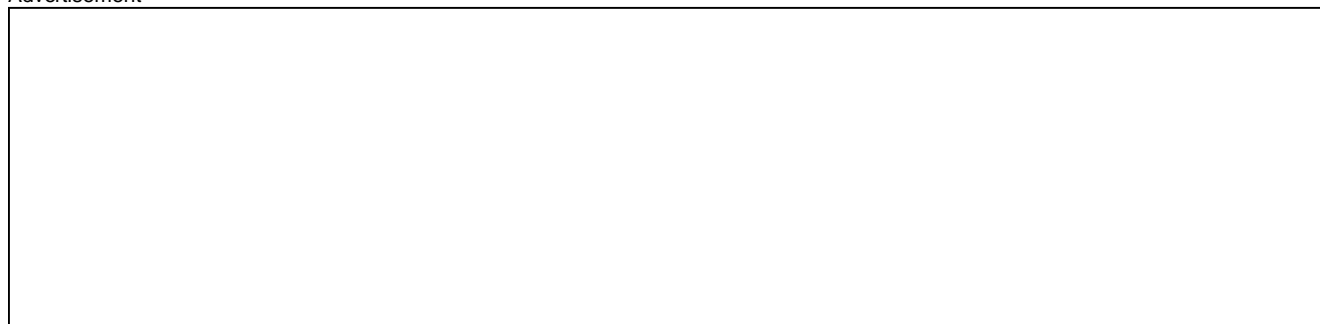
"I think that'll all be determined over the next couple years when he kind of sees what we're doing," Pollard said.

Pollard said he has 25 mares now, but the number could be down to 15 by the time the lease runs out.

"I plan to keep a few mares as long as I'm able," saying he has 25 now and that may be down to 15 by the time the lease runs out.

Pollard has been Churchill's board chairman since 2001 and previously was a health care executive.

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He bought the farm in 1995 from the family of the late Warner Jones, a former Churchill board chairman.

Hermitage was the home of 1953 Kentucky Derby winner Dark Star, who Jones bred. In 1985, Hermitage sold the then-unnamed Seattle Dancer at the Keeneland July yearling sale for a world-record yearling price of \$13.1 million.

Wilson said that while he owns no thoroughbreds, he owns other breeds and horses will be at the center of whatever Hermitage's future holds.

"I'd like to see the Valhalla of horse farms available to horse lovers," he said.

Brown and Wilson own the 21c Museum Hotel and are developing Museum Plaza in downtown Louisville. But they also own about 20 horses and live on their Woodland Farm, also in Oldham County.

Wilson said a group of environmentally conscious master planners will work on a plan for the farm, including holding meetings May 3 and 4.

"It certainly won't be developed as a subdivision," he said. "We might build an indoor arena for training purposes."

Possibilities imagined by Wilson include a steeplechase course or facilities for three-day event competitions.

He said he hopes there would always be a part of the farm used as Pollard currently

does.

Wilson said their trail riding pleasure horses would remain at their Woodland Farm and that the ones in training for carriage driving, a sport he's taken up, will be at Hermitage with his driving trainer, who moved there and brought several clients.

The farm also hopes to be open for competitors in the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games to compete and train before the games, which start in September at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, Wilson said.

The price in the deal, which is expected to be completed by the end of May, was not disclosed.

Reporter Gregory A. Hall can be reached at (502) 582-4087.

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