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PROFILE

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THE FUTURE

J. KIRK AND JUDY ROBISON

BY EMILY SHIELDS

From Sept. 4-7, Kirk and Judy Robison had the biggest racing weekend of their lives. The married duo not only won the Runhappy Hopeful Stakes (G1) at Saratoga, but also took the \$94,000 I'm Smokin Stakes at Del Mar with a homebred.

"Winning at the highest level at both Del Mar and

Saratoga is pretty hard to do," Kirk Robison said. "That we did it on the same weekend is pretty cool."

Kirk Robison grew up in Southern California and frequented Santa Anita and Hollywood Park with his father.

"I caught the bug early and never lost it," Robison said.

Kirk met Judy when they were students at San Jose State University, and he affectionately calls her, "my

first and only wife."

"She supports what I do—even though she's not as into it as I am—she's very supportive. We have nine grandchildren who send me texts and emails about it all. We've taken the kids to Santa Anita and Del Mar for the summertime. It is an experience I'm trying to pass to my kids and grandkids."

Two decades ago, Robison not only began to buy yearlings at auction, but also tried his hand at the claiming game.

"I have lots of history in claiming horses, breeding state-breds, and buying them. I have been trying to get a good one any way I can."

The first real "good one" was Vertical Oak, a \$20,000 yearling purchase who went on to earn \$773,095. The Kentucky-bred daughter of Giant Oak—Vertical Vision, by Pollard's Vision, won nine times, including the Prioress Stakes (G2) at Saratoga and the Adena Springs Miss Preakness Stakes (G3) at Pimlico in 2017. She sold in foal to Into Mischief last year for \$700,000.

"She was a really good filly who could really run," Robison said.

Enter Jackie's Warrior, another horse who can really run. The juvenile son of Maclean's Music—Unicorn Girl, by A. P. Five Hundred, is unbeaten in three starts. Robison paid \$95,000 for him at the 2019 Keeneland September yearling sale; the dual stakes winner has earned back \$265,064. He started his career with a 2½-length score at Churchill Downs, then



COURTESY OF ROBISON FAMILY

Judy and J. Kirk Robison in the paddock at Santa Anita



won the \$150,000 Saratoga Special Stakes Presented by Miller Lite (G2) Aug. 7.

In the \$250,000 Hopeful Stakes, a prestigious event with 116 years of history, Jackie's Warrior swooped to the lead early and ran away 2¼ lengths clear of favored Reinvestment Risk. Steve Asmussen trains Jackie's Warrior for the Robisons.

While success in New York is something no horse person would turn down, it isn't the area where the Robisons are concentrating their breeding program. The El Paso, Texas, couple have 10 broodmares at Ballena Vista Farm in Ramona, Calif., and another dozen in New Mexico.

"Our hometown track is Sunland Park," Robison said. "It is just over the Texas border." He noted that the rich Sunland Park Derby (G3), a prep race for the Kentucky Derby, has put the track on the national map.

Robison also noted that the state-bred programs differ between New Mexico and California.

"The horse has to be by a New Mexico stallion and foaled here as well," he said. "You can't ship in a mare bred to an outside stallion like you can in California. It protects the studs from outside competition, but I'm not sure if that's a good or bad thing."

Robison may invade the Cal-bred ranks next year, with eight yearlings currently being broken in New Mexico.

"I've got them by Street Sense, Dixie Chatter, Danzing Candy, Smiling Tiger, and Grazen," he said. "They are a nice population of horses. They will all go to Peter Miller next year."

Miller also trains Good With People, a homebred colt by Curlin to Mischief out of the stakes-winning Roar of the Tiger mare Gator Prowl and winner of the I'm Smokin. The Robisons purchased Gator Prowl for \$15,000 at the 2010 Keeneland November sale



CHELSEA DURAND/NYRA

Kirk and Judy Robison's big coast-to-coast weekend began with Jackie's Warrior's victory in Saratoga's Hopeful...



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...and ended with their homebred Good With People's triumph in the I'm Smokin Stakes at Del Mar

western Prowl and Diabolical Gator both won, and then the 2015 mare Fast Gator won the New Mexico Classic Cup Lassie Championship. Fast Gator ultimately won six stakes and earned \$378,065.

Good With People is Gator Prowl's next foal to race. His sire, Curlin to Mischief, never raced, but the royally bred horse by 2007 and 2008 Horse of the Year Curlin is out of Leslie's Lady, dam of Beholder, Into Mischief, and Mendelssohn. Curlin to Mischief stands at Rancho San Miguel. Good With People is a stakes winner from the stallion's first crop.

Good With People debuted July 12, winning a maiden special weight race at Del Mar by 3¼ lengths as the second choice in a field of seven. Abel Cedillo was aboard for the win. Three weeks later the pair were nailed on the line in the \$100,500 Graduation Stakes, missing by a half-length after leading throughout most of the race.

Blinkers came off for the six-furlong I'm Smokin Sept. 4, and Good With People responded with a half-length win over three rivals.

"He's a very nice colt," Robison said. Good With People now has two wins and a second in three starts for earnings of \$106,000. "He got a better Beyer Speed Figure (77) than the winner of the Del Mar Futurity (Dr. Schivel, 74). For a Cal-bred colt, that's pretty good. If he stays together, he will be a really nice horse."

Despite the roaring success of early September and the fact that both Good With People and Jackie's Warrior are pointing toward future stakes—and more grade 1 company for the latter—Robison is reserved in his excitement.

"I'm very grateful because I know it's hard," he said. "Luck is fickle—it moves around. Occasionally you get it, but sometimes you don't. Right now we have it." **CTB**

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through Litt Bloodstock, just eight months after she won the \$55,200 Marshua Stakes at Laurel Park.

Gator Prowl's first foal, Gator Heat, was a stakes-placed winner. South-