**Rillito Park Racetrack History**

Originally opened in 1943, Rillito Park Racetrack is considered the birthplace of modern, formalized Quarter Horse racing. Other advancements, including the introduction of the photo finish and the straightaway “chute system”—a standard for Quarter Horse racing today—remain a part of Rillito’s legacy.

Rillito Racetrack was built on Rukin Jelks’ stud farm. With the help of another man, Melvin H. Haskell, Jelks created a track in his backyard for him to race his personal horses. With the right people and more horses, official racing was brought to the track. Jelks and Haskell experimented with stakes races, graded races, futurities and weighted handicaps—elements of races that exist to this day. Famous horses such as Shue Fly, Piggin String and Hard Twist raced at Rillito during its early years and the track experienced measured success in the first several decades of its existence.

Thoroughbred racing was brought to the track in 1953 with the introduction of a 5 1/8-mile oval to the existing straightaway. After some tumultuous years in the 1980s, the Pima County Horsemen’s Association, led by Howard King, opened the track for Pima County Fair Racing in 1988. That year, the large crowds Rillito had been known for came back. The racetrack faced some trying times during the 1990s and 2000s, but in 2011 cooperation with the county ensured that horse racing would continue at the famous track.

Today, the Rillito Park Foundation manages the racetrack along with other park facilities including the Jelks Stud Farm house and pavilions for the farmers’ market.

**University of Arizona Race Track Industry Program**

Since the 2015 race season, Rillito Park Racetrack has extended its reach to the classroom through cooperation with the University of Arizona’s Race Track Industry Program.

The RTIP was established in 1974 as a unique program to educate students to become a part of the racing industry through both a bachelor’s and master’s degree program. Students in the program have an opportunity to learn about the industry first-hand through working at the track and in the classroom with projects related to Rillito’s operations.

From jobs in the racing office to presenting handicapping picks to the live race audience, students in the RTIP can get real-world experience at a racetrack right in the program’s own backyard.

**Rillito Park Foundation**

The Rillito Park Foundation was formed in 2011 to provide a solution to an impasse between local soccer and horse racing interests that has stymied the future of Rillito Park for years. RPF believes that through a public/private partnership with Pima County government, private donations and investments can enhance county assets to provide amenities the public deserves, while preserving Tucson’s heritage for future generations.

With over 90 acres located in the foothills of the Catalina Mountains, Rillito Park consists of Rillito Racetrack, the J. Rukin Jelks Stud Farm historic site, soccer fields and the Rillito Pavilions. The Park also serves as a festival site year-round. In 2012, Rillito Park was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. For more information, visit www.rillitoparkfoundation.org.

**Track Layout**

For more information, please contact:

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