



# *Kentucky Gentleman*

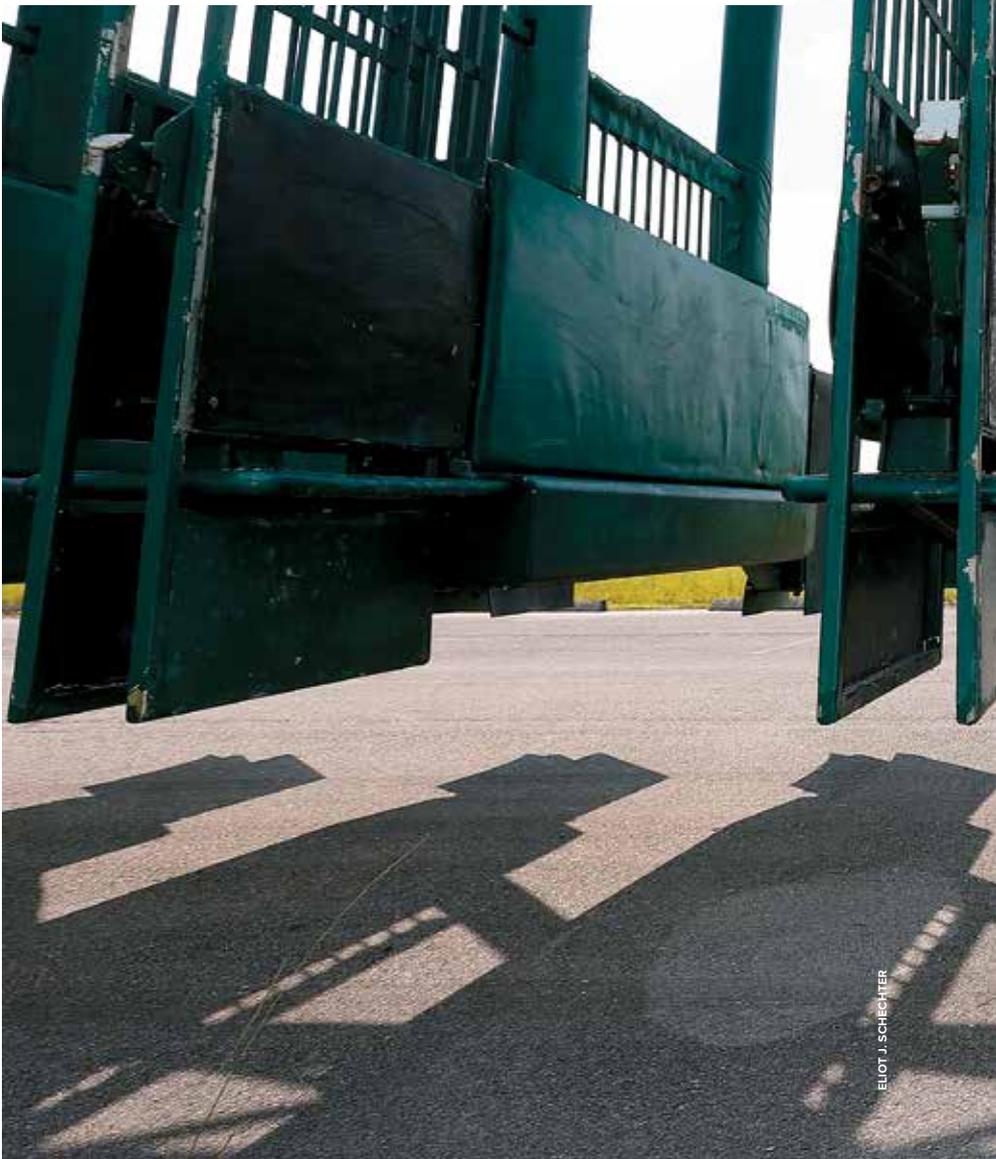
**ALEX CAMPBELL HAS QUIETLY RESHAPED LEXINGTON, QUIETLY CAMPAIGNED GRADE 1 WINNERS**

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BY EVAN HAMMONDS

**MOST EVERYONE** in the Thoroughbred business likes to win at Keeneland, but few relish it more than Lexington native Alex G. Campbell Jr. The nonagenarian has racked up a few wins at the local track, most notably when homebred Karlovy Vary landed the 2012 Central Bank Ashland Stakes (G1). In six decades in the game, he's also won at the grade 1 level from New York to Southern California.

Two of his current runners, Mean Mary and Bye Bye Melvin, both out of Karlovy Vary, are being pointed toward starts during Keeneland's Breeders' Cup World Championships stand Nov. 6-7. However,



ELIOT J. SCHECHTER



Alex G. Campbell  
Jr. is quarantin-  
ing in South  
Florida

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COVID-19 concerns come with a heavy price, and Campbell won't be able to watch from his clubhouse box.

Campbell winters in Delray, Fla., and as that's where he was when the pandemic brought most travel to a crawl, South Florida has been, and will be, his safe haven for the time being.

"Keeneland is Lexington's greatest asset," Campbell said from afar.

But there is much more to Campbell than watching his horses run at Keeneland. Hard work, drive, and business savvy have made him a success, but his philanthropy—done without fanfare—has quietly made him one of Lexington's leading civic leaders. The town's signature downtown spaces—Triangle Park and Thoroughbred Park—were made possible by Campbell's vision.

Along the way he has shared his good fortune for more than 80 years with childhood friend James E. "Ted" Bassett, the former president of Keeneland. They have been running mates since meeting in the Fayette Park enclave off North Broadway. Think of what has to happen to have a friendship endure for eight decades.

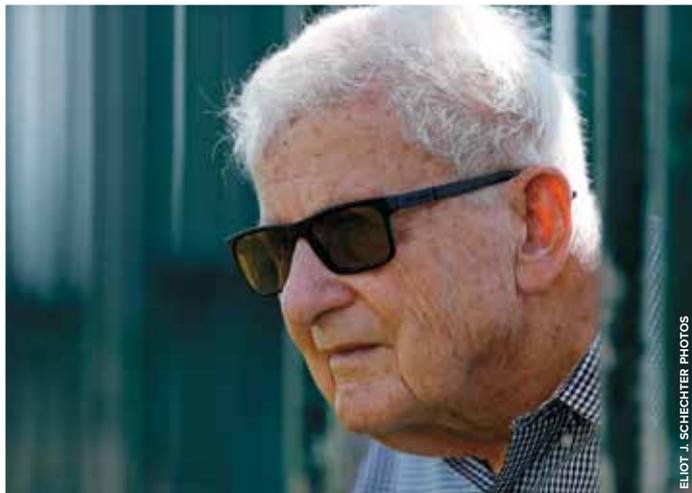
"Until this thing (COVID-19) hit us, I'd see him every day," Campbell said. "When I'm in town, we go to lunch a lot. We are both members of The Jockey Club, and we go up there every year and do a few things."

"He's my dearest, closest friend," Bassett said. "Alex and I have known each other since early childhood and have been close friends and confidants for more than 80 years. We converse almost daily. It's usually nothing important...these days it's, 'Have you made it through the day?'"

"He has been one of Lexington's most benevolent supporters. And he has supported a wide range of civic and educational projects almost unknown. He has shunned publicity most of his life."

Campbell gravitated to the track, specifically Keeneland, at an early age.

"The first thing I was really interested in



**Campbell has bred and raced several grade 1 winners in his six decades in the sport**

was racing," Campbell recalled. "I thought the owners made their money racing horses...guys like Warren Wright at Calumet Farm and E.R. Bradley. They were the two guys you saw in Lexington with the big, long black Cadillacs and a chauffeur. I thought those guys were loaded...and I wanted to get into that horse business."

Like most other children of that era in Lexington, Campbell spent a fair number of April and October afternoons at Keeneland.

His executive assistant, Anja Stieber, recalls this story from the spring of 1942:

"Mr. Campbell and three other kids were roaming around the clubhouse when they decided to all put up 50 cents and get someone to bet on a horse for them. Because the boys were not old enough to bet,

Mr. Campbell approached Charlton Clay who was a friend of his father's. All four boys liked the name Savage Sailor and asked Mr. Clay to bet \$2 to win. The horse won and paid \$212.20.

"After the win on Savage Sailor, the boys managed to make a few more good bets with Mr. Clay's help resulting in a highly successful betting day. On the way home Mr. Campbell's father saw his son sitting in the backseat of the car counting a big wad of cash. Mr. Campbell recalled the conversation he had with his dad as follows:

"Dad: 'Where'd you get all that money son?'"

"Alex: 'I won it at the races, Daddy.'"



“Dad: ‘You can’t bet on the races! How’d you bet?’

“Alex: ‘Well, four of us bet. We put up 50 cents apiece. Made \$2 and Mr. Clay bet for us.’

“Dad: ‘Charles had no business betting for you! Elizabeth, I want you to take that boy to the track tomorrow. Seems he’s found a vocation.’

“The next day Mr. Campbell’s mother brought him out to the races with his wad of money. Mr. Campbell soon discovered that what his daddy really wanted was for him to lose the money and learn a lesson. It dawned on him then that betting wasn’t as easy as he thought so he wisely stopped when he still had half of his earnings.



COURTESY ALEX G. CAMPBELL JR.

**Campbell (far right) in his youth as a tobacco buyer for Liggett & Myers**

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“At the dinner table that night his dad said: ‘So how did the big winner do today?’

“Mr. Campbell knew what his dad wanted to hear and answered: ‘Oh, Daddy, it was terrible. I lost every race, and I haven’t got a penny.’

“His dad replied: ‘Well, but you learned something. Betting is not necessarily all good and most gamblers lose money.’

“However, Mr. Campbell had money all summer, which he used to buy candy. In those days you could get a bag of candy for a penny, and he recalls feeling like he was the richest kid in the neighborhood with money that lasted him all year long.”

Campbell’s success as a young handicapper, and the business acumen to salt away some of his winnings, served him well as an adult.

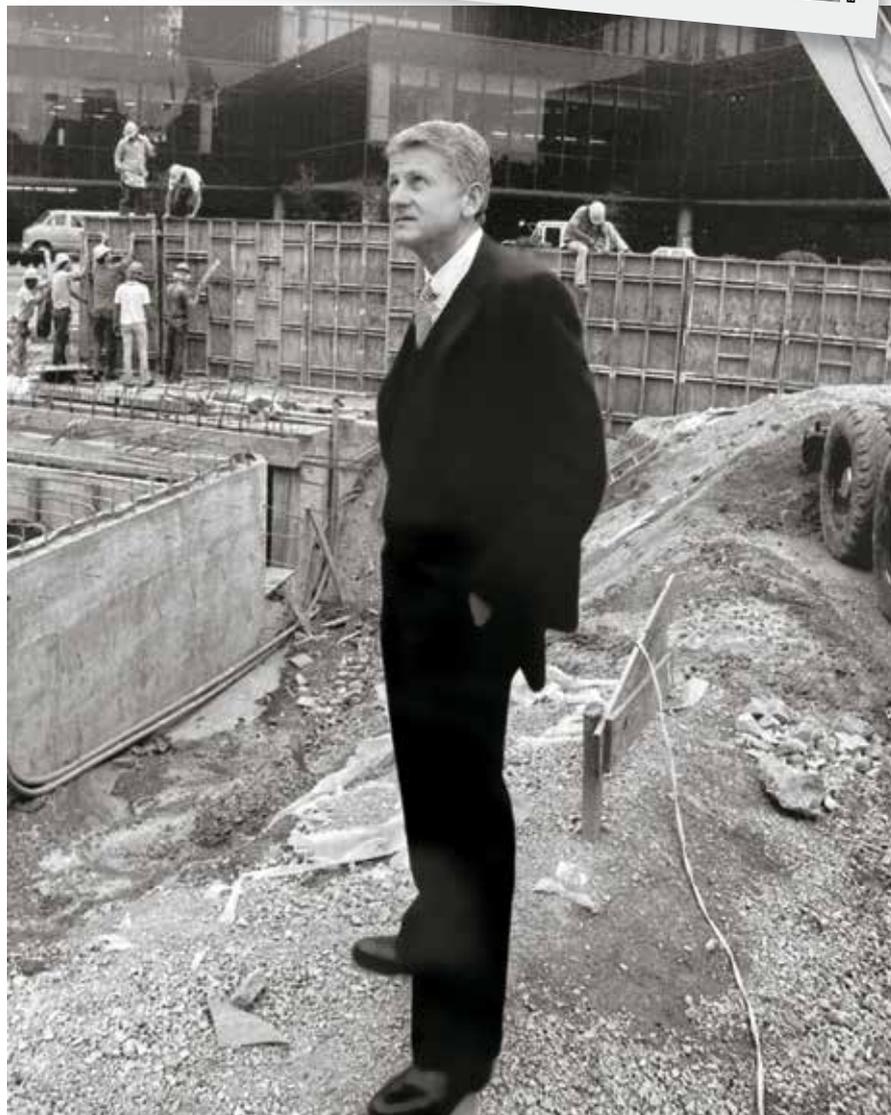
Campbell started in the tobacco business, working for Liggett & Myers with another lifelong friend, Ambrose “Buster” Givens. Givens left to work for Clay Ingels, a Lexington building supplier, and Campbell stayed in the tobacco business, advancing to assistant manager and later to a position as a buyer.

“It was very competitive. I stayed there 10 years, and then I looked around at some other little things to try to make money on the side,” he said. “Finally I quit and went on my own.”

Driven, Campbell made several fortuitous business decisions. He acquired stock in First Security Bank in Lexington, which at the time towered over the local competition. The bank was later sold to Bank One, which in turn was purchased by JPMorgan Chase.

Campbell, along with friend W.T. Young was an early investor in what became Humana Hospitals.

“The original idea of Humana was to get into the nursing home business, but they figured out real quick that they could make a lot more money in the hospital business,” said business associate John



Top, Campbell, far right, in 1967 with star equine Tom Fool, Greentree manager Bob Green, W.T. Young, groom Ed Wynear, and John Glenn; above on the construction site at Triangle Park in downtown Lexington

Maddox. “A lot of people in this area came along for the ride and have been rewarded quite handsomely.”

Without bringing too much attention to his business success, Campbell has been quite beneficent to his community in his own, understated way. Few realize he was the driving force behind Lexington landmarks Triangle Park, Thoroughbred Park, Equestrian Park at Blue Grass Field, and the skateboard park at Woodland Park while serving on several boards, including downtown’s Transylvania University. His relationship with fellow Transy board member Graham Beck led him to be a client of Gainesway Farm.

“He likes to get things done, but he’s not real big on bureaucracy,” Maddox said. “He doesn’t want too many chefs in the kitchen, but he got a number of his friends to contribute, and the Triangle Foundation was born.”

“His charitable philosophy has been ‘giving is its own reward.’ That has been a driving force behind his outlook,” Bassett echoed. “He really has contributed generously to Transylvania. And he steps up annually on The Jockey Club initiatives for equine improvement. He has always stepped up first for things that are for the best interest of the sport.”

Campbell said he was approached by Lexington’s mayor Jim Amato (1978-82) to do something about a “gravel parking lot in front of the civic center.” Campbell told the mayor he’d do it under several conditions.

“One, you are not allowed to put anybody on the board even if I decide to have a board,” he said. “Another thing, the city won’t have anything to do with the financing. I’ll take care of everything.”

Campbell was able to collar the design firm of Zion and Breen, who had devel-

oped the award-winning Paley Park in midtown Manhattan.

“I had to do some work...they said it would be two years before they would take on any new projects,” Campbell said. “I flew them down to Lexington...I told them they’d be fascinated with this park in the middle of the main intersection of town. Before the day was over they had agreed to start the next week.



COURTESY ALEX G. CAMPBELL JR.

**Campbell with one of the equine statues during the construction of Thoroughbred Park**

“It’s such a beauty...especially at night,” Campbell said. “That was the first park...I got stuck with a few more.”

At the other end of downtown Lexington is Thoroughbred Park.

Campbell had been eyeing the area daily as he drove downtown to check on the progress of Triangle Park.

“It was the worst looking piece of junk...with five filling stations...it was terrible,”

he said of the intersection of Main, Vine, and Midland Avenue. “The Webb brothers, who were prominent at the time, wanted the property to put up two skyscrapers. If they had done that, they’d just turn Lexington into another Peoria, Ill., or something.”

Campbell purchased a lot in the center of the area that kept the total block from being developed, and went from there.

“I always thought up to that time there had never been anything in Lexington to honor the Thoroughbred and/or the owners,” he said of the 2.75-acre landmark. “I wanted to dedicate it to the Thoroughbred owners.”

As an owner, Campbell has had pockets of top-line success, playing the game at the upper end of the spectrum, but he has yet to reach the pinnacles of Wright and Bradley.

“Once I got into it, I loved it,” he said. “And like most all of the people in the business I started with a one-horse stable and have been doing it unsuccessfully for more than 60 years.”

Employing Lexington-based trainer Rusty Arnold, Campbell had his initial stakes winner with homebred Acting Brave, winner of the \$15,000 Valdale Stakes at Latonia in 1985. Her full sister, Dreamy Mimi, was third in the Matron Stakes (G1) in the fall of 1988. The following year Rootentootenwooten, a daughter of Diesis, whom Campbell paid

\$220,000 for as a Fasig-Tipton Saratoga sale yearling, won the Demoiselle Stakes (G1). Dreamy Mimi capped her career with a score in the 1990 Top Flight Handicap (G1).

Campbell then shifted his tack to Southern California.

“I started talking about getting a trainer out there,” Campbell recalled. “The money was good; the purses were awe-

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Campbell with rider Chris McCarron after his homebred Queens Court Queen won the 1995 Santa Maria Handicap; at right, Mr Purple scores in the 1996 Santa Anita Handicap



At right, Karlovy Vary winning the 2012 grade 1 Ashland at Keeneland



some, and Bassett was so high on Ron (McAnally). He said, 'I'm sending Alex out there. I need you to straighten him out and any horses he might have...you straighten them out, too.' I stayed with Ron for years, and we ended up being good friends."

It was a pair of runners out of Campbell's mare Turk O Witz that further bur-nished the Campbell brand.

First came Queens Court Queen (by Lyphard). Placed in Keeneland's Alcibi-ades Stakes (G2) at 2, she matured into a two-time grade 1 winner in South-ern California, taking the Santa Maria Handicap and Santa Margarita Invita-tional Handicap in early 1995.

The following year Mr Purple (by Dep-uty Minister, and named for his friend David Reynolds) looped the field to win the Santa Anita Handicap (G1).

"A lot of races you don't see real well, but I saw that one pretty clearly," Camp-

bell said. "I had a good spot. That Mr Purple was remarkable...he came around the far turn and was nine lengths behind while on the far outside. He came flying down the stretch and won by two. Every good horse in the country was in that race."

While those might have been the glory years for Campbell's racing career, other top wins have come his way, including the score by Karlovy Vary in the Ashland Stakes that would hold up to the 100-1 score by Savage Sailor of his youth.

He had purchased the Pulpit filly The Right Pew at the 2000 Keeneland July yearling sale, and while she had failed to impress on the track, her first foal, by Dynaformer, Rocket Legs, was grade 2-placed. His full sister, Karlovy Vary, came five years later.

While in his 80s, Campbell, again made a fortuitous shift in his breeding/racing operation, getting his horses in

the shedrow of Graham Motion.

"I wish I had met him 20 years ago," Motion said of Campbell. "He's a charm-ing man, and he's such a pleasure. It's old school to have these nice pedigrees and the way we do things. I get a tremendous amount of pleasure out of being with him."

Campbell, who has a habit of getting his way, recalls the courtship.

"I remember when I introduced my-self to him...he wasn't looking for more clients," Campbell said. "I told him my philosophy, which is people that ruin a lot of stables are owners that try to train horses. They say to their trainer, 'John, I'd like to run in so-and-so stakes next Saturday.' The trainer tries to tell him that the horse doesn't belong there, but some of the owners I've known don't lis-ten to their trainers.

"It's ridiculous to pay a man that has talent that you don't have and then try to not do what he says," he said. "I told him



Campbell, with friends and family and trainer Graham Motion (far left) after Mean Mary's victory in this year's La Prevoyante at Gulfstream



PHOTOS BY Z

right off that I'll never tell you what to do or when or criticize your workouts, but you will see a lot of me because I like to go out and watch them work. I won't say anything unless you say, 'Gee, Mr. Campbell, think that was a great workout?' Then I'll say, 'Yes, sir.' ”

Motion recalled the meeting as Campbell said, and added he's never offered a criticism.

“In this day and age it is pretty rare,” Motion said. “He certainly talks about the horses, but he's never told me what to do. It's very easy to train for Mr. Campbell.”

In 2018 Campbell and Motion started to click, winning a pair of grade 3 races with homebred Ultra Brat, a granddaughter of Rootentootenwooten by Uncle Mo. He's No Lemon was a minor stakes winner in 2019, and amid the pandemic, Campbell has come up with a pair of aces, New York Stakes (G2T) winner Mean Mary (by Scat Daddy) and Bye Bye Melvin (by Uncle

Mo), winner of Saratoga's Saranac Stakes (G3T).

Mean Mary, named as a joke after his assistant Mary Venezia, hopes to advance the ladder to grade 1 status Nov. 7 in the Maker's Mark Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Turf (G1T) while Bye Bye Melvin, having been pipped in the Oct. 3 James W. Murphy Stakes at Pimlico, is being pointed toward the nine-furlong Bryan Station Stakes on the Nov. 6 World Championships undercard.

For Campbell, and now for Motion, it's more than just the races.

“With Mr. Campbell, it's the personal things...the horses are a bonus,” Motion said. “We were trying to buy a 2-year-old last spring, and we hadn't had any luck. We got the lead on one of Niall Brennan's we could buy privately after a sale. We flew from Boca up to Ocala and went and looked at some 2-year-olds, went to Barry Eisaman's and looked at some other

2-year-olds, had lunch in a little town near Dr. Eisaman's place, but the point is... we bought the horse, but it wasn't the fact we bought the horse, but it was just the fact it was a great day we spent together. We then flew up to Lexington...we spent the whole day, and it was the neatest day and experience for me, to hang out with him for the day. It was just something I'll never forget.”

The city of Lexington won't soon forget the generosity of Campbell, nor will the world of Thoroughbred breeding and racing. He brings that and much more to the table.

“The most impressive thing is he loves the horses; more than anything,” Maddox said. “He doesn't have a ‘Thoroughbred ego.’ It's not about him winning or getting his picture taken. What I have always admired is his love of the horses, and the joy he has sharing the experience with others.” **BH**