

RED RABBIT RACING PARTNERSHIP: **All in the Family!**

By Susanne Reardon

Johnson family reunions must be a lot of fun. At one such event in 2005, between the obligatory hamburgers and potato salad, games of horseshoes and volleyball, the Johnson family formed a horse racing partnership!

They call it Red Rabbit Racing Partnership named for their late grandfather, Russell Johnson, whose *hair...* I mean *hair...* was red.

Principal partners are Rick Johnson and his aunt, Peggy Lenz, a longtime equestrian affectionately called “the instigator” for suggesting such a venture. Along with sister Jean Gallo and Cousin Jeff Johnson, the Red Rabbit partners ‘did it right’ from the very start.

Peggy is a long-time friend of the Brommer family, horse owners who employ Chris Block as trainer. Block agreed to take training duties for Red Rabbit. “Chris was delighted to work with us,” says Johnson. With Block on board, the team searched for a racehorse claiming an Illinois-bred gelding, Marion’s Man, for \$25,000 in August, 2005. Much to the owners’ delight, the gelding won his first two races for Red Rabbit only to lose him in a claim to Mike Reavis later that year.

Success followed for the next two years with group avidly pursuing other claims. Red Rabbit’s second acquisition, Salt Syn, won both her two starts for the group in 2007. The group struck gold in 2008 after claiming turfer General Charley for \$35,000. Under Block’s guidance, the horse has progressed reeling off five wins in five starts at the 2010 Arlington Park summer meet. General Charley’s career statistics stand at 15 wins, 7 place finishes, and 8 show placements from 25 starts with total winnings of \$500,000. Under the Red Rabbit Racing banner, his record stands at 9 - 4 - 3 with earnings in excess of \$200,000!

After Charley won his third race, Johnson recalls “we thought he wasn’t getting his proper recognition on the



General Charley in his stall

Photo compliments of Rick Johnson

backstretch. So, for his devoted groom, Erasmo, who nicknamed Charley ‘Champion’, we made two large signs with arrows pointing to him on either side of his stall. We took pictures and had a small party at the barn for him, and he had a great time,” Johnson said.

So, Welcome to Charley Land!

Johnson gives extra special treatment to General Charley. Often, after Johnson leaves his job as an IT executive in Itasca, he heads to the Arlington Park shedrow with DVD player in hand to watch movies with Charley. Recent flicks that Johnson and Charley have enjoyed are “Sherlock Holmes” and “Dreamer,” but the all-time favorite remains “Seabiscuit.” They’re looking forward to seeing the new Disney picture “Secretariat,” as Charley is a chestnut too.

Block has designated the first stall in his barn for every Red Rabbit equine so that visits “don’t wake up the rest of my horses, as this horse is very popular,” the trainer said.

The family is loyal to Illinois racing and looking to a bright future on local tracks. In fact, recently Red Rabbit purchased a 33% interest in Illinois-bred Thundering Brook bought in partnership with horsemen Neil Pessin and Bob Jaffe. The hopes are high for the new charge.

With the winner’s circle always packed with up to 75 people, their horses enjoying first run films and lots of attention, and a family sharing in the sport’s success, Red Rabbit Racing is what owning horses in partnership should be for all... *fun!* U