

Rappahannock Races Are Back!

*New Venue, New Course, Traditional March
Date Kicks Off The Spring Race Season*

By Emily Houston



PHOTO COURTESY: OLIVER BROWN

Oliver Brown's father, Elzy Brown, competed in the Rappahannock Point-to-Point over six decades ago. After a hiatus, the Hunt is bringing the steeplechase races back this year.

Last fall, Rappahannock Hunt Master Oliver Brown was a bit taken aback when one of the Hunt's largest landowners came to him with an idea. Larry Levy, owner of The Hill, in Boston, Va., proposed resurrecting Rappahannock's point-to-point races, which last ran in 2008.

Levy offered his farm as the venue, and would handle building the course.

Brown said he hadn't ever considered such a thing. After managing the races for 40 years – the races started in 1954, and Brown says he has memories of his involvement in the event starting in 1958 – he knew what a daunting task it would be. But Levy's passion and commitment to it won Brown over.

This year, for the first time in 12 years, Rappahannock Hunt's Point-to-Point will reclaim its traditional position as the first event in Virginia's spring racing season (the first weekend in March) which includes 11 steeplechase events, culminating in the grand finale of the Gold Cup in May.

When Brown brought the idea to members of the Hunt for approval, he found enthusiasm for it. "It's created a lot of excitement," he says. Commitments for sponsorship and program advertising have been good, he reports.

The March 7th date is understandably dicey weather-wise, Brown notes. But, he says, "We leave that to the man upstairs."

Levy was, according to Brown, eager to have the construction of the course "done right." Great attention has been given to the footing and drainage. The jumps all have a slight lean, so they are consistent. The terrain is just slightly rolling. It should, Brown predicts, be "a great spot for trainers to start their year." The other important aspect of the new location is that it affords ample parking with a view of the whole course. Levy has, Brown says, "gone above and beyond – way beyond – to make this a nice course."

The number of steeplechases has declined in the past decade or so, due largely to diminishing open space available on which to hold them. Brown is thrilled to be able to reverse this trend, thanks to a land owner with the vision to make it happen.