

# PENNSYLVANIA BREEDING & RACING

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## California couple launches breeding operation in Berks County



Photo by Linda Dougherty

Maria Vorhauer (left) and Gayle Gerth

By LINDA DOUGHERTY

**LENHARTSVILLE, Pa.** — The Pennsylvania thoroughbred breeding industry is continuing to grow by leaps and bounds, as evidenced by the new addition of Gayle Gerth's Dana Point Farm on Long Road in this Berks County town located about 25 miles west of Allentown off I-78.

The 60-plus acre facility was opened Sept. 1 to accept outside mares that will meet the Oct. 1 residency deadline.

Dana Point is the first thoroughbred venture by Gerth and Bob Levine, residents of Dana Point, Calif. The farm manager is Maria Vorhauer, who brings a lifetime of experience to the position.

Vorhauer previously offered sales prep, consignments and a myriad of other services through her November Hill Farms.

Dana Point was formerly an Arabian and Morgan showplace, but was vacant when Gerth purchased it in late July. Since settlement, Gerth has been busy transforming the farm into a top-notch facility for thoroughbreds, utilizing Point Pleasant Construction Landscaping, Inc., out of

Lahaska, for the bulk of the hardscaping and landscaping.

Smyrna Grove Manufacturing, out of Christiana, Pa., is making the stall doors and custom metal work inside the barns.

"This will be an elite breeding and foaling facility," said Vorhauer. "We'll also be offering training and sales, yet at affordable prices."

### *60-acre startup seeded with in-foal NY-breds purchased at fall sale in Saratoga*

"I'm very fortunate and blessed to be associated with Gayle and Bob."

The first stallion to take up residence at Dana Point will be Fidrych, the only son of Grand Slam at stud in Pennsylvania. Fidrych is owned by Melvin Ray Moyer of East Coast Farms in Perkasie and stood there the last two years.

"He's a stakes-placed runner out of a Storm Bird mare, and he has impeccable conformation," said Vorhauer, who added that Fidrych's

fee will be \$2,500 for 2009, with special consideration to mares foaling in Pennsylvania.

While Gerth and Levine are relative newcomers to the thoroughbred scene, they have been receiving advice throughout by Vorhauer.

A triple-cancer survivor who has undergone surgery and chemotherapy, Gerth has had many challenges in her life, but the excitement of starting Dana Point Farm, and buying several broodmares and horses in training are some of the greatest highlights, she said.

Under the stable name Lainey Bug Stables, the racehorses are in training with Murray Rojas, who is currently the leading trainer at Penn National.

"I never in my life have woken up and said, 'I'm happy ... really happy' until I got those horses," she said. "Something happened that fulfilled a part of me that was totally void of what it needed, and that's part of the reason for this farm. But I could never do it without Maria. She is just amazing. All we can do is put in the money and keep the books. The success of this place should be Maria's crown,

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## DANA POINT

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not mine, and I really mean that."

Gerth, a native of Los Angeles, lives in the Pacific coast community of Dana Point with her life partner, Levine. A mother of three, she founded the very successful company JB Research/Relaxor Company, then a spinoff company, Seating Solutions, LLC, which she sold in 2000.

The company manufactured electronic massage systems that were placed into furniture and bedding, as well as seating for the airline industry.

Currently, Gerth is flying back and forth between Pennsylvania and California as the farm project progresses. She hopes to have the majority of work complete by Oct. 1.

Gerth and Vorhauer met at the New York Breeders' Sales Co. Saratoga fall mixed sale last October. That sale marked the start of Gerth's involvement with thoroughbreds, which ultimately led to the birth of Dana Point Farm.

"I had seen signs for a weanling auction at the track," said Gerth. "Bob (Levine) and I were in Saratoga for the wedding of Bob's son, and I went to the sales grounds dressed in winter white from head to toe, with high heels on. Maria saw me walking around and said, politely, 'May I help you?' And I said, 'Oh, that would be wonderful. This is my first time at a sale, and I have no idea what I'm doing.'"

Vorhauer helped Gerth sign up at the sales office as a buyer and, after exchanging phone numbers, Gerth went back to the auction two days later.

After being unsure what to do on her own, she decided to call Vorhauer. Vorhauer told her she should buy broodmares instead of weanlings, Gerth bought two mares in part-



View of Dana Point Farm (left). (Right) Elizabeth Bordner and Oscar Tores of Point Pleasant Construction Landscaping Inc, with Vorhauer and Gerth.



Photos by Linda Dougherty

nership with Vorhauer, which were brought back to Pennsylvania.

Soon after, she bought two more in-foal mares, one of which is Connie Bar, the dam of Bar Fly Blues, who has won four of seven starts this year at Delaware Park and over \$80,000. Connie Bar foaled a Pennsylvania-bred colt by Petionville this spring and is currently in foal to Congaree.

"So all of a sudden I'm thinking that it's costing a lot of money to board my mares, and because I'm not in it for the money—I'm in it because I love the horses, and I found my dream—I started thinking about a farm of my own," said Gerth. "When I sold my business and retired, I didn't have a clue as to what I wanted to do. I just sort of fell into this. I'm learning as I go. I can't imagine these horses being thought of as a commodity. That part of the industry disturbs me."

Gerth searched for just the right property in Pennsylvania. Ron and Barbara Rieklie (owners of Xanthus Farms in Gettysburg, Pa.) introduced Gayle to a realtor they recommended highly, Marshall Lytle of Prudential.

Through Lytle, she found Dana Point, which at the time was not on the market. Even though the property was overgrown ("We didn't even know we had run-in sheds,

that's how high the grass and weeds were," said Gerth) she fell in love with it. She negotiated with the owner, set up a quick closing date, and began to get the farm in shape.

"I think one thing that Bob and Gayle are learning is how much time it takes to set up the barns properly, to put the horses in the right stalls, so my main focus is, and always has been, the welfare of the horses," said Vorhauer. "But in the first two weeks, we really have gotten a lot done."

Because the farm had been vacant for so long, it was in need of a complete cleaning and overhaul. The main barn at the top of the property will have 32 new stalls and an indoor track around the perimeter for light exercise. There will be new seeded grass paddocks with run-in sheds, a separate stallion barn with an indoor breeding shed and a barn for mares and foaling. Several of the stalls open out into a small enclosed paddock.

"Our motto is that we want to make this into a very premiere breeding and foaling facility in Pennsylvania, as well as offering services such as sales representation, buying and selling horses, shipping, layups, and sales prep, all at affordable prices," said Vorhauer. "Every service that I formerly

offered at November Hill will now be offered at Dana Point. It's not so much about quantity here, but quality. You won't find another facility in the state that offers the kind of personalized care that we do!"

"Gayle (Gerth) said that this farm is her dream... I was honored to be chosen to be able to help her fulfill her dream and it's also a great opportunity," said Vorhauer.

Gerth said that she decided to open Dana Point to outside boarders, rather than having it as an entirely private operation, because it would make it more affordable.

Dana Point Farm currently owns 10 mares and foals by such sires as Hold That Tiger, Petionville, Dance With Ravens, Wiseman's Ferry, and Fidrych, all registered Pennsylvania-breds.

"We'll see in the next five years where we want to go, what we want to do, as far as our own. I really like the breeding part of the industry," said Gerth.

"This is the first time in my life that I'm doing something that's really for me," she said. "I am extremely excited about starting the Dana Point Farm and sharing my experience with others in the industry."