

# HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The construction of Century Mile marks a turnaround in Alberta's horse racing industry.

By Allison Field

**P**aul Ryneveld, general manager of Century Downs and Century Mile, is not new to the sport of kings. Previously the director of racing for Sunland Park Racetrack, Emerald Downs, and Hastings, as well as the equine manager at Fairplex, Ryneveld is a horse racing aficionado.

Ryneveld has visited 79 racetracks across North America and it's evident he is looking forward to the challenges of designing, building and operating his newest track, Century Mile in Edmonton.

While Ryneveld took over an already-started project in Calgary with Century Downs, in Edmonton they will start from the ground up, taking lessons learned from the Downs and building their ideal racetrack on 105 acres at Century Mile.

"We will take what we did at Century, but do it how we would have done it right off the bat. Edmonton won't be as new of a market, but the area is new and Leduc has had a lot of growth," said Ryneveld.

The site of Century Mile in Leduc, a city of 30,000 just south of Edmonton, is ideal for this type of venture. A large outlet mall is under construction in the area, and the racetrack will have a view of a golf course. The bedroom community has seen massive housing builds and has no existing gaming complex, making it an ideal location for the new racetrack.

"Three things make this location ideal," said Ryneveld. "The first is that this area of Edmonton has no gaming, the second is that we are working with the airport authority, and the third is the ample acreage available with infrastructure."

Access is also key, and Century Mile is close to highways and the airport with plans for the LRT to extend to this location at some point.

Ryneveld also speaks passionately about the historical change in the way that race fans experience racetracks.

"The old days of the racetrack had long buildings with bleachers for seating; that

is changing. People are not experiencing racetracks that way anymore. It won't be as formal as it used to be.

While still offering the standard dining areas with views of the racetrack, VIP elements, and box seats, less formal and more themed areas will also be offered creating a more diverse and entertaining user experience.

"We ask people when they book, do you want barn tours, starting gate viewing, the opportunity to present in the winner's circle or stand in the paddock?" said Ryneveld. "That is what creates immediate fans. People are Instagramming their experience immediately."

Tweets, Facebook posts and pictures on Instagram are sent in real time from ecstatic racegoers to their broad friend groups - expanding the reach of their one-of-a-kind experience.

"We put profiles of drivers and jockeys, horses, and trainers in the program and post them on social media. That helps people to get to know them," pointed out Ryneveld.

Another element that will no doubt support the success of Century Mile is part of its name - a one-mile track - the first in Western Canada. The next largest track in Western Canada is Assiniboia Downs at 6 ½ furlongs.

"The longer track means milder turns and a better trip for the horses," said Ryneveld.

Ryneveld hopes that the mile track and ideal track surface will encourage Western Canadian owners, particularly those in Alberta who own and race their horses in the U.S. to bring their horses home to race for part of the season.

"The mile brings something that will attract owners that were leery to send horses to Western Canada," said Ryneveld.

He anticipates that there will be a late summer/fall meet at Century Mile in 2018, with racing three nights a week. Moving into 2019, while still in the planning phases, the racetrack will likely have thoroughbred racing from April to



mid-August with standardbred racing from September to November.

The current plan is to alternate thoroughbred and standardbred racing between the two tracks each year, with the bulk of thoroughbred racing taking place in Edmonton. There will also be quarter horse racing at Century Mile, with quarter horse races filling out the thoroughbred race card.

Century Mile's backstretch is designed for stabling 800 horses which will support a minimum of three nights of racing with 7-9 races per card and an average field of eight horses. There will likely be four barns with a capacity of 200 each.

"The land has space to increase if warranted," said Ryneveld.

Twelve hundred jobs are expected to be created with the establishment of Century Mile, with approximately 200 directly employed and 1000 indirectly employed.

With a 10-year deal offering stability in Edmonton, Ryneveld thinks it likely that the track will contribute not only to the success of the racing industry in Alberta, but of Western Canada as well.

Ryneveld anticipates the success that Century Casinos, Inc. has had at Century Downs will support success at Century Mile.

"Having two facilities will allow for common branding. It will help simulcast and the sale of our signal as we create a familiar brand. We are taking advantage of global opportunities and doing whatever we can. That will only continue to grow." **CT**