



DAVID COYLE PHOTOS



The main house at Crestwood Farm; at left, Pope McLean Sr., who started the farm in 1970; right, a pair of the farm's lush paddocks

GOLDEN RUN

Crestwood Farm's McLean family marks 50 years of horsemanship

BY LENNY SHULMAN

WHEN ONE STARTS A BUSINESS from scratch, the first consideration isn't whether it will still be viable 50 years up the road. But when an operation such as Crestwood Farm, started in 1970 by Pope McLean Sr. and propelled forward by his children, hits its golden anniversary, it is wise to consider the lessons offered by its longevity.

Crestwood doesn't purchase Triple Crown winners for its stallion barn or buy \$6 million mares for its broodmare band. What it does offer can't be measured in dollars. That is, special relationships with clients who feel more like members of an extended McLean family than they do business associates.

Consider the adjectives used by clients when describing Pope Sr., sons Pope McLean Jr. and Marc McLean, and daughter Grandison Offutt: "Honest," "quality," "nicest," "direct," "hard-working," "responsive." Those are the traits that add lengths to a business and allow it not only to navigate the rollicking good times, but also survive the



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From left, Marc McLean, Grandison Offutt, Pope McLean Sr., Betty Ann McLean, and Pope McLean Jr.

inevitable downturns in the cycle.

That is why the Crestwood principals exhibit optimism even in the midst of the current crisis gripping the world. Having come through on the other side of several previous stock market downturns, the McLeans offer confidence while battling the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic currently threatening businesses of all kinds. It is the confidence borne of a solid foundation, sound business decisions, and a loyal client base of cultivated relationships.

And the confidence of an operation that has bred and/or raised more than 280 stakes horses in its first half century.

McLean Sr. was on his way to following his father, Dr. C.G. McLean, into medicine when his path diverted while studying pre-med at the University of Kentucky. The elder McLean had a 20-acre farm on Newtown Pike near

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— POPE MCLEAN SR.

Lexington, and one of his patients, P.A.B. Widener II of Elmendorf Farm fame, gave Dr. McLean an interest in the broodmare Wicki Wicki. Pope raised Oil Wick, a son of Wicki Wicki, on his father's farm and Oil Wick rewarded him with a victory in the 1959 Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes at Churchill Downs.

Pope McLean turned in his stetho-

scope and went to work at Calumet Farm for legendary manager Melvin Cinnamon, who happened to be another patient of his father's. McLean had two jobs, working at Calumet by day and at his father's farm at night. He co-bred Random Shot, winner of the 1967 Clark Handicap for James Cowden Sr., who owned Poplar Hill Farm contiguous to Dr. McLean's land. Pope eventually leased 100 acres of Poplar Hill before leasing, along with his wife, Betty Ann, the original Crestwood Farm, which they bought four years later.

The first decade was a struggle, “driven more by fear of failure than desire to succeed,” said McLean. The work filled days and nights but carried with it one large fringe benefit.

“I had a passion and a love for the animals,” said McLean. “So I thought if I could make a living doing something I



Got Stormy was bred by Pope Sr., Pope Jr., and Marc McLean and Mt. Joy Stables



Grade 1 winner Bowies Hero was bred by the McLeans

love, you can't ask for anything better."

Asked about what has surprised him most in the 50 years since, Crestwood's founder noted, "Actually, I think it's grown a lot more than I ever anticipated when I started in the business. At the beginning you're just trying to survive. And now, the way things are...we're hoping what's going on will just be a bump in the road. I guess I could have picked an easier business to be in, but not many are as enjoyable as the horse business. There have been times

when we've won a nice race with something we bred, and I'd literally get tears in my eyes. It's that thrilling."

There have been numerous such thrills for the Crestwood team over the past couple of years. Got Stormy, a 5-year-old mare co-bred by Pope Sr., Pope Jr., and Marc along with client Brian Burns' Mount Joy Stables, set a course record at Saratoga Race Course last year when taking the Fourstardave Handicap (G1T) against males in 1:32.00 for the mile.

The daughter of Crestwood stallion Get Stormy also won the Matriarch Stakes (G1T) last season and is a six-time stakes winner of more than \$1.5 million.

Bowies Hero, a 6-year-old horse by Artie Schiller—Remembered, bred by the three McLean men, proved victorious in the 2019 Shadwell Turf Mile Stakes (G1T), the 2018 Frank E. Kilroe Mile Stakes (G1T), the 2019 Eddie Read Stakes (G2T), and the 2017 Mathis Brothers Mile Stakes (G2T). He also has banked better than \$1.5 million and has won seven stakes events. In addition, the farm raised Con Te Partiro, a 6-year-old Scat Daddy mare who has won the 2020 Coolmore Classic and Coolmore Legacy Stakes (both G1) in Australia. Bred by K.C. Garrett Farm, she is out of Temple Street and is owned by Newgate S F.

Such success has occurred with clockwork regularity at Crestwood, which bred 1994 Kentucky Oaks (G1) winner Sardula and raised \$2 million earners Serena's Song, Island Fashion, and Xtra Heat. Also coming off the farm was two-time Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile (G1) winner Goldencents.

McLean acknowledges that a key to these achievements has been the adaptability to change with the times, especially the commercial marketplace that is more weighted toward the individual today than in times past.

"Today we're looking for mares that look like they can produce sound individuals," noted Pope Sr. "I think people got away from that for a while, maybe inbreeding a little too closely or breeding unsound mares to unsound sires and creating a problem there. It seems to be more about the individual today. The real outstanding individual might bring triple or more what you think he's worth if he has that look they want. Conversely, if you have something that's extremely well-bred but doesn't fit all the things they're looking for, he's not going to sell very well.

"It's a different game now than it used to be, and we're trying to breed horses that appeal to buyers. One thing that hasn't changed is the enthusiasm

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you have for hoping you're going to come up and hit with that big horse. That's what still drives us. And when we have two we bred and one we raised winning grade 1s this past year, we're pretty proud to accomplish that. It's not an easy thing to do."

Crestwood recently has changed physically. Located just north of Leestown Road outside Lexington, Crestwood has maintained its approximate 1,000-acre size, but with a shift in parcels. Don Alberto Farm, which purchased the former Vinery next to Crestwood a decade ago, bought part of Crestwood from the McLeans five years back. While Crestwood kept the land that houses its stallions, it purchased an additional tract in the immediate vicinity farther north on Yarnallton Pike that was part of the original North Ridge Farm. The expansion of Don Alberto also included buying out Hill 'n' Dale Farms, which is moving its operation to the former Xalapa Farm outside Paris.

The most crucial change, however, occurred in 1991 when Pope Jr. and Marc both returned after college to help their father operate Crestwood. In exchange for their youthful energy, their father has passed along his work ethic, attention to detail, and the importance of conducting business in the time-tested fashion where one's handshake is as good as gold.

"Since they've come onboard, the farm has doubled in size," noted Pope Sr. "It's been a blessing to have all three of my children involved in the operation."

"When we came back here, we had to learn through the down market of the early 1990s, when a lot of farms were going out of business," said Pope Jr. "And that experience helped us learn collectively as we worked with Dad. We learned what it takes to get through something like that, and we know how to make it survive. We believe in the future of the game."

"We grew up with the farm as our backyard, and learned the ropes early, although I'm sure we thought we were helping a lot more than we were initially. Having the farm reach 50 years is definitely a milestone we're proud of. And

now my two sons, and Marc's son, have been working on the farm the past three or four years, and they seem to be interested. Dad never forced us, and we certainly won't force them, but it would be a dream if they keep coming on."

Added Marc, "It's really hard to believe the amount of time this has been going, and how hard Dad had to work to get it to where it is. We learned from him that

they've always made it a point to be there to answer questions or hear crazy thoughts. They not only know their business, but are fantastic human beings."

Rowland Hancock, of Paducah, Ky., was accepted to veterinary school decades ago but chose another path. He continues to be fascinated by genetics and the horse business and has bred for 48 years, getting group 1 winner Be My



The McLeans at Keeneland in 2002

we're not done working until every detail is in place. That, and loyalty to our clients."

Burns, who has been doing business at Crestwood for 30 of the farm's 50 years, noted of the McLeans, "They're more than horse people—they're family and friends. And the kids are cut from the same cloth as Pope Sr. Apples don't fall far from trees. They are respectful, nice people you want to be with."

Daniel Hughes, based in Montgomery, Ala., entered the horse business just four years ago after dreaming about it for a while. He was impressed about the commitment of the McLeans in helping a newcomer.

"Marc was available to talk and offer advice, and Pope Sr. did likewise. We quickly got to know the family, and

Native, who stood in Ireland. He's impressed by the hands-on work carried out by Pope Jr. and Marc.

"I have eight mares there, and when they foal, one of those two boys is with those mares," said Hancock. "You just don't get that kind of service. They're just folks. They take a personal interest and are as good a horsemen as I know."

David Bloom, an attorney in Southern California, stood Taste of Paradise at Crestwood because of the McLeans' stellar reputation.

"I became even more impressed with them over time because of their honesty and integrity," Bloom noted. "They continue to take exemplary care of 'Taste,' who is pensioned now. Besides the honesty, it's the family unit that is so impressive. They each have their area of

expertise, but at the same time they're deferential to one another. There is no competition or ego involved. Everyone complements each other, and they function as a team, which is to be admired."

Crestwood has stood stallions since 1994, with early notables such as Storm Cat's son Storm Boot, and Petionville. The most-established current resident of the stallion barn is Get Stormy, a 14-year-

thing is the quality of the mares has increased tremendously; graded racemares and graded producers. The quality is way ahead of what he's had in the past."

New to Crestwood in 2020 is Heart to Heart, a most popular racehorse due to his gameness, durability, and the heart-shaped star on his forehead. The son of English Channel has more than simply sentimental value, however. Amazingly, he

ing Line, whose first crop are 2-year-olds in 2020. Texas Red, by dual classic winner Afleet Alex, also won the Jim Dandy Stakes (G2). Firing Line is perhaps best remembered for giving American Pharoah all he could handle in the 2015 Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (G1), testing him for the entire stretch drive before succumbing by just a length, the closest any horse finished to the eventual Triple Crown champion in the three classic races.

"At one point we thought he was going to pull off a Derby win," said Pope Sr. "We have his female family here, so we were really pulling for him."

Firing Line has already had a six-figure 2-year-old sell this season and will be well-positioned if he passes along his racing talent. Crestwood is connected to yet another Maker's 46 Mile winner, as it stands Jack Milton, a son of War Front, who won graded stakes in three consecutive seasons.

While relationships with clients have been key to the success and longevity of Crestwood, so too have the relationships with staff members, many of whom have been with the farm for more than 25 years.

"They make our business what it is," noted Pope Jr. "Pedigree and bloodstock analyst Robert Keck, stallion manager Rogelio Castillo, yearling manager Heron Perez Castillo, and our cattleman Carlos Charry have all been here more than a quarter-century. And, of course, our sister Grandison has meticulously led our office team for 21 years, keeping us organized and on task, and doing all the billings, sales entries, and registrations. And our clients love her."

Kentucky horseman Henry White said of working with horses, "If you don't love it, you can't do it." Crestwood Farm is a testament to that statement's veracity.

"It's a way of life," stated Pope McLean Sr., "all of us agree to that. If you're in this business, you have to devote yourself 100% to it or it doesn't work."

It's been working at Crestwood Farm for half a century. **BH**

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DAVID COYLE

Crestwood is home to sire Get Stormy

old son of Stormy Atlantic who won such prestigious races as the Woodford Reserve Turf Classic Stakes and Maker's Mark Mile Stakes (both G1T) in 2011, and the Bernard Baruch Handicap and Fourstardave (both G2T) in 2010 on his way to earning more than \$1.6 million. In addition to Got Stormy, he has sired graded stakes winners Fifty Five, Storm the Hill, and Go Noni Go.

The success enjoyed by Got Stormy in 2019 has made a big difference in her sire's book during the 2020 breeding season.

"Get Stormy is getting a lot more, and better, mares than he was a few years ago," said Pope Sr. "He should take another jump forward. The phone rings considerably more after a Got Stormy comes along and does what she's been doing. He's gotten 100 mares this year, and the main

won graded stakes at 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, with his grade 1 scores in the Gulfstream Park Turf Stakes and the Maker's 46 Mile Stakes coming at age 7. Trained by Brian Lynch, Heart to Heart banked more than \$2 million and won 13 stakes, 11 of them graded.

"Heart to Heart is similar to Get Stormy," said Pope Sr. "What has made Get Stormy effective is not only ability but the soundness he is passing on. His horses are staying around, and Heart to Heart certainly offers that as well. He was a durable grade 1 winner who raced 41 times and had 18 Beyer Speed Figures over 100."

The increased emphasis on turf racing in North America figures to aid Get Stormy and Heart to Heart further. Also standing at Crestwood are Sentient Jet Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1) winner Texas Red and graded stakes winner Fir-