

Winners' off-track betting facility had grand opening in Bayonne

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By **Rafal Rogoza / The Jersey Journal**

Elected officials, business executives, and a race horse crowded the entrance of Winners Bayonne this morning for a ceremonial ribbon cutting during the grand opening of the new off-track wagering facility.

"Horse racing can be a lot of fun, especially when your in a building like this," said Jeff Gural, chairman of New Meadowlands Racetrack, the company responsible for operating the facility, during the 11 a.m. ceremony.

The \$18 million venue, located at 400 Route 440 North at Fifth Street, brings the rush of horse race betting to Bayonne with two large simulcast areas, a VIP room, a 38 seat bar, and with McLoone's Restaurant serving a full menu of delicious entrees.

"I have very high expectations for this place," said Bayonne City Council President Terry Ruane. "It will benefit the city recreationally and economically."

The 25,000-square-foot facility is expected to boost Bayonne's economy by creating 100 new jobs and generating an estimated \$200,000 in new property taxes, according to city officials.

"It's going to bring jobs and there are a lot of Bayonne residents employed here," said Bayonne Third Ward Council Member Raymond Greaves. "I'm overwhelmed and I'm excited about the future."

In addition to Gural, the ceremony was attended by Bayonne Mayor Mark A. Smith; Chuckie Lopez, a renowned thoroughbred racing jockey; Briann Sears, a harness racing jockey; and Gallo Blue Chip, the richest harness horse of all time earning \$4.2 million in his seven year career.

During the ceremony, New Meadowlands Racetrack presented a June 2012 Horseplay Donation worth \$2,596 to the Bayonne Economic Opportunity Fund.

After the festivities, Bayonne residents eager to place their first bets stood outside waiting for the 12:30 p.m. grand opening to the public.

"I'll be here everyday," said Nick Barletti, 76, resident of 24th Street. Barletti is a long time horse racing enthusiast who said his bus commute to the Meadowlands betting facility took over two hours.

"Now I get a cab, five minutes I'm here," said Barletti.

Many residents agreed, saying they were happy with the facility's location.

"I'm ten minutes away, I'll be coming here a lot," said Fred Steinbrunn, 80, resident of 32nd Street.

Bill DeVenuto, 74, resident of 25th Street, nodded as Steinbrunn spoke, adding "You come here make a bet, check out the restaurant with the wife and grab something to eat."