



# Answers To Your Questions About The Equestrian Village Project

By Mark Bellissimo, Managing Partner, Wellington Equestrian Partners

## What is the Equestrian Village?

The Equestrian Village (EV) is the most important investment that WEP will make in Wellington. It is more than just a real estate project. It is also a business strategy to develop a connection to the community, enhance the current business, and provide an engine for economic growth. The location of the EV is critical as it represents a very strategic, visible, and accessible location. It will become the "gateway" to the equestrian community. It will provide a central gathering spot open to the entire community that educates, entertains and inspires residents about the equestrian industry. There are four components of the Equestrian Village; 1) local shops with an exhibition arena and a Wellington Hall of Fame; 2) a riding academy; 3) a world-class Showgrounds with dressage complex, covered arena, and derby field; 4) and a resort condo/hotel. All of the elements are integrated. The hotel on the corner will become a worldwide recognizable piece of architecture for Wellington.

## How do the four components of the EV help you accomplish your objectives?

The four components above allow us to accomplish four key objectives that are critical to Wellington's long term success; engaging the community, increasing community participation, expanding the equestrian season, and finally as a vehicle to market Wellington to the equestrian industry and to the world.

## How will the EV engage the community?

The EV provides a central gathering spot open to the entire community that educates, entertains and inspires residents about the Wellington equestrian industry. The limited number of shops and restaurants at *Equestrian Village* (only 45,000 square feet) will surround an exhibition area where there can be daily and nightly exhibitions, demonstrations, training, and/or clinics highlighting all dimensions of equestrian sport including riding, horse training, horse care, horse welfare, or job opportunities within the industry. On some days and evenings it could just be pony/horse rides (a live carousel, so to speak) for residents of all ages to get exposed to and ride a horse. Some examples of demonstrations could be explanations of the different disciplines, jumpers, hunters, dressage, polo, driving, vaulting, reigning, cutting, etc. It could be an Olympic rider demonstrating their craft, or a horse groom (some grooms can make over \$50k per year plus housing and benefits — there are thousands of grooms in Wellington with positions always available) or a farrier (hoof care/horse shoeing) explaining what they do. It also could be a demonstration by disabled riders showing how they overcame their adversity to pursue their dreams. There would be an online schedule that would be available to those interested in attending, as well as a process for people who wish to make presentations. It would also include a "Legends of Wellington" Hall of Fame exhibit that educates the community on Wellington's history. It would include a "Golden Horseshoe" on a walk of fame that would initially include C. Oliver Wellington, Bill Ylvisaker and Gene Mische.

## Why will it increase community participation?

Once people become engaged and knowledgeable we believe they will want to participate. If they have an interest in riding they would now find the high quality, accessible and affordable Palm Beach Riding Academy. The Academy provides a facility that will allow residents to participate in the sport whether a child, adult, or senior, whether for recreational or competitive rider. It will also be the center of the universe for our new public school riding initiative and our proposed interscholastic riding program. Also, with the right level of awareness, education and training, we think that residents will increase their interest in jobs that are available within the industry.

## How will it expand the equestrian season?

The EV will strengthen and stimulate the expansion of the equestrian season by adding new events (e.g. the Global Dressage Festival, breed shows, young horse shows, horse auctions, etc...). With an integrated hotel option and covered arena, we believe we can pursue regional and national finals for licensed events as well as collegiate events. With a world-class Showgrounds, an indoor arena, and a hotel option, we can pursue the 2015 World Cup Finals and/or the 2018 World Equestrian Games. We are also exploring western, cross country, and driving disciplines to add to the calendar of events. The more events, the longer the season and the more economic impact on the community through increased spending and jobs.

## What does it mean to market Wellington to the industry and to the world?

The EV allows us to introduce and market Wellington to a broad array of industry professionals (horse owners, veterinarians, trainers, product manufacturers, equestrian retailers, drug companies, and tourists) in order to enhance the exposure of Wellington through trade shows, industry conferences, spectator-oriented equestrian events and festivals (e.g. Equitana, BreyerFest, Equine Affair). Those events can leverage the hotel, competition arenas, covered arena, and various hospitality complexes. Many of these events would occur during the shoulder periods (i.e. non-winter) and would allow us to attract new riders, sponsors, and new businesses interested in relocating to Wellington, or new tourists (some of whom can be converted to participants).

## Why focus on a dressage complex?

Dressage has been the stepchild of equestrian sport in Wellington for years. There is a large passionate group of people who participate in the sport who have not had a world-

class facility in which to compete. There is an increasingly large group of dressage riders that make Wellington their full time home. I believe that will increase and there will be a longer season. Internationally, there is no real winter home for dressage and we are already seeing hundreds of new dressage horses and riders flowing into the community. The sport is growing and I think it will give Wellington an important new dimension.

## Why is the hotel important?

It is by far one of the most important investments to bring Wellington to the next level and it will have the biggest impact on extending the season. First, the most obvious issue is meeting demand and serving our customers. The Palm Beach County Sports Commission recently published an independent report that highlighted that the Winter Equestrian Festival generated 47,700 bed nights during the 12-week event. The only hotel in town at full capacity during that time period could only support 8,400 of those bed nights leaving a gap of 39,300 bed nights, which means 83% of the demand is filled outside of Wellington. This translates into tens of millions of dollars spent outside of Wellington and a tremendous amount of unnecessary traffic on the roads. Those guests are most likely eating and supporting non-Wellington businesses. Second, attracting world-class Sponsorship is critical to our long-term success. One of the biggest complaints from our sponsors is that there is no full service hotel to put up their senior executives and customers. The Hampton Inn is the only hotel in Wellington, and it does not have room service or conference facilities. Some of our sponsors have to put up their guests at the hotels throughout Palm Beach, which can be a 30-40 minute trip each way. Our largest sponsor FTI believes it is critical to maintain our standing and attract broader sponsorship. Many of our existing and potential sponsors would love to bring in their key customers and entertain them locally, however, it is inconvenient. A world-class hotel would dramatically expand our sponsor base. Finally, and most importantly, the existence of a hotel will allow us to create and or attract new events to Wellington. A hotel would allow us to attract new events, industry conferences, trade shows, or to develop a new equestrian tourism product. The hotel would act as the headquarters for the events, tradeshow, conferences, and sponsors. These events will allow us to extend the season before and after the winter, which will create jobs. If you bring a big conference, you would use the hotel as the headquarters for the event with the banquet and conference facilities. The event would be unique because you could leverage the other components of the property like the village shops, the covered arena, the equestrian arenas, and the riding academy, which would make the event unique. This would also bring commerce to other hotels, local businesses, rental properties, and restaurants. As for tourism, this year the Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau ran an ad in *Horse & Hound* magazine, the largest equestrian-oriented English-language magazine in the world, which is based out of England. I believe that it has generated one group of 30 people and over 70 other tourists to experience Wellington and the Winter Equestrian Festival. Since there was no place to stay in Wellington, they are staying as far away as Delray. A destination equestrian resort would also be unique in that you could bring your horse to the local stables and compete on site during off-season shows. I believe it will also be critical for our bid for the 2018 World Equestrian Games.

## Why does the hotel need to be 5 stories?

While the hotel is five stories at its maximum point, the hotel has been designed to be an attractive architectural landmark. In order to maximize green space and equestrian activity we went vertical instead of horizontal. The allowable height in Wellington is three stories. The design of the hotel steps down from 5 floors to 4 floors to 3 floors giving it a layered feel making it less than of box structure. The fifth floor is only 10% of the total area of the hotel so on average it is about four stories, which is one story above what is allowed. Again, the height is important in order to get the number of rooms and to achieve the green space.

## Why don't you use the commercial property across the street and put the hotel there?

Our strategy entails bringing more equestrian businesses and jobs to Wellington. That site is approved for commercial professional and offices. At this time we think the expansion of the season, increase in number and types of events, increased awareness of Wellington, along with county and state incentives can elevate Wellington for a potential site for a corporate headquarters or a regional office for an equestrian targeted enterprise. In combination with the great infrastructure of Wellington; schools, recreational facilities, lifestyle, quality home inventory, it leverages the strengths of the two complementary worlds. Further, it is critical that the hotel is a resort hotel with many amenities (spa, banquet, conference facilities, stables, pool etc. with beautiful grounds that will support many types of activities that are directly linked to the equestrian activity. With a strong world-class product, we can attract many equestrian events during the non-winter periods.

## There is empty commercial space in Wellington. Why should we create more?

Nearly all the tenants will be locating in Equestrian Village because it is an equestrian venue. They will be economic base businesses in that they will be associated with the equestrian industry, and therefore support local, non-base businesses. This property is already zoned Commercial Recreation with a floor to area ratio (FAR) of 10%. This 59-acre property thus has existing entitlement for almost 250,000 square feet of commercial activity. Despite the misleading information that is flowing around, the pure commercial elements are only 75,000 feet split between restaurant (20,000), retail (25,000) and office (30,000) all small numbers. The increase in FAR that is being requested to 15% is intended to be more consistent with what is allowed in other

elements of the equestrian preserve. The balance of the square feet is supporting the hotel and equestrian pavilions that are located within the property. A lot of the square feet beyond what is necessary to support the condo/hotel is going to be used for spas, banquet facilities, conference rooms and hospitality areas that will support the events.

## How does your vision benefit Wellington?

We believe that Wellington is just scraping the surface of the opportunity. The goal of this project is to not necessarily to make the winter season busier but rather to provide a platform to make the fall and spring months stronger. Executing on this vision will provide for the following benefits:

- Provide hundreds of critical short-term construction jobs.
- Provide Wellington a strong base to develop the very important dressage market.
- Develop hundreds of long-term, full-time jobs in all areas of the industry (horse shows, hospitality, lodging, administration, equestrian support, specialty retail).
- Elevate the real estate market, which enhances the tax base that supports community services.
- Reduce seasonality, which strengthens and supports local businesses.
- Create a common gathering spot to engage the community.
- Firmly establish Wellington as the number-one equestrian destination in the world.

## What do you see for the future of WEP and Wellington's equestrian industry? How will the partners both expand and preserve the equestrian lifestyle for years to come?

While many would sit back and enjoy what they have accomplished in their first five-year plan, we believe they have just scraped the surface of the opportunities for Wellington and are poised to launch a new five-year plan that is centered around integrating the community by making the equestrian world more relevant, affordable, and accessible with the unifying theme being the love of the horse.

- Increase the level of participation in direct equestrian activity of Wellington children, adults, and seniors through after school programs, clinics, summer camps, adult riding programs, scholarships, and seniors programs.
- Create a public interscholastic riding program in Wellington that will be a model for the country.
- Increase spectator participation in Saturday Night Lights and the dressage activities at the new stadium property.
- Increase the level of annual fund raising for the FTI consulting Great Charity Challenge to \$3 million dollars per year within five years.
- Increase the equestrian season to 7-8 months by bringing in new equestrian disciplines and new events, which will create full-time jobs and opportunities for Wellington residents.
- Create training programs for Wellington residents who want to seek employment in the equestrian industry.
- Create an indoor arena to support a broader range of equestrian and community events.
- Create a world-class equestrian village that is the gateway to the equestrian domain that provides a central architectural feature in the form of a world-class hotel and a corresponding equestrian plaza that would be a gathering inviting for the community.
- Secure the World Equestrian Games in 2018.

## Why do you believe the equestrian community is important to non-equestrians?

I don't think it is as relevant as it could and should be. I would estimate that less than 30% percent of Wellington residents know where the facility is and less than 10% have ever been there. The biggest challenge and one of the biggest goals of our partnership is to make the equestrian center and the corresponding equestrian activity directly relevant to the community. To accomplish this you have to make it accessible, affordable, and inclusive. Let's face it, the sport as configured is inaccessible, expensive, and exclusive, but it does not have to be that way. Over the next few years we are going to be opening up the facility and its resources to the community. It is a multi-step process that will require a lot of effort and investment. First, we have to get people to know where the facility is by providing a high quality, low cost entertainment that excites the community and inspires them to come to the facility and learn about equestrian sport. Second, we then have to create an access point or a vehicle that allows families (children and adults) in the community to experiment and experience the majesty of the sport through free lessons, camps, accessible riding programs, and scholarship program for children that have an interest in the sport. That vehicle is the Palm Beach Riding Academy. Third, we need to create a low cost interscholastic public school riding program that starts in elementary school and ends up in high school and allows the participants to become educated and positioned to access the tens of millions of dollars of collegiate scholarships available to them for intercollegiate equestrian sport. Once people become insiders to the sport and not observers to a "distant world," they will become interested, engaged, and fellow enthusiasts. Once we engage the community, I am hopeful that within three years, we can get 50% of the community to go to at least one equestrian event per year.