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At Crawford Farms, the Goals are Growth, Excellence

By Bill Finley

DURHAMVILLE, NY—It's hard to hear Michelle Crawford at times. It's not that she talks softly, it's that the din of hammers, Bobcats and power saws could drown out anyone. The noise is a constant and somewhat annoying backdrop at Crawford Farms, but a small price to pay when

you have a vision, the resources to make it happen and a dream of being one of the top breeders in standardbred racing.

If you've come here to hear the constant drumbeat of negativity, pessimism and complacency that seems a part of the fabric of the sport of harness racing, you've come to the



Al and Michelle Crawford

wrong place. This is a place where they look toward the future with hope and optimism, a place that is committed to making the sport better and more visible, a place where the mantra is that determination is a powerful force.

"I love horses and I've fallen in love with this sport," Crawford said, succinctly explaining why she is the way she is.

Which is why she has a vision.

"The vision is a boutique breeding operation," Crawford said. "I don't think we'll ever be as big as Hanover or Blue Chip, but I can't tell you we won't have 100 broodmares down the road. And I want them to be fabulously bred broodmares. Then I want to sell the babies somewhere where they'll be highly visible, like the first few nights of Lexington. The target would be something like 50 high-quality yearlings every year."

It is a work in progress, but something that is well underway. No breeding farm in America can match Crawford when it comes to expansion, ambition, optimism and a determination to break away from the pack of mid-sized breeders that are overshadowed by the Goliaths like Hanover Shoe Farms.

Crawford Farms is not new. Located a few miles from Vernon Downs in Central New York, it has been around since the mid-sixties, when it was opened by Michelle Crawford's late father-in-law, Jim Crawford. It was a steady presence in the New York harness breeding industry for five decades, but its owners were content with the size and scope of the operation.

That started to change the moment Michelle met her

future husband, Al, some 10 years ago when the two had their first date at the Lexington yearling sale. Five years later, they were married. While Al Crawford had grown up in the business, Michelle was raised on a potato farm and had had no connection to harness racing. The closest she had come was owning an Appaloosa. But she says she loves horses--of all breeds--and was immediately smitten by the sport of harness racing.

She says she was the "driving force" behind the idea of building Crawford into a major farm. With her husband running the couple's primary business, [Bankers HealthcareGroup](#), which provides financing for people in the healthcare industry, if a new, bigger and better Crawford Farms was going to spring from the ground, Michelle Crawford was going to have to be the one to make it happen.

"I'm the front person because I am the one here everyday working at it," she said.

And she admits that her husband has allowed her to chase her dreams because "he knows this is what makes me happy."

But Crawford is quick to point out that her husband is not at all on the sidelines when it comes to the horse business, that he brings years of experience and knowledge and that

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