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Thoroughbred industry centered on Plateau

Some of the state's top breeders occupy 1,000 acres here

By DENNIS BOX
The Courier-Herald

Thoroughbred horses have long been an integral part of the Plateau life, but today the racehorse breeding industry represents the largest concentration of farms in the state.

A quick inventory of farms on the Plateau include Mary Lou and Terry Griffin's farm, Griffin Place in Buckley; Debbie and Rick Pabst's Blue Ribbon Farm, also in Buckley; Nina and Ron Hagen's El Dorado in Enumclaw, Oak Crest Farm owned by Jack Hodge, vice-president of Emerald Downs; Barbara Ratcliff's Coal Creek Farm; Czech-Mate Thoroughbreds in Enumclaw, owned by John and Doris Konecny and too many others to list.

"There is no question the Plateau is the center for Thoroughbred breeding farms in the

state," according to Ralph Vacca, president of the Washington Breeders Association. "There are very successful farms in other places, but the Plateau is where the most action is. So many good horses have come out of our sale from that area."

One of the top horses bred on the Plateau would have to be Chinook Pass, foaled in 1979 at Dewaine Moore's Rainier Stables in Enumclaw, located where Thunder Mountain Middle School is located today. Chinook Pass won the 1983 Longacres Mile and the same year the gelding was given the Eclipse Award as the top sprinter of the year. Chinook Pass was honored as the Washington Horse of the Year both in 1982 and '83. The son of Native Born is sixth on the all-time Washington-bred earnings list with \$480,073.

Another big winner that took its first breath on the Plateau is Mary Lou Griffin's Rings A Chime. The grade 1 winning mare is fourth on the all-time earning list with \$606,315.

Other notable winners from the area include Belle of Rainier, Makors Mark, Tali'slucky-busride and, most recently, Fast Parade, bred at Czech-Mate.

The 4-year-old Fast Parade has earned \$461,873 and the gelding has risen to 10th on the all-time list.

Thoroughbred breeding is demanding and financially challenging, attracting those with both the toughness to hold up during rough years and an innate ability to understand horses.

Mary Lou Griffin has been breeding horses since 1976 and went full time in 1991. The Griffins recently expanded their farm to 72 acres and Griffin Place is home to 10 mares.

"I think 10 is a really good number for us," Griffin said. "I have one mare who is retired, she is 24, and two others are 23. They tell us when they are ready to retire."

It takes a certain touch to be a successful breeder and the Plateau is home to many.

Nina Hagen at El Dorado has brought some of the top sires in the state to the area including Tribunal, Cahill Road and Free At Last.

Vacca said about 1,000 acres on the Plateau are dedicated to breeding and raising Thoroughbreds.

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Photo by Dennis Box

Campanita and her colt Free At Last enjoy sunny days at Griffin Place in Buckley.