

sports&recreation

D.W. Salty is looking for material for his column, **Streets of Salt Spring Island**

If you have information on any of our streets, please contact us at: 250-537-9933 or dwsalty@driftwoodgimedia.com



HORSE RACING

Race world honours Salt Spring jockey Joan Phipps

Local resident offers inspiration

BY SEAN MCINTYRE
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Joan Phipps knew horse racing was her thing as soon as she'd saddled up a thoroughbred in the early 1970s.

"It was like love at first sight," Phipps told reporters in the lead-up to an Aug. 15 ceremony to mark Phipps' remarkable achievement at Marquis Downs in Saskatoon. "I knew then that it was something I wanted to do."

The former resident of Saskatchewan may have relocated to Salt Spring but the connection to the horse racing community in her home province remains strong. Phipps began riding when she was barely eight years old.

Although her family didn't own any horses, Phipps took on jobs around the Exhibition Grounds in Saskatoon and rode whenever she could. By the time she reached

Grade 10, Phipps joined the rodeo circuit. It wasn't long after a close friend offered her a chance to ride a thoroughbred that Phipps clearly saw the natural next step in her progression. She learned to gallop and was soon eyeing a spot in the gates alongside professional horse jockeys.

But life on the track was nothing like what it's become today. All of those jockeys Phipps wanted to compete against were men, and Phipps recounts strong resentment from male riders from the outset.

Phipps said male jockeys refused to speak to her, relegating her to a lonely rise in the ranks. She was forced to travel to New Zealand to compete in her first official race in 1972.

The aspiring jockey rose quickly but faced numerous injuries in the rough world of horse racing. Following years of overcoming discrimination's emotional toll, it was a series of physical injuries that led to Phipps' retirement from the

horse racing world in 1982.

To this day, Phipps swears that a good jockey is defined by a rider's ability to tune in and gauge a horse's feelings and nothing to do with gender.

The Aug. 15 celebration in Saskatoon marks the accomplishment of an incredible Canadian sporting pioneer and offers thanks to the woman who set the scene for generations of young female horse riders to follow.

Work is underway on a book that recounts Phipps' often rocky journey from being a youngster in the stalls to working as a pro jockey.

"Joan Phipps blazed a trail for women jockeys the world over through her tenacity, spunk, drive and pure talent," reads an entry on the Joan Phipps Story Facebook site. "Her compassion for animals and the underdogs of the world have made her, both in and out of the thoroughbred racing industry, a Canadian hero."



Joan Phipps, third from left, at a ceremony at Marquis Downs in Saskatoon on Aug. 15. The Salt Spring resident was honoured for her contributions to the sport of horse racing for women in Canada and around the world.