

# The LeVan Family



## Staying the Course

The LeVan family has been involved in Ohio racing for more than 50 years

story by **Jay Wolf**

**H**arness racing has been blessed with participation from multi-generational families. While the Haughtons, Campbells and Millers come to mind, on the Ohio circuit the LeVan family has been a mainstay for more than five decades.

The LeVan legacy began in the late 1960s with, of all things, dairy cows and trottingbreds, which are a cross of ponies and Standardbreds.

**HEY, BRO!** / Hank LeVan, driving Royal Meeting (5), and his younger brother, Harrison, driving Spiffy Beach (7), both raced in the McAuliffe's Pace at the Union County Fair in Marysville, Ohio, last summer. Both are fixtures on the Ohio fair circuit.

Charles "Vic" LeVan was a dairy farmer in Lewistown, an hour northwest of Columbus, milking over 100 head of cattle each day.

"He developed pneumonia a couple of years in a row and the doctor told him to go to Florida," said his son Herb. "He had a friend that got him hooked on those trottingbreds and so when he would go to Florida each winter, he would race them down there."

# CONGRATULATIONS

# MEADOWLANDS

## Ramona Hill

Winner of the \$1,000,000  
Hambletonian Final in a  
stakes record equaling 1:50.1

Bred by Crawford Farms



## Tall Dark Stranger

Winner of the \$273,125  
Cane Pace in a  
stakes record equaling 1:47.1



## Sorella

Winner of the \$600,000  
Hambletonian Oaks in 1:51



“We are very grateful to all of our fellow co-owners, partners, trainers,  
drivers and caretakers that helped make this extraordinary day a reality.”

--- Michelle & Albert Crawford



With the parents wintering in the Sunshine State, the farming operations at LaVanderosa Farm were left to Herb and his wife, Rosemary.

"I told him that while he was loafing down there, he might as well take a horse with him," Herb said. "That's how we got started in the horse business."

The elder LeVan took his son's advice and built a training track on the farm that would serve as their home-base until the mid-2010s.

The next summer, the LeVans piled into a truck and traveled to Indiana where they purchased a Scotch Straight colt, People's Choice. Better known

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Louie LeVan

graduation was June 10 and my boss went on vacation on June 11," he said. "My wife and I purchased Woodside Veterinary Hospital on Sept. 15."

Louie and his wife, Melissa, now have six children—Hank, Louis ("Harrison"), Frani, Cati, Hadley and Holden.

"My dad worked hard," Louie, now 52, said. "By no means did we have expensive horses. Brian Brown said to my dad, 'Herb, you've beat more people with cheap horses than I have ever seen.' Dad has always looked up to Brian, so that was special for him."

Some of those "cheap" horses included Caramel Dumpling (\$276,108),



as "Pete" around the barn, People's Choice was the first of many workhorses for the LeVans. With 120 career starts and \$25,215 in earnings, the horse may not have been a cash cow, but he did help three LeVans—Vic, Herb and Louis ("Louie")—get their licenses.

"He was as nice of a horse as you could find," said Herb, who turned 82 in late July.

"They had a matinee over in Marion and Louie was 12 or 13," Herb said. "He did a lot of the jogging here at home and he asked me, 'If I get Pete ready to go, can I take him to matinee?' The worst thing that ever happened was he won his first race.

"Mom said I had to go to college, so I went to St. Leo University in Florida. My grandparents had a farm near Sunshine Raceway and I stayed with them and took care of the horses," Louie

said. "Grandma made your bed, made your meals and cleaned your clothes. I got to spend four years with them."

Grandma Ester is currently 101 years old and still resides on the family farm.

**In the fall of 1990**, armed with a bachelor's degree, Louie enrolled in veterinary school at The Ohio State University.

During his breaks from school, he raced at Northfield Park and Lebanon Raceway to make a little extra spending money. He participated in the Ohio Youth Driver's Series, a development series that produced the likes of David Miller, Brian Brown, Mike Wilder and Kurt Sugg.

Louie graduated from veterinary school in 1994 and entered a very hectic period of time in his life.

"Hank was born on June 8, my oath and hooding ceremony was June 9,

Herbie L (\$253,233) and Hanky L (\$307,663).

Caramel Dumpling went postward 489 times during his 13-year career, finishing on the board in 248 of those starts. Herbie L started "only" 310 times in his 9 seasons, while Hanky L is still racing and is nearing 290 starts.

"Caramel Dumpling was a really tough horse," Herb said. "I don't think he was ever lame. He was a super nice horse. I think everyone needs a horse like him once in their life."

"Caramel splits time between the two paddocks at home with Herbie L," Louie said. "Neither of them liked to be turned out when they raced. Dad would turn them out and 15 minutes later they would bang on the fence. It took them a while to get used to being turned out.

"Hankie's been pretty good to us.



We raised him. We had his mother. He had a couple of (bowed tendons) at 2 and we worked on him and we were able to race him.”

**The LeVans** believe in hard work, both from themselves and their horses.

“We have to work every day and we make the horses earn their keep,” Louie said.

“Grandpa was pretty ‘old school’—not in a bad way,” his son Hank, 26, said. “He felt horses were under jogged and over trained. If you only show up to work four days a week, you are not as productive as someone who shows up six or seven days a week.”

Hank hung around the fairs and the barns but didn’t catch the racing bug until his junior year in college.

“I was at Western Illinois and that summer Grandpa had some colts to race

at the fairs and didn’t have much help,” Hank said. “I groomed and took care of the horses. I saved some money and wanted to buy a part of a horse that fall.”

The yearling the young LeVan would purchase would eventually be renamed Cursive L, which pays homage to the family’s maroon and white racing colors.

Hank, whose cursive *L* is trimmed in gold, earned his first career driving win in 2017 with Cursive L with a 4¼-length win in 2:06.2 at Oak Harbor.

“I got called into the judges’ stand for a slow quarter,” Hank said.

Hank’s younger brother, Harrison, is the final active member of Team LeVan.

“I helped my father when I was really young, before I could even get into the paddock at Scioto (Downs),” Harrison, 23, said. “Between my sophomore and junior years of college, I worked

**L IS FOR LEGACY** / Herb LeVan, 82 (*opposite, far left*), represents the second generation of LeVans involved in harness racing. Joining him are his son, Louie, 52, and two of Louie’s sons, Harrison, 23 (*opposite*), and Hank, 26 (*near left*).

for Bill Dailey and that’s when I started getting more and more involved. That’s what really got the ball rolling for me.”

Harrison, whose *L* is trimmed in gray, graduated from The Ohio State University and started driving in 2017. He won his first two career starts, both with Herbie L in Free-For-All trotting events at the Union County Fair, their home track, and three days later at the Shelby County Fair.

“I was two-for-two,” Harrison said. “It all went downhill from there.”

**Much like** their parents, Louie and Melissa have always stressed the importance of an education to their children.

“They can never take your education away from you,” Louie said. “If nothing else, college teaches you discipline and hard work.”

“I always told them that it’s a tough game—you have to take the ups and the downs. Harness racing has treated us well as a hobby. When you take that next step and turn it into a business, it will be tough. It’s nice that they have their degrees to fall back on.”

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Hank was the general livestock judging coach at Ohio State. He is close to completing his master’s degree at that facility in agricultural communication, extension and leadership.

“At the end of May my contract was up at Ohio State,” Hank said. “I now have the opportunity to focus on the horses.”

He currently trains 12 head.

No matter what happens on the track this summer, 2020 will be memorable for another reason. Hank and his wife, Megan, are expecting their first child, a son, this month.

So, will we see a fifth generation of LeVans at the races? “I hope so,” the father-to-be said. **HB**

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