

# A Very Special Group



by DOUG BURGE

As noted on the cover of this March 2014 edition of our monthly *California Thoroughbred* magazine, last year's Eclipse Champion Male Sprinter, Points Offthebench, was recently crowned the California-bred Horse of the Year for 2013.

In front of a crowd of more than 130 people at The Claremont Hotel Club & Spa in Berkeley, California, on Feb. 10, the Horse of the Year, as well as the other divisional winners and the Leading Sires, Leading Breeder and Trainer of the Year, were honored. Suffering a tragic injury while preparing for the Breeders' Cup World Championships, this final acknowledgement to Points Offthebench as the California Horse of the Year was a fitting salute to this champion.

The evening also included both the induction of the class of 2014 in the CTBA Hall of Fame as well as a surprise presentation of the President's Award, given periodically to a deserving industry participant. One individual and one horse were selected to the esteemed Hall of Fame: William J. Morey Jr. and In Excess (Ire), respectively.

A fixture in both Northern and Southern California, trainer/owner/breeder Bill Morey saddled such stars as millionaires Dixie Dot Com and Bold Chieftain. The latter claimed honors as the California Champion Turf Horse in 2008. Morey, who has been recently battling cancer, was very emotional in accepting his induction. While receiving a large standing ovation from the crowd, he credited the Cal-bred program for a lot of his success.

In Excess, who passed away in 2013, was a leading sire in the Golden State for many years. A multiple grade I winner and earner of more than \$1.7 million, he stood all but his first year at stud at Vessels Stallion Farm in Bonsall. Owners

Mike Pegram and Scoop Vessels partnered in the son of Siberian Express as he quickly elevated to be the premier stallion in the state. Showing their commitment to California, the partners eventually syndicated the nationally desirable stallion ensuring that he remained in the Golden State. The sire of more than \$45 million in progeny earnings, including three grade I winners, In Excess will leave a lasting legacy as one of the state's best ever studs.

A final esteemed honor, the CTBA President's Award, was presented to longtime California Thoroughbred Breeders Association (CTBA) member and Northern California breeder, William "Bill" Nichols. This award, given as a proclamation by the current President of the association, is an expression of appreciation for the many services Bill has provided to the industry during his lifetime. As a teenager, Bill worked for the famed Ridgewood Ranch in Willits, California, leading to his knowledge and connection with the Charles Howard champion Seabiscuit. Bill later wrote and published *Seabiscuit: The Rest of the Story*. Bill, a member of the CTBA's Board of Directors since 2004, has been an outspoken leader in Northern California, spearheading many events including the Northern California Yearling and Mixed Sale and the annual Stallion Tours of farms. Bill has been a good friend and supporter of the CTBA for many years, and is very deserving of this award.

The date and location for next February's Awards Dinner will be announced soon, as we are looking forward to continuing the tradition of honoring the state's best horses and individuals. With all of the highs and lows in this business, it is important to honor all of the successes that are achieved. ■



Bill Morey (center)—CTBA Hall Of Fame



Bill Nichols (center)—CTBA President's Award

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