



Standout Employee



DANIEL LOPEZ

Daniel Lopez and St James Place

COURTESY RENEE BECKWITH

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Although his published work hours are from 7 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, if Daniel Lopez isn't on the scene by 6:30, everyone starts to worry.

"If he's not there by then, we wonder, 'What's going on with Daniel?'" said Mike Tippett, owner of Blue Diamond Horseshoe, a growing Thoroughbred farm in Aguanga, Calif.

"He usually gets here by 6:15," manager Renee Beckwith confirmed. "And if something happens, you never need to ask him to stay late. He just stays."

Lopez has only been with the Blue Diamond Horseshoe team for 14 months, but he is already irreplaceable. The 42-year-old Mexico native grew up riding horses and herding cows on his father's cattle ranch in Jalisco but came to the United States 18 years ago. He has never held a job that did not involve equines in some way.

"Since he's been here, he's learned how to do landscaping and handle the farm

equipment," said Beckwith. "But he's always worked with horses and never done anything else."

Lopez is a jack-of-all-trades type on the farm, handling stallions in the breeding shed, feeding three times a day, and cruising the property in the Gator Utility Vehicle to check on each horse, often making multiple trips per day. He has also had a hand in the actual construction of the property, which is still very young, with new structures regularly being erected.

"He helped build our huge mare motel, which has about 40 stalls," Beckwith said. "He built all the pipe-panel pens, planted our 80 California pepper trees, maintains the property, and helps plant the alfalfa."

Tippett has another 10 acres of property across the street from the main farm, which is being planted as alfalfa fields. One day, he would like to add a place for Lopez to live.

"In the future we could put one more house in on the acreage across the road, and then Daniel could live on the property," Tippett said. "He is phenomenal."

Lopez has a special way with foals,

Beckwith noted, saying, "He's very good at catching them. He's very quiet, and very good with them."

But Lopez' favorite horse on the farm isn't a foal. It's a yearling named St James Place. He's by the farm's premier sire James Street and out of the six-time winner Lady Biscayne. Lopez handles James Street, by El Prado, as well. The multiple graded stakes winner earned \$637,723 while racing predominantly in Canada at Woodbine. He has first-crop yearlings this year.

"He's very good with the stallions," Beckwith said. "He's good at everything, really. If you teach him something, he learns it immediately. And he just loves horses. He'll drive around and look at each one up close, even if you can see them all from where he's standing." The farm always has more than 50 horses on the property.

Tippett often sees Lopez during his Saturday walk-throughs.

"The stalls are always cleaned, and all the chores are done," Tippett said. "You could not ask for a better employee. I cannot say enough about him." **CTB**

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First Foals will be 2-yr-olds of 2017.



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