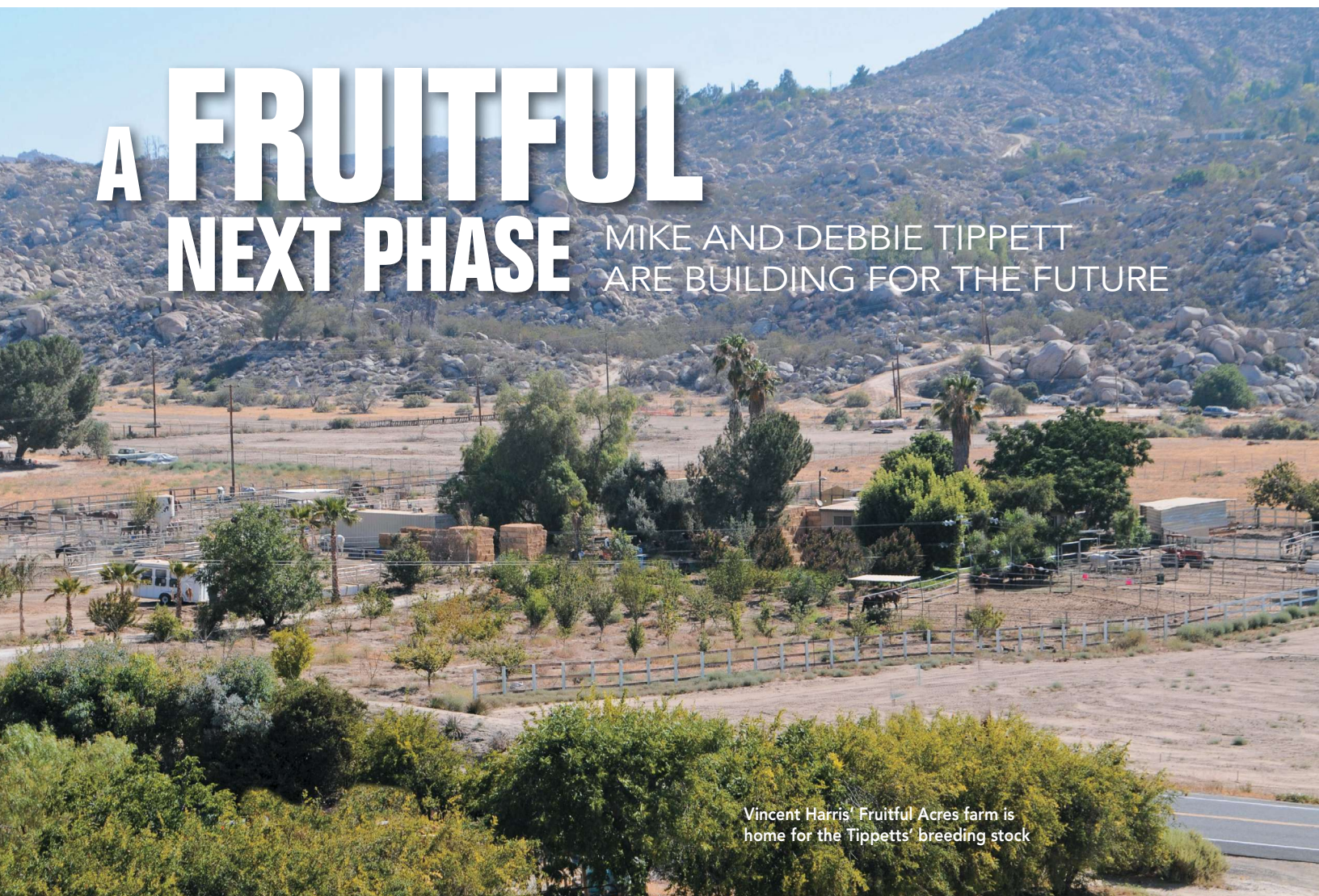




A FRUITFUL NEXT PHASE

MIKE AND DEBBIE TIPPETT
ARE BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE



Vincent Harris' Fruitful Acres farm is home for the Tippetts' breeding stock



Fruitful acres owner Vincent Harris, left, with Debbie and Mike Tippet, all of whom are living the dream with their Cal-based operation

BY TRACY GANTZ / PHOTOS BY RON MESAROS

Whirlaway, Big Brown, Paul Reddam, and the Breeders' Cup hat contest would seem to have little in common. But together they piqued Mike and Debbie Tippet's interest in horse racing to such an extent that today the Tippetts stand four stallions and are building their own farm near Aguanga, Calif.

"Our kids had just moved out, and we were kind of feeling this empty-nest syndrome," said Mike. "We wanted to start our next phase."

That next phase began with one claim and has expanded to about 50 horses, most of them broodmares and foals. They stand multiple graded stakes winner James Street and stakes-placed Wolfcamp, both sons of El Prado, as well as Lightnin N Thunder, a stakes-placed son of Storm Cat, and Hidden Blessing, the first horse they owned.

The Tippetts have embraced the California-bred program. They have bought mares in foal to major Kentucky stallions and brought them to California so that the babies can be Cal-breds.



When trying to purchase their first two mares, Hailey Keen and Cristina's Diamond, the Tippetts encountered Vincent Harris, who owns five-acre Fruitful Acres farm near Aguanga and wanted to buy the same mares. That has led to a partnership and friendship among the three people.

The Tippetts, who race as Blue Diamond Horseshoe, brought their horses to Harris, who lives at Fruitful Acres, east of Temecula, and tends to his horses and theirs. The Tippetts reside in Chino Hills, about 70 miles northwest, close enough that they can visit regularly.

They usually come armed with a gigantic bag of carrots. It didn't take long for them to want their own farm and another home nearby.

They have purchased acreage adjacent to Fruitful Acres. Harris has cleared and fenced the property, which will ultimately have what Mike calls a "mare motel" with 24' x 24' stalls that each lead to a 50' x 50' paddock. The Tippetts are looking into buying more nearby property as well, possibly growing some of their own alfalfa.

"When I first came up here, this place just had a peace about it," said Mike. "I was really taken by it. I wanted to be a part of that. Vince and I were just a match made in heaven. He gets to live his dream, and I get the makings of a horse farm without quitting my day job. We couldn't exist without each other."

Harris grew up in San Diego and Torrance. Like many other racing fans, he began going to the racetrack with his father. Young Vincent learned to handicap, but he knew that he wanted to own horses and care for them himself someday.

"I had helped my grandfather in Texas breed mules," said Harris. "This is always something I've wanted to do."

Harris began owning Thoroughbreds in 2009. He also grew a variety of fruit on his property, from which the Fruitful Acres name is derived. The first stallion he stood was Impeachment, who ran third to Fusaichi Pegasus in the 2000 Kentucky Derby (gr. I) and died recently at age 17.

While Harris was building his farm, Mike was seeing to his steel business and he and Debbie were raising the children in their blended family. All the kids are grown now, and the Tippetts recently became first-time grandparents.



The California mountains make a scenic backdrop for the horses at Fruitful Acres

One of Mike and Debbie's hobbies is collecting sports memorabilia. They have an entire game room in their home devoted to their collection. Before they married, Debbie was living on Whirlaway Lane in Chino Hills, a street that inadvertently began their journey to horse ownership.

"What kind of name is Whirlaway?" Mike asked Debbie, who told him that Whirlaway was the Triple Crown winner of 1941.

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— Mike Tippetts

At that time, Debbie had visited Santa Anita, but most of Mike's experience had come from watching a few Quarter Horse races at Los Alamitos.

Mike created a piece of memorabilia for Debbie by taking a Rolling Rock beer sign that had three horses' heads on it—Seabiscuit, Man o' War, and Whirlaway. Mike added photos of Whirlaway and some horseshoes.

"But he put the horseshoes on facing

down," lamented Debbie, who knew only too well the adage that horseshoes must face up so that the luck doesn't run out.

The luck didn't run out for the couple. When Big Brown began his Triple Crown run in 2008, he captivated their imagination. The Tippetts followed the Triple Crown races, and Mike also learned about the Seabiscuit-War Admiral match race at Pimlico in 1938.

"I wanted to go to where they had that match race," said Mike. "So the first thing that we did was we went to the Preakness the year that Shackleford won (in 2011). We wore hats, took pictures, and had a ball."

The next year they decided to attend the Kentucky Derby. As part of the trip Mike planned a visit to Three Chimneys Farm near Midway, Ky., so that they could see Big Brown.

Before the trip he presented Debbie with a list of Derby probables, and she picked I'll Have Another as her choice. As it turned out, while they visited Three Chimneys, a bus of tourists pulled up. The farm, which also stands Flower Alley, the sire of I'll Have Another, had arranged for owner Paul Reddam and some of the other connections to sign posters of I'll Have Another.

Debbie lined up to get a poster because