

LOBBY WATCH



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Horse Whisperers Say:

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Put Out To Stud, Austin Jockey Club Improved Its Political Pedigree

- Track Marks Now Lead To Governor Perry's Personal Realtor and Personal Lobbyist!

Seeking a controversial racetrack permit from gubernatorial appointees to the Texas Racing Commission, the Austin Jockey Club (AJC) upgraded its bloodline last June—recruiting new partners with close ties to the governor.

Inside tract

In June, Racing Commissioners approved AJC's sale of shares to new owners. The largest of these, Tack Development, Ltd., bought 10 percent of AJC. Austin realtor Tim Timmerman, who controls Tack Development, is a major landowner in Pflugerville, where AJC wants to build its track. A decade ago, Timmerman and Rick Perry respectively served on the board and advisory board of insurer Citizen's, Inc.

The *Dallas Morning News* reported in 2002 that it was Timmerman who told Perry about nine acres of land that strategically stood between municipal sewage lines and the hilltop that Michael Dell was buying up for Travis County's largest homestead. Perry bought the tract in 1993 for \$122,000, making a \$343,000 profit when Dell bought it just two years later.

Perry did not attend the closing to buy this property. Instead, he granted power-of-attorney to lobbyist Mike Toomey, who was his roommate when both men served in the Texas House. After Toomey resigned as Perry's chief of staff this fall, one of the first new lobby clients that he landed had ties to AJC's next-largest new owner.

Honky Tonking

Silver Creek Racing, Ltd., which bought 9 percent of AJC, is controlled by Holt Hickman who made a fortune making auto air conditioners and cruise

controls. He is better known as the owner of Fort Worth's Stockyards and Billy Bob's Texas—the world's largest honky tonk. Hickman bought that Western club from eponymous founder Billy Bob Barnett. Both men have nursed a thirst to break into the gambling industry.

Hickman (who over the years founded companies called Texas Casino Development Association and Hickman Gaming Group) wanted Texas to legalize gambling a decade ago so he could build a hotel and casino in the Stockyards. Earlier this year the Fort Worth City Council granted \$330,000 in tax breaks to a Hickman development group to build a new hotel at the Stockyards—although it still cannot have a casino.

Meanwhile, Billy Bob Barnett was part of a group that planned to develop a Western-theme casino in Las Vegas—complete with a Billy Bob's nightclub. Inadequate funding killed that project in 1999. As Toomey joined Governor Perry's staff in late 2002, Barnett registered a new company in Nevada: Big City, LLC. It was one of the first clients to hire Toomey after he left the governor's office this fall. In fact, Big City is paying a high-powered Texas lobby team up to \$1 million this year.

Big City hit up the Texas General Land Office and local officials last year for permits to stage huge concerts on a public beach in Galveston. But it did not meet \$1 million worth of resistance. In what might explain this kind of lobby money, however, Toomey and other Big City lobbyists disclosed that they are pushing “gambling” for this client.

Big City Capital Lobby Studs

2004 Lobbyist	Contract Value
Reginald G. Bashur	\$150,000 - \$200,000
Walter Fisher	\$150,000 - \$200,000
John 'Cliff' Johnson Jr.	\$150,000 - \$200,000
Cal E. Varner	\$150,000 - \$200,000
Mark D. Harkrider	\$50,000 - \$100,000
Mario A. Martinez	\$50,000 - \$100,000
Carl A. Parker	\$10,000 - \$25,000
Michael Toomey	\$10,000 - \$25,000
TOTAL: \$720,000 - \$1,050,000	

Austin Jockey Club Lobbyists (From Gardere Lobby Firm)

2004 Lobbyist	Contract Value
Stephen P. Koebele	<\$10,000
A.W. 'Woody' Pogue	<\$10,000
Carl S. Richie	<\$10,000
Caroline Scott	<\$10,000
Robert D. Spellings	<\$10,000
Mark Vane	<\$10,000
Kimberly A. Yelkin	<\$10,000
TOTAL: <\$70,000	

It is unclear if Big City, Billy Bob, Toomey and friends are working behind the scenes to promote AJC—or if they have other gambling cards up their sleeves. What is clear is that Big City Capital and AJC have amassed serious political capital to pursue what they are after.

AJC's owners have contributed \$29,000 to Governor Perry since 2000. Big City Capital contributed \$5,000 to House gambling cheerleader Ron Wilson in April.

This contribution was intriguing, since Democratic voters had thrown out Wilson one month earlier. In the last days of the 2004 campaign, Big City also backed two Austin lawmakers. It gave \$1,000 to Rep. Elliott Naishtat and \$10,000 to Rep. Todd Baxter—just one week before Baxter nosed out his challenger by just 147 votes. The same day, Baxter received \$2,000 more from Big City lobbyist Mike Toomey. •

Austin Jockey Club Owners' Contributions To Rick Perry (July 2000 To Present)

AJC Owner	Home	Amount
Tim Timmerman	Austin	\$12,000
Holt Hickman	Fort Worth	\$7,000
Joe Straus	San Antonio	\$5,000
Bryan Brown	San Antonio	\$4,000
Joseph Archer	Houston	\$1,000
TOTAL:		\$29,000