

Feature Story I (final)
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Little Brown Jug: Help or Hindrance?

Thousands of people mill around, straining their necks to catch a glimpse of the finish line. I can't see; standing under five-and-one-half feet, it's not even worth my effort to try. Some of these people, however, have a lot of money riding on this race.

"Perhaps the biggest community event each year running," according to the Delaware Chamber of Commerce, this is the 57th Annual Little Brown Jug, the final race of six days filled with races at the Delaware County Fairgrounds, which was recently awarded the U.S. Trotting Association's Blue Ribbon Fair Award. This race was named for one of the first winners at the track, which opened to racing in 1938.

Jug Week, the third week in September, begins with sixteen races on Saturday and Sunday, including the Lady Pace for older mares and the Buckette, for two-year-old fillies on Saturday. The Ohio Breeders Championship races for two-year-old filly pacers are held on Sunday, along with the Ohio Breeders three-year-old filly trot races and five divisions of the billings Amateur Driving Series. Two Standardbred Grand Circuit Races for two-year-old trotters are held on Tuesday.

The Jugette, one of the more famous races, is held on Wednesday, with three-year-old filly pacers racing. Also on Wednesday is the Old Oaken Bucket for three-year-old colt and gelding trotters. Thursday brings the Magical Mike, an open pace race for last year's Jug participants who are not yet retired from racing, and the climax of the week, the Little Brown Jug. "Previously there had been valuable stake races for every class of harness horse except the three-year-old pacers," read a September 1946 issue of the *Delaware Gazette*, referring to the first Jug race.

Everyone in the stands sits just a little taller and the air gets a little heavier as the horses and drivers approach the end of the race. Then suddenly, an explosion of sight and sound breaks the tranquility of anticipation. Some people are so excited they're jumping up and down; others hang their heads and

mutter under their breath. Million Dollar Cam wins this year's Little Brown Jug, with a record breaking time of 1:50:2, making a lot of people a lot of money. But where do all of these people go with their money after the races are over?

According to Didi Fahey, executive director of MainStreet Delaware, the average day tourist in the United States spends \$28.00 a day in the cities they are visiting.

There has never been a study done to measure the economic effect the Little Brown Jug has on Delaware, said Tom Thomson, director of racing at the Jug. "But it must be quite a large amount." Payroll for the fair and races exceeds \$200,000.00 in just that one week. Over \$2.5 million was in this year's purse for the races. "Race fans bet over \$3 million on our six days of racing," Thomson said. "An additional \$2 million was bet off track." The races are broadcast over closed-circuit television to casinos all over the continent. The first Jug race, according to another September 1946 issue of the *Delaware Gazette*, was broadcast over WHKC, a national radio chain.

The Jug race has been huge in the community from the beginning. In the same issue of the *Delaware Gazette*, the reporter said, "Horsemen thronged into the city all day Tuesday to watch the first go at the \$36,000 Jug and early morning saw crowds headed toward the fairgrounds to search for seats that are certain to be at a premium by race time. It is expected that from 10,000 to 20,000 persons will see the initial classic."

Tom White, press representative for the race, wrote on the Little Brown Jug website, "They had come to Delaware, Ohio from throughout the Midwest, from Canada and Florida, from New York and California, and from just about everywhere in between. Unofficial gate estimates put the swarm of Little Brown Jug enthusiasts at 27,000."

The track at the Delaware County Fairgrounds is known officially as the world's fastest half-mile racing strip. According the *Delaware County Then and Now: An Informal History*, a book by Ray E. Buckingham, "The vision and foresight of Joe Neville and Hank Thomson in creating this outstanding sporting event assumes even greater importance when the extensive economic and the widespread publicity values are considered."

Not everyone feels the Little Brown Jug is that much of an important part of Delaware all of the time. Beverly Coniff of DPS Antiques and Collectibles said, “the race is a big part of Delaware for that week, but there’s too much else in town, like the [Ohio Wesleyan] University which has been around since 1842.”

From the outside, it looks like a quaint little pub-like restaurant, but once I open the door, I am transported into another world. It could be any time and any place, but the atmosphere is unmistakable; this is the Brown Jug Restaurant and this is Thursday night, September 19, 2002, the night after the Little Brown Jug, and everyone is celebrating.

Every booth and table is full. Extra chairs litter the walkway, which is also lined with people. Trying to make my way up to the bar to get some water, I have to fight my way elbow-to-elbow with men, women, and even a few older children. This is the biggest group of Delaware residents I’ve seen since I started attending Ohio Wesleyan University. My past experiences at the Jug have been quiet and peaceful, even during the busy lunch hour.

After being jostled around, feeling like a pinball in an arcade game, I finally get my glass of water. I search for about five minutes for a place to sit down, and eventually spot a lonely chair against a wall in the adjacent room. Grabbing it, I pull up to a spot near the crowded bar and sit back to take it all in.

Although this is my third year at Ohio Wesleyan, it’s my first “Jug Day” experience, and boy is it an experience. The energy and excitement are contagious. The air is vibrating with the buzz of conversation and laughter. People are talking about everything from the week’s race results and how much money they won or lost, to politics, to their families, to Monday night’s football game. The scents of beer and sweat, typical bar smells, mingle with a hint of horse. I feel like I’m about to be let in on a secret.

The Brown Jug Restaurant is a typical bar and restaurant, except for one thing: its origin. It was started in 1946 and named after the second jewel on the Triple Crown of Grand circuit harness racing,

“The Little Brown Jug”. The winner of the Jugette race receives a trophy from the Brown Jug Restaurant every year.

The affiliation is quite evident when you walk into the Jug. Jackets, pictures, and other memorabilia from winners of past races line the dark, wood-paneled walls. Most of these pictures show a prosperous past.

“Years ago there were jewels and furs at the race,” said [Joe Schmoe](#), owner of the Delaware Antique Mall in downtown Delaware. “People let it all hang out.” The Jug race was a place to see the high rollers in the past, and they loved to show off. Now, you see the best and the worst of people at the race. Rather than the furs of the past, people today wear jeans and t-shirts and baseball caps. Some people sport even less, wearing tank tops, shorts and sandals. It has become much more of a family event, much less formal.

Huge beer bottles with a horse and harness on them line an archway, commemorating this year’s races. An old cart and harness hang above the bar, which is the only place in the whole building with bright lights. The dim lighting gives it an even more nostalgic atmosphere.

Behind the cart, the wall is covered with commemorative plates from years worth of races, along with almost every kind of liquor you could imagine. The beer cooler on the wall at the far end of the bar, which is filled with hundreds of cans and bottles, sports a banner reading “Celebrate Harness Racing, Delaware Co. Fair, Little Brown Jug: 2002.” These people were definitely taking this suggestion.

“Jug Day is party day,” explains Bill Straud, owner of the Brown Jug Restaurant “The locals continue partying and move downtown here after the race.” Straud is an older man with graying hair who looks a little out of place serving food to the locals. He fills the doorway as he walks from room to room, and becomes a commanding presence soon after entering. But in conversation, he lets the customers lead. He has a good relationship with them, peaking over his glasses while balancing a tray to drop in and out of their conversations. It seems as though a busy restaurant is what Straud lives for.

Unfortunately, this is the only day and time during Jug Week that the locals celebrate away from the fairgrounds. “Daytime crowds are fairly the same [as any other week],” says Straud. “All the new people

moving in either don't know or don't care, so daytime business is pretty much the same, but the nights, especially Tuesday and Wednesday, there are a lot of out-of-towners, quite a few from Canada." Friday and Saturday are normal business days as well.

Despite the absence of crowds during the day, the biggest week of the year is still Jug Week for the restaurant. "We have a 25 percent higher sales volume that week," says Straud. The only other time of the year that might rival Jug Day would be Monnett Weekend at Ohio Wesleyan University. He attributes this to the lack of other restaurants within walking distance from the University where people can sit down and have a nice meal with their families.

Other businesses in the downtown area do not necessarily reap the benefits of the Little Brown Jug. Coniff says their store closes on Jug Day because staying open is worthless, there's no business. "A lot of people come from all over the world, like Ireland, Canada, and a lot from the East Coast. They can't buy big things like furniture because they have to fly home." They do get a lot of browsers the rest of the week. Most sales are of Brown Jug souvenirs and other horse related items.

Lauretta Beltz, of Candle Creations, recently moved to Delaware. When she showed up to work on Jug Day at 2 p.m., she didn't know what to make of the deserted downtown. "I thought there was an emergency or something!"

Candle Creations is one of the few businesses that stay open all day on Jug Day. Some close at Noon, but most don't even bother opening. This year, Beltz says they had pretty good business on Jug Day, as well as the rest of the week. Last year, however, they only sold \$17.00 worth of merchandise.

She attributes it to the deserted streets. "A lot of people are out-of-towners, and they could find parking!"

"[The Jug] has more of a direct economic effect on the fairgrounds and the larger community, like hotels and fast food places," Fahey said. "There's not so much [of an effect] on downtown Delaware, other than restaurants like the Brown Jug."

Many businesses found Jug week more prosperous this year than last year.

Anthony Zanetos, owner of The Nectar Candyland, which is also open on Jug Day, said, “we’re usually slower because of [people going to] the fair, but this year business was busy.”

Schmoe said that they did surprisingly well too. “[We had] super traffic, especially on the Saturday after the race.” He said bad weather always means better business. This year the fair and the races had a summer sun to compete with which may explain the boost in business. “We were busier than I thought we’d be this year...but there’s no question [The Jug] has a positive effect [on the community].”

He did mention one reason many businesses find it useful to close on Jug Day. “People from out-of-town are here for the races, not to buy [merchandise].”

There doesn’t seem to be a drop off of business in recent years though, the downtown has traditionally not seen much of a positive effect directly from the races. “The race's affiliation with downtown hasn’t changed much [over the years],” Coniff said.

One newcomer to downtown Delaware is not daunted by the lack of business on Jug Day. Barth Beaman vice president of the Mean Bean is thinking of setting up a kiosk at the fair next year. He said, “[the fair] pulled people out of downtown. They go to the fair for their Belgian Waffles and such, but next year, we’ll follow them.” Maybe some changes are on the way.