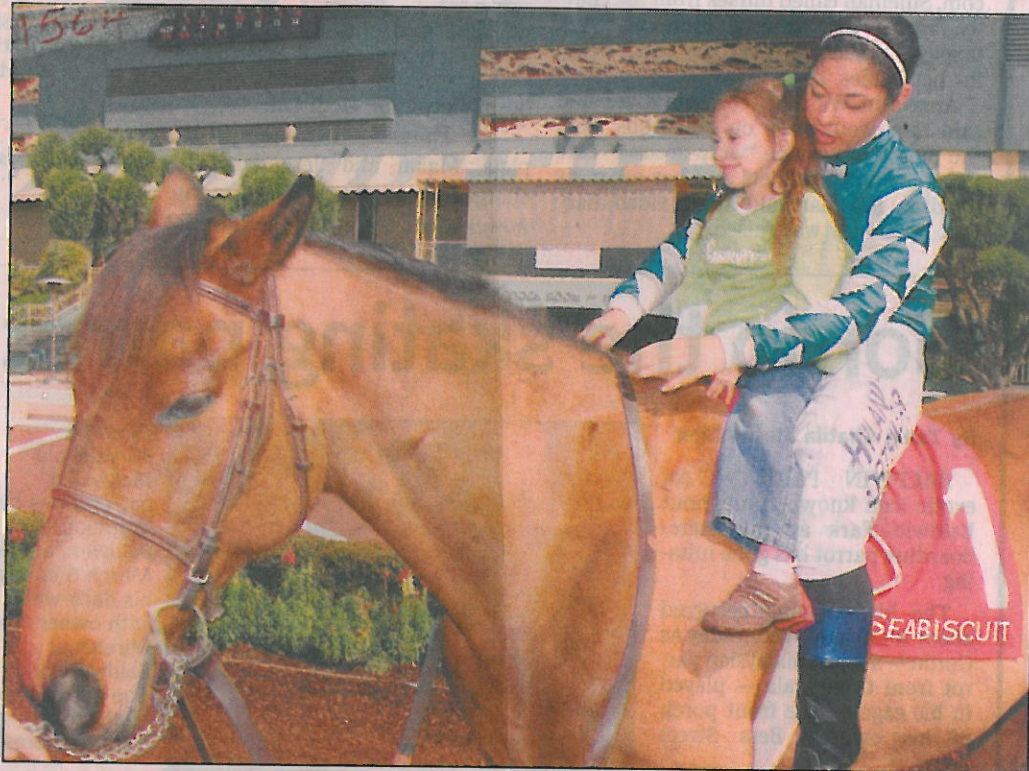


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Keith Birmingham Staff Photographer

Jockey Kayla Stra sits atop Fred with 4-year-old Jasmine Delgado. Fred appeared in the movie "Seabiscuit." Disabled children and adults, along with their families, met jockeys as part of a pre-event for the upcoming 5K fundraising run for AbilityFirst at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia.

In the winner's circle

AbilityFirst, Santa Anita to hold fundraiser

By Robert S. Hong
Staff Writer

ARCADIA — Michael Rossi relaxed in a chair on a grassy field inside Santa Anita Park after feeding a famous horse and meeting some celebrities.

He was among a group of about 25 adults and children with disabilities from nonprofit AbilityFirst that came to the track Thursday to meet local jockeys and the horse that played Seabiscuit in the famous movie.

"I'm enjoying this. We're having a good time," Rossi said.

Lori Gangemi, president of AbilityFirst, which provides programs and services for children

and adults with disabilities, said her agency is "gearing up" for Santa Anita Park's Derby Day 5K Run and Walk on April 4, where clients, employees and others from the agency will raise money for the nonprofit's programs.

"We thought it was important to get the word out about the event and also get some exposure for the jockeys," said Peter Siberell, director of community service and special projects for Santa Anita.

It was an enriching experience for the visitors, said Gangemi.

"Being around animals is really soothing," she said.

And the participants

appeared to enjoy themselves, getting autographs from and talking with the jockeys, some of whom appear on the Animal Planet's "Jockeys" television series.

"I feel like these are God's special kids, and it makes you realize how lucky you are," jockey Chantal Southerland said, between signing autographs.

Many of the children from AbilityFirst had a chance to sit on the horse while others fed it carrots. A trumpeter piped out classic tunes in the background.

For more information on Derby Day, visit www.santaanita.com

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