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Aqueduct

SUNNY JIM FITZSIMMONS ROOM GIVES BIG A PATRONS SMOKE-FREE HAVEN

by Susan L. Morris
NYRA Press Staff

Say goodbye to the age-old stereotype of the racegoer puffing on a big cigar.

In fact, there is now a room at Aqueduct racetrack where you won't find one cigar or cigarette—the new, nonsmoking “Sunny Jim” Fitzsimmons Room.

New York Racing Association officials set up the “Sunny Jim” room because, said the Executive Director of Customer Services, Mafalda Z. Garges, “we had had many requests from patrons asking for a nonsmoking section.”

Officials looked around and came up with what was formerly the Jamaica Bay Room, located on the first floor between the grandstand and clubhouse.

The old Jamaica Bay Room was a perfect choice, Mrs. Garges explained, because it was not previously being used and smoking patrons would not be displaced from an area to which they had grown accustomed.

But it also had other attractive aspects. “It’s a comfortable place for a person to be able to enjoy the races, and there is access to the room from the grandstand and clubhouse,” said Mrs. Garges.

Seating for 300 is available in the carpeted facility, with six large-screen televisions providing races, odds, will-pays and the rest of the information available throughout the track. Stencil paintings of famous owners’ silks decorate the windows which look out on Aqueduct’s backyard park.

But while a nonsmoking area may be the wave of the future, tradition is one of the focal points of the room in honoring Fitzsimmons, one of racing’s greats.

The room will be decorated with winners’ circle photos of Sunny Jim and photos of his greatest horses, as well as a painting of Sunny Jim by Roche.

While response was slow at first, the room is now regularly filled, even on weekdays.

“It took people a while to realize that the room was there,” said Mrs. Garges, “but now that they have, we have had a lot of positive comments about it.”

Everyone asked said that they used the room specifically because of its no-smoke appeal.

“I come here because it’s a nonsmoking area,” said John Sansone of Brooklyn. “In the OTB parlors, there is a lot of smoke and it’s hard to stay in there very long.”

John Psathas of Woodside echoed that same statement. “I like the change,” he said. “It’s comfortable and the air is cleaner in here.”

