

# The Paymasters of Purses

## Who Are They and What Do They Do?

By Mary Forney

Working at each major California racetrack and racing fair is a very unique group of individuals – six women to be exact – without whom the business of racing would be impossible. Every owner will at some time, or has already, come in contact with at least one of California’s paymasters of purses. What most owners may not know, however, is the enormous responsibility quietly shouldered by each of them – and the efficient and seamless working relationship they have with one another.

The paymaster’s job is highly specialized, involving an entirely unique set of accounting skills and understanding combined with an extensive knowledge of what is really a very complex racing business. It’s no wonder then that as a group, California’s paymasters account for more than 100 combined years of service to horsemen, with individual tenures ranging from 5 to 30 years.

In Southern California, the contingent includes Cece Connor at Santa Anita, Susan Winter at Hollywood Park, and Bridget Crawford at Del Mar. In the North, Patricia Prospero represents Golden Gate Fields, Peggy Morsi Bay Meadows, and Vicki Layne the Northern California Fair Circuit. Each of them performs basically the same functions, using the same Incompass computer database system. They also regularly share their insights and tips, and cooperatively work to help one another provide the high level of service and integrity California owners have come to expect.

The paymaster’s job is incredibly involved, performed under intense day-to-day pressures and demands. Their varied duties include:

- Processing daily race information provided by the racing office, ensuring that the information is correct with regards to the amount of purses to be paid, ownership details, and trainer and jockey information for each individual horse.
- Entering race results into the Incompass system, which calculates payments and fees to be posted to the owners, trainers, and jockeys.

- Calculating the payouts of race day funds and depositing them to owners’ accounts at the conclusion of each race. According to California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) rules, these funds are to be available to owners 72 hours after the race is complete.
- Maintaining accurate owner, trainer, and jockey accounts for each live racing meet.
- Accepting all deposits and posting to owner and trainer accounts daily.
- Tracking and disbursing purse, California Bred, and Breeder’ Cup monies.
- Deducting both trainers’ fees from the first three finishers’ accounts and allocating the deductions to the proper trainer account, and jockey fees as set forth by the CHRB schedule of fees or by private contract.
- Overseeing claims, including pre- and post-race deposits to owners’ accounts, approving the claim forms, and signing the cards indicating that the money is on deposit and certified before the claim slip is allowed to be dropped. Following a claim, the paymaster posts the ownership change via the Incompass system, which then debits the purchaser, credits the seller, and transfers the California State sales tax to the holding account for monthly disbursement to the State.
- Receiving all stakes money and nomination, entry, and starting fees for stakes races.
- Receiving fine monies resulting from CHRB rulings.
- Maintaining financial transaction records relating to numerous payees such as the CHRB, the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association, TOC, and track management.
- Processing year-end tax forms including 1099, 592-B and 1042 forms for all horse owners, trainers, and jockeys who earned purse money.



**Bridget Crawford:**  
“Definitely call and ask questions; sometimes your trainer isn’t going to give you all the information. That’s what we’re here for, and we’ll do our best to walk you through the idiosyncrasies of what we do.”



**Pat Prospero:**  
“I’m so proud of the paymasters in California. We work together and have a great working together relationship.”



Vicky Layne:

*"I would ask owners to have patience with us. I don't have an assistant, and I have to prioritize minute to minute – with phone ringing and people coming in. I may have a lot of people standing at my window, and it's just me to help them.... I don't know one paymaster who doesn't try to help people the minute they need help."*



Peggy Morsi:

*"Because there are so many multiple ownerships these days, it is very good for owners to let us know, when the account is racing, what percentages they have on a particular horse."*

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### Sharing Information

As mentioned above, since 2003 the Horsemen's Bookkeeper accounts – as they are officially known – in California have been maintained through an automated computer system developed by Incompass Financial Services. While the offices are currently able to share account information among the Southern California tracks, they do not yet have the capability to share the same information between Northern and Southern California tracks, but that will change. "I believe it's coming," said Winter. "It will be nice to have the state on one key system. It would be so helpful to the owners."

That's not to say the paymasters don't share information in other ways. "We talk to each other and basically handle our offices the same way," said Crawford. "We talk all the time." Additionally, the southern and northern tracks work together to facilitate claims. According to Santa Anita's Connor, "We don't wire money between tracks, but if somebody has money here and they want to claim up north, we have a reciprocal agreement that we will give them the money if they should get the claim."

### The Horsemen's Bank

All horsemen have an account with the paymaster of purses. "We function like a bank for owners, trainers, and jockeys," said Crawford, who has been at Del Mar for 15 years and, like her colleagues, can't imagine working anywhere else. "People usually are fond of us because we give them money," she added.

Each of the paymasters deals with thousands of individual horseman's accounts. According to Connor – Santa Anita's paymaster for the last 25 years – "There are probably 2,500 to 3,000 active accounts. On the first racing day of each week, we'll cut more than a million dollars in checks."

Although one might think there are more accounts in the south than the north, Prospero, who has been with Golden Gate Fields since 1978, noted "It was determined by a study that the actual number of owners' accounts has nothing to do with purse money; it really has more to do with the length of your meet. We tend to run the same numbers in the north as they do in the south."

The current account system is also very secure – much like any other banking system. "We don't give out any private information," explained Winter. "Our job is to keep accurate records, because at the end of the year, we have to file tax forms with the government." She added, "Because of all the partnerships that are now so much a part of the industry, we deal with a lot of changing percentages for people – moving money from one account to another."

### Meet Your Paymasters

The office of the Paymaster of Purses can usually be found adjacent to the racing office at each of California's major racetracks. The situation is slightly different on the Northern California fair circuit, and for Layne who lives a bit of a "gypsy" lifestyle in the summer, packing and moving her entire office every two weeks. She can usually be found in a trailer adjacent to the racing office.

Most people find that they receive a different level of service from their banker when they're on a "first-name" basis. The same principle applies to an owner's relationship with the paymaster. If you haven't yet met them in person, take some time to stop by the paymaster's office when next out at the track. They'll be happy you stopped by – and so will you!



Susan Winter:

*"If you're going to be a new owner, we should be one of the first stops you make when you get your license, so we get all the information and everything is right from the beginning. We're more than happy to answer any queries you might have, and if we don't know we'll find out!"*

Cece Connor:

*"There are so many people who don't keep track of their own accounts, and they really should, especially if they have partners... The best thing an owner can do is have contact with the paymaster."*