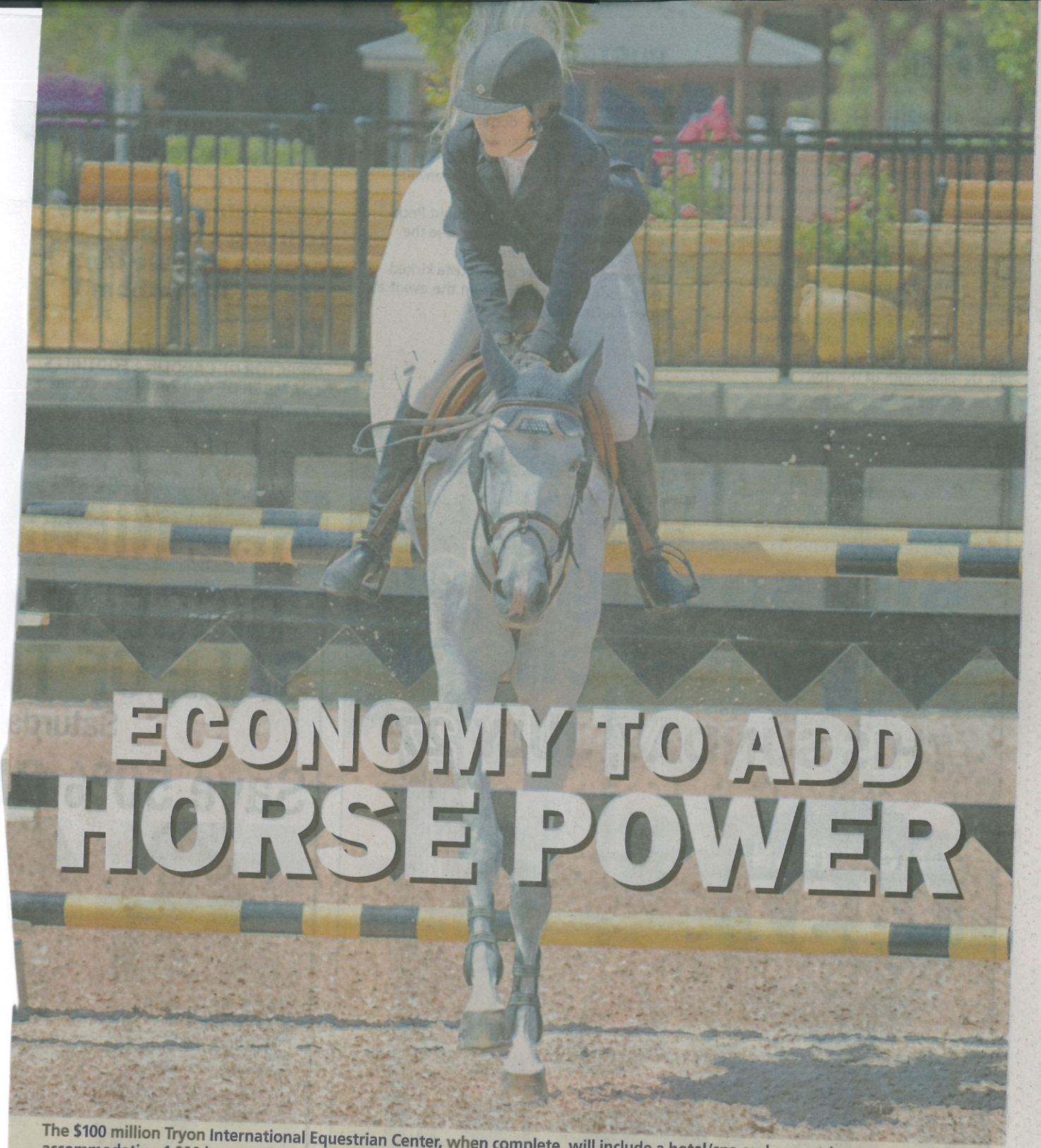


# ECONOMY TO ADD HORSE POWER

The $100 million Tryon International Equestrian Center, when complete, will include a hotel/spa and equestrian center accommodating 1,000 horses. The resort is expected to benefit Upstate equine-related business as well. FRANCES PARRISH/STAFF

## NC equine center expected to boost Upstate business

**By Frances Parrish**
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Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Tryon International Equestrian Center sits in the quiet and bucolic region of Mill Springs, North Carolina.

Grooms lead exhausted horses to barns while smartly dressed riders in navy blue jackets sit astride their steeds, eyes focused on the show ring in front of them.

The hustle and bustle of the center is punctuated by trainers shouting to be heard as loudspeakers blare announcements and rumbling water trucks wet down competition rings.

"It's exciting to have a facility of this caliber," show secretary Jen Hicks said. "It's a big boost to the community."

The economic boost from the $100 million center and resort when completed is expected to send economic ripples throughout the Upstate.

"(The) big impact will be the hospitality industry, and food is part of that," said Dr. David Hughes, assistant director of Clemson Univer-

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The Tryon International Equestrian Center sits on 1,400 acres off U.S. 74, and currently accommodates 500 horses. FRANCES PARRISH /STAFF

# HORSES

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sity's Institute for Economic & Community Development. "Then you get these specialized suppliers of equine goods and services, and so you might see some regrowth in the retail of those services."

The equine center sits on 1,400 acres off U.S. 74, accommodating 500 horses. Once it's completed by 2017, developers said, it will be a resort, featuring a hotel/spa and equestrian center accommodating 1,000 horses.

A 6,000-seat outdoor arena, a covered arena, a sports center and another 500 stalls will be added to the equestrian center. To accommodate guests, a rental log cabin village and RV park will be built along with the 150-room hotel managed by Salamander Hotels and Resorts, developers said.

"To have this kind of facility close to home is a big deal," said Jodi Robertson, owner of Foxwood Farm in northern Greenville County's Marietta community.

Dr. Kristine Vernon, assistant professor in animal and veterinary sciences at Clemson University, expects the facility to create a demand for equine-related jobs.

"I think when you attract a certain level of riders ... it's going to increase the demand for very high-end equine professionals, whether that's veterinarian, farrier, massage therapists, chiropractors, feed dealers, hay brokers, the whole nine yards," Vernon said.

The demand could benefit Clemson students who graduate from the university's equine program.

"It's exciting from my perspective at Clemson University because we are training people to become those types of equine professionals," Vernon said. "So we are hoping to place them into grooms, working student positions and internships."



Jodi Robertson, owner of Foxwood Farm in Marietta, says the equestrian center could host the kind of winter show that has brought millions of dollars to Palm Beach, Florida. PATRICK COLLARD/STAFF

Janet Sciacca, executive director of Carolina Foothills Chamber of Commerce in Tryon, believes the new center will not only give a boost to the economy in Polk County, North Carolina, but also in the Upstate region.

Nearly 500 workers have been hired to help with construction of the equestrian center and resort.

"We believe the resort will be a major job engine and contributor to the community's economic recovery," said Mark Bellissimo, a founder of Tryon Equestrian Partners.

Bellissimo also has worked with the Winter Equestrian Festival at Palm Beach International Equestrian Center, which lasts from January to March. The festival hosts more than 100,000 room nights for the area during the winter festival and attracts about 6,000 horses and competitors.

Sciacca hopes the Palm Beach equine experience, with more jobs and tourism, will be replicated in Polk County.

The Winter Equestrian Festival pumped an estimated $120 million into the Palm Beach economy over the three-month event in 2011, according to a Winter Equestrian Festival Economic Impact Report prepared for Palm Beach by Marketing Research.

"I think it's going to do incredible things for our community. It's going to bring economic growth that we can't even really fathom yet. But we can look at developments like this and what it has done for other communities," Sciacca said.

Robertson expects the Tryon center will host shows of similar caliber as the Winter Equestrian Festival. She said competitors following the hunter-jumper circuit, who want to continue to show during the winter but are unable to due to weather, migrate to the Palm Beach equestrian center for the winter.

"In the end, if (the Tryon center) keeps us from moving to Florida for a month, it would impact our area greatly," Robertson said.

The equestrian center's first show was the week of July 4, and included a Grand Prix jumper class based on the speed of the horse and how cleanly it jumps. Horse and rider teams competed for the $50,000 purse.

"When you get offers of $50,000 and $75,000, you're going to pull in some people from far away," Robertson said.

Vernon, the Clemson professor, believes the equestrian center's impact will extend beyond the horse-show community.

"I think it's going to attract more people to the sport of equestrian and people are going to want to come out and enjoy a nice day at a horse show."