

That's a wrap



CAMDEN'S JOHN FORT (far left), owner of Peachtree Stable and of Kentucky Oaks winner, Plum Pretty, presents the blanket given to his filly to the staff at Kip Elser's Kirkwood Stables in Camden, which developed Plum Pretty. Pictured, from left, are Fort, Scottie Ottaiano, Elizabeth Fort, Kip Elser, Helen Richards, Ana Martinez, Charles Woods, Alejandro Flores, Kateryna Stolyar and Snag Lee.

Plum Pretty's Kentucky Oaks-winning blanket returns home to Camden and to the staff at Kirkwood Stables

By TOM DIDATO

C-1 (Camden, S.C.) sports editor

It would have been easy for John Fort to have pulled a Linus by taking his blanket and going home with it.

Well, Fort did bring the blanket, which was presented to the Peachtree Stables-owned Plum Pretty following her win in the \$1 million Kentucky Oaks on May 6, home. But where he brought it and what he did with the blanket might surprise you.

Many a Thoroughbred owner dreams of winning a race such as the Kentucky Oaks, the fillies' companion to the following afternoon's Kentucky Derby. And, any piece of memorabilia presented to the connections of the winning horse is a treasured piece of racing history.

That being said, Fort could have taken the blanket and mounted it on his office as a reminder of that historic early

evening victory on that first Friday in May. Instead, he gave the blanket to a group which had as much to do with Plum Pretty's win as did her trainer, Bob Baffert, or her jockey that day, Martin Garcia.

Plum Pretty's blanket returned to Camden with Fort. But it did not stay in his possession for long as he presented the winning blanket to Kip Elser and his staff at Kirkwood Stables.

In another local angle, the high-performance EquSuede blanket which was presented to Plum Pretty and to Kentucky Derby winner, Animal Kingdom, the next day, were custom-designed in Camden by Fenwick Equestrian Products.

It was the staff at Kirkwood who developed the filly in Camden before sending the then 2-year-old to the Ocala (Fla.) Breeders' Sales Company's

2-year-olds-in-training sale in March 2010.

Sired by Medaglia d'Oro and out of Liszy by A.P. Indy, Plum Pretty was purchased by Fort for \$130,000. In the fall of 2009, the Pennsylvania-bred could have been purchased for \$75,000 at the Fasig-Tipton Mid-Atlantic October sale but her reserve was not attained (RNA).

"John gave the winners' blanket from the Oaks to my crew. It was a wonderful gesture by John to reach back to the people who helped (Plum Pretty) get started," Elser said of the gift which was received by himself and his crew of workers. "It was just great to see something like that."

Fort's gesture caught Elser and his staff off guard. Many a Grade I winner has come out of Kirkwood Stables, including 1995 Kentucky Oaks winner Gal In A Ruckus, but no trainer or

owner that Elser can remember, has ever made a presentation such as the one which Fort did to the Kirkwood staff.

"I don't know that any owner has ever reached back to us before this like John did," Elser said. "Most people would have wanted to put something like that on their own wall."

"This was a really, really kind gesture on John's part. And, we appreciate it."

The price for which Fort purchased the then-gangly filly looks like a bargain now as Plum Pretty has brought in \$761,200 in earnings from five lifetime starts, in which she has three wins and a pair of thirds. She was scratched from her scheduled start in Saturday's \$250,000 Mother Goose Stakes at Belmont due to a quick-passing illness. She is now entered into Saturday's \$150,000 Hollywood Oaks at Hollywood Park.