

interview

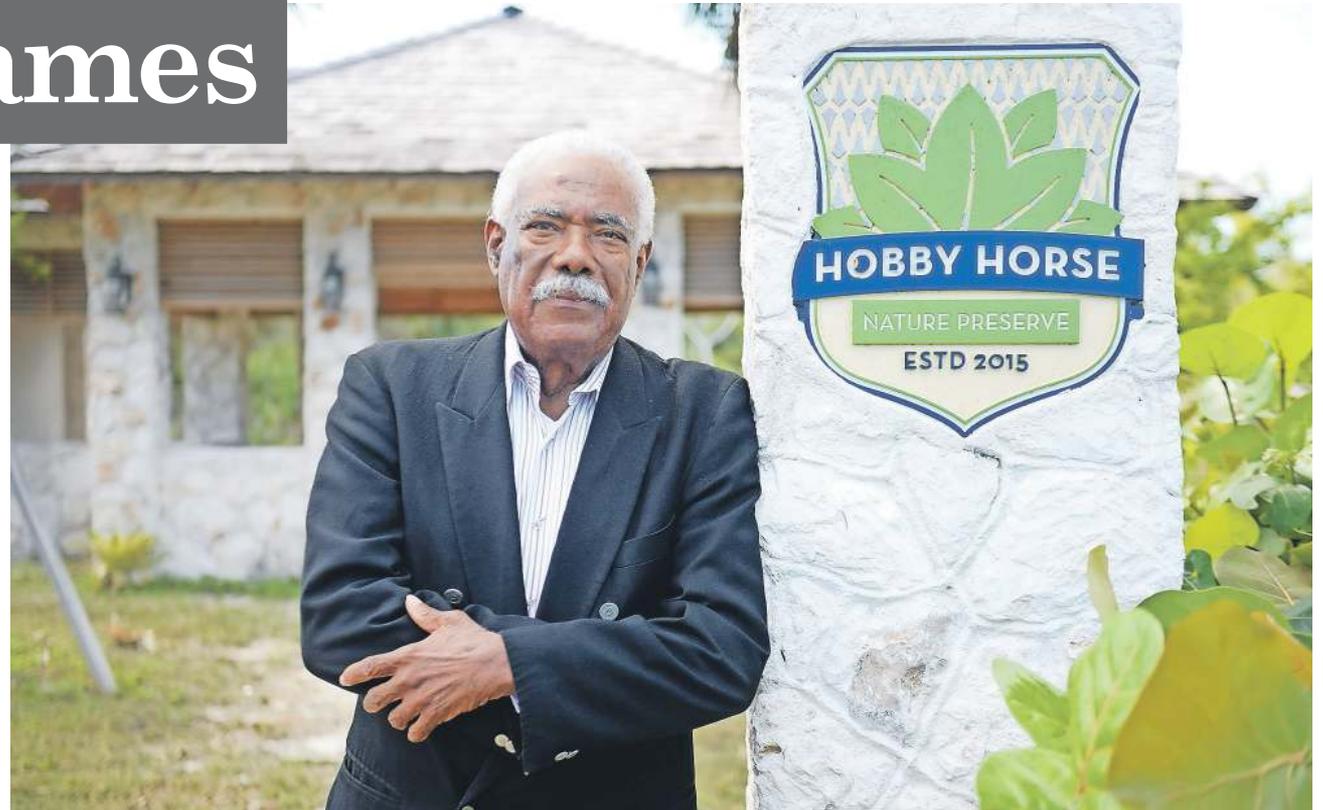
The Hobby Horse Hall Race Track was a hallmark of the Bahamas' illustrious heyday. And after uncovering the facility's impressive 200-year-old history, author Ivan James believes that its return could usher in a new era of prosperity for the country. He speaks to *Felicity Ingraham* about his new book on the subject and his thoughts on how to bring horse racing back home.

Ivan James

Mention the words "Hobby Horse Hall Race Track" to anyone in their mid-50s or older and watch their eyes light up. It's as if you just mentioned the magic words that stir up memories of grandeur and denote a time of peace and plenty in the Bahamas. There's no doubt that this was a significant period in Bahamian history, and Ivan James has captured it in his book, which is being released today.

"The Life and Death of Hobby Horse Hall Race Track" captures an illustrious time in Bahamian history. In more than 400 pages of pictures and newspaper clippings, Mr James' book does an excellent job of showing the romanticism of a time that older Bahamians seem to agree was one of the country's best eras. The book displays many historical photos of locals who dedicated themselves to the sport as well as people from all over the world who flocked here. Mr James has uncovered two centuries worth of history and believes that the race track on New Providence may have been the very first to be established in the New World.

The Hobby Horse Hall Race Track, he believes, was established between 1790 and 1792 under the direction of Colonel Andrew Deveaux. A Loyalist to the King of England during the war of 1776, Deveaux was exiled to St Augustine, Florida. In 1782, the Spanish attacked New Providence



Ivan James at the original site of the Hobby Horse Racing Track. PHOTO/SHAWN HANNA

with 5,000 men and Fort Nassau surrendered. Deveaux heard of this and took it upon himself to sail to Harbour Island and Eleuthera with 65 men. He recruited for five days before sailing to New Providence to recapture the town of Nassau and return it back to King George II. Deveaux's previous experience as governor of both New York and Massachusetts may have contributed to him becoming one of the most autocratic governors this country ever had, Mr James told *Tribune Weekend*.

An avid equestrian and a noted racer in the Carolinas, Colonel Deveaux had his engineers build a one-mile race course. It was located in the area which now consists of Baha Mar, the golf course and Prospect Ridge. Lord Dunmore, Governor of the Bahama Islands, granted 420 acres of this area to Deveaux in 1790. The remaining acreage was used as a farm for the Hobby Horse Hall Race Track.

Having a 200-year history means that the race track existed during the time of slavery, and it is known that

in the Carolinas and Virginia many slaves rode to their freedom by winning countless races for their owners.

As the years progressed, the horse racing industry became a major source of economic development for the Bahamas, Mr James said, and it was a perfect accompaniment to the rise of the country's premier industry, tourism.

Mr James is a noted hotelier with 40 years experience in the industry. His career started in 1957 at the Coral *Continued on page 4*