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Harbour Hotel and Golf Club, and ended in 1994 at the Crystal Palace Hotel and Casino, where he served as director of marketing, sales and public relations.

In 1971, he was honoured as the first Bahamian to be given the title of concierge of a major hotel in the country and was one of the top three Bahamian executives in the country. He went on to manage two small hotels in the Dominican Republic before returning home. Today, at the age of 78, he is a self-employed taxi driver who enjoys sharing the history of the Bahamas with visitors he encounters daily. A native of Farm Road, Mr James shares his love and passion for the land of his birth with everyone he comes into contact with.

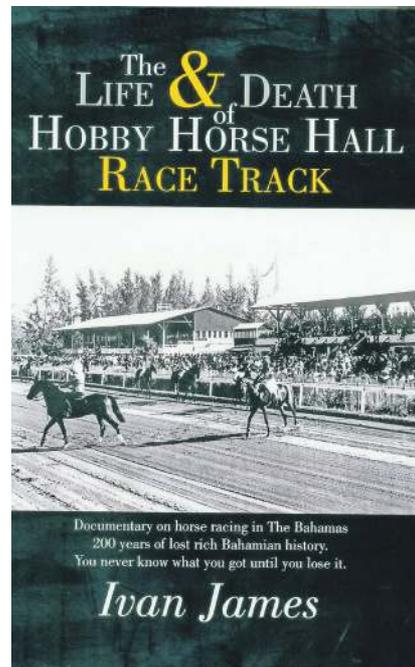
He is certain that the Hobby Hall Race Track played an important role in the economic empowerment of Bahamians, and if reestablished, would do so again. He was serving as director of sales and marketing for the Ambassador Beach Hotel in 1977 when the race track was officially closed. At that time, he was a steward for the race track on his days off, filling in at the request of Nigel Ingraham who was the racing secretary. Sir Arthur Hanna was the Minister of Finance at the time, and he made the announcement to the public that it would be the last year of the race track at that location, but that a new track would be built on land that was allocated by the government in the Gladstone Road area.

Mr James recalled the day it all came to an end: "It was balmy day... there was rain and wind, the temperature was in the high 60s, which was unusual for that time of year... it was in April. When my colleagues came to pick me up I waved them off because I still had my topcoat on. When I got up to the pavilion where the refreshments would be for the stewards, I saw all these canisters of racing film reels strewn all over the place, about to be discarded."

He decided to collect some of the reels, and two decades later he took them to a company in Miami to have them restored and put onto VHS cassettes. Initially, his intention was to share the race track's history with all those who had an affection and nostalgia for the sport like himself. But as he began a search at the Department of Archives and scanned old copies of the local newspapers, he realised that his work was of much more value than he had thought. In fact, it was of national importance.



Horses at the historic Hobby Horse Hall stables.



Ivan James' book will be officially launched today at the Baha Mar Convention Centre.

His conclusion is that the death of horse racing in the Bahamas is intricately linked to the rise in crime in the country: "In 1977, we had about three to four murders. In 1978, the murder count rose to seven. From that time to this day with no race track, the escalation of murders has turned into a dilemma. The horse racing industry is the only thing you can measure crime by in this country, because crime was at an all-time low when the track was open here. You can't measure crime by



Lady Dupuch with her prize-winning horse, Brooks Carlisle, holding the Governor's trophy that Brooks had won at the Hobby Horse Hall.

anything else. I say that with authority. Horse racing is the only event that brought white and black Bahamians together, and it's sad that the bureaucracy that has kept the race track closed for 40 years."

Mr James said after the closure of the Hobby Horse Hall Race Track there was much anticipation from the public for a new track, as it was a source of livelihood for so many. Today, he believes that the reestablishment of the track could result in at

least 800 jobs annually, in addition to a spinoff economic effect which could impact vendors such as horticulturalists and farmers, tailors, and those in the food service industry.

Forty years after the end of the horse racing era in the Bahamas, Mr James is today releasing his book during a special event at the Baha Mar Convention Centre. He considers it a good omen. He is calling on the current administration to seriously consider the return of horse racing, especially as it was promised by the then government of a newly-independent Bahamas.

The layout of the one-mile oval race course in New Providence was up to the standards of the best race courses around the world, including one of the most historical, the Royal Ascot, built in 1711, said Mr James. Stake races, 100 guinea (1.1 pound) races, the Seagrams Cup and other major events were held there, all drawing international attention. Racing subsided during the time of World War I, but only for a few years. In the 1930s, racing became regulated and patrons could make wagers on horses. Beautifully manicured greens, great jockeys and a supportive government aided in its success.

"The book is a fascinating read," said Mr James, "And I am hoping that it acts as a stimulus to create interest for the return of horse racing in the Bahamas."

"It would bring a high diversification of jobs and would act as a stimulus to the economy from the merchant perspective. You have to buy coats, medicine, even the horticulturalists and farmers would benefit greatly – as a matter of fact, all the farms would probably be sold out. Racing is thriving today in Jamaica, Barbados, St Kitts and other countries in the region. In St Kitts, the Chinese are putting close to a billion dollars into their breeding, racing and residency programme. We were doing this long before our Caribbean brothers and sisters. Land in Andros right now is ripe for large-scale horse breeding."

This could also serve as tool to combat crime, Mr James believes, adding that the sport builds confidence and character.

In his book, readers get a glimpse of the past and the Hobby Horse Hall Race Track with lots of pictures and interesting stories about Bahamians, foreigners and expats who were united in their love of horses and the sport of horse racing.

Tribune publisher Eileen Carron's parents are pictured in the book as