THE NEIGHBORHOOD STORY PROJECT PRESENTS:

LETTERS FROM THE BACKSIDE

Exhibition of Letters, Photographs at Fair Grounds Louisiana Derby Weekend

NEW ORLEANS (Friday, March 11, 2011) – The Neighborhood Story Project, a local nonprofit in partnership with the University of New Orleans that facilitates local residents publishing books about their own communities, will present Letters from the Backside, an exhibition of open letters by racing’s behind-the-scenes workers accompanied by the photography of Aubrey Edwards, around the Fair Grounds paddock during Louisiana Derby Week, March 25-27.

An opening preview reception open to the public will be held Wednesday, March 23, 6-8 p.m. The opening will feature finger food and a cash bar.

When: Wednesday, March 23, 6-8 p.m.

Where: Paddock Area, Fair Grounds Race Course & Slots, 1751 Gentilly Boulevard

What: A reception to celebrate the opening of Letters from the Backside, featuring 17 open letters and posters representing all parts of the Fair Grounds Barn Area, known colloquially as “the Backside.” The reception will feature finger food and a cash bar with proceeds benefiting the Neighborhood Story Project. The exhibition will remain on view through Fair Grounds’ Closing Day, March 27.

More on Letters from the Backside
After a season of writing workshops on the backside of the Fair Grounds, the Neighborhood Story Project has produced an exhibition of open letters written by jockeys, trainers, grooms, hotwalkers, veterinarians and track employees.

With photographic portraits by Aubrey Edwards, the show gives a sustained look into a city within the city of New Orleans. Each year, more than 700 workers arrive in October and leave after the Louisiana Derby at the end of March. In this project, the writers have documented the joys and struggles of the horseracing world during the months in between. The exhibit includes handmade letter boxes with copies of the letters that can be taken home to read more about the months of work and planning that go into creating the racing glory that lasts less than two minutes.

Letters from the Backside is a product of the Neighborhood Story Project and the University of New Orleans. Publishing supported by a generous grant from Fair Grounds Race Course & Slots. Graphic design by Erik Kiesewetter.

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Introductory text from the exhibition
For seven months the barns sit still, endure small repairs, get new coats of paint. Watchmen walk through the quiet, listening to their own footsteps echo, or fill the hours with phone conversations, one hand on the phone, the other on the steering wheel of the backstretch golf cart. Sixteen workers preparing stalls for the horses, preparing rooms for those who will come to care for the horses.

In October, trucks filled with horses arrive from Canada, Kentucky, Bossier City. The people arrive from across the Americas – jockeys, groomsmen, hotwalkers, and trainers, driving through the night or catching planes. The backside fills up again and the old patterns are reestablished. Friends are hailed, acquaintances nodded to. Rivalries mellow into respect.

The backside is a world unto itself – the Horsemen’s Café for nourishment of the body, the chapel for sustenance, and empty parking lots for soccer games. Over a game of cards, stories are swapped and horses of yesteryear called to mind.

The racing world is measured in distances and time – furlongs, lengths, fifths of seconds define victory and defeat for horses and humans. For those involved in the sport, another kind of time and distance becomes central – miles from home, time apart from family.

During the first months of 2011, seventeen writers composed Letters from the Backside, giving us a view of the months of work and worry, small joys and pleasures that go into creating the two minutes of racing we come to see. These letters cross the distance between the backside and the grandstand, between the Fair Grounds and other places called home.

About The Neighborhood Story Project
The Neighborhood Story Project was founded in 2004 by Rachel Breunlin and Abram Himelstein as a book-making project based in New Orleans neighborhoods. Following the mission, “Our stories told by us,” the NSP works with writers in neighborhoods throughout the city to create books about their communities, often focusing on locales of underappreciated historical and cultural significance. The NSP is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization in partnership with the University of New Orleans.

About Fair Grounds Race Course & Slots
Fair Grounds Race Course & Slots, the nation’s third-oldest racetrack, has been in operation since 1872. Located in New Orleans, Fair Grounds is owned by Churchill Downs Incorporated (NASDAQ Global Select Market: CHDN); it also operates a slot-machine gaming facility and 10 off-track betting parlors throughout southeast Louisiana. The 139th Thoroughbred Racing Season will run through March 27, 2011, highlighted by the 98th Grade II Louisiana Derby on March 26. Information about Fair Grounds can be found online at www.FairGroundsRaceCourse.com.