

RON TURCOTTE AND SECRETARIAT

Press release for the live auction of this rare print of Ron and Secretariat @ the Friends of Connetquot Gala October 3rd 2010

Secretariat became a 20th century legend when he captured the Triple Crown in 1973, winning the Belmont Stakes by an astonishing 31 lengths. In 1978 his jockey, Ron Turcotte, was paralyzed in a tragic accident at Belmont Park when his mount, Flag of Leyte Gulf, clipped heels with another filly and went down.

One of the people who was touched by Turcotte's story was Arthur Cussell of Brooklyn, a devout racing fan and a great admirer of the art of Rita Trapani. In 1990 he commissioned Rita to create a painting of Secretariat with Ron Turcotte aboard, which he sent to Turcotte at his home in Maine near the Canadian border. The artist took her cue from the cover of a popular sporting magazine and portrayed the horse and rider at a full gallop. Turcotte was delighted and hung the picture in his dining room. Around this time, the patron and the artist met Turcotte at a Belmont Stakes press party, which was meaningful for all three.

Rita later presented Mr. Cussell with a framed copy of the original as a birthday gift, and he displayed it in his living room for many years. When Mr. Cussell passed away on July 4, 2010, it fell into the hands of his friend Paula Rodenas. She offered to donate it for a worthy cause: the preservation of Connetquot Park, which the artist supports and describes as “the most horse-friendly park in New York” The painting is timely, as a movie about Penny Chenery Tweedy, owner of Secretariat, was recently produced. Mr. Cussell, who loved horses, would have approved.

