

# Clawson man recognized for 'horse sense'

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STAFF WRITER

Many people spend their lives running the rat race, but Al Terwilliger spends his time helping others run the horse race.

Terwilliger, 67, of Clawson was recently honored by the Michigan Harness Horsemen's Association. The group put Terwilliger into the Michigan Harness Racing Hall of Fame for developing more products and patents than anyone else in the horseman community.

As the president of Protecto Horse Equipment for more than 45 years, Terwilliger said he currently has seven patents with two more pending. And although he takes pride in his company's products—such as its harness and bridle—he said the honor of being in the hall of fame is truly great.

"You better believe I was overwhelmed," he exclaimed.

Terwilliger learned to love the equine species when he was



Al Terwilliger of Clawson, president of Protecto Horse Equipment, was recently honored for his achievements in inventing equipment to make harness racing safer.

raised on a farm with his family in central Michigan. He often watched his father and brother compete in harness racing, in which "drivers" sit behind the horse in two-wheeled carts called sulkies.

However, Terwilliger caught the acting bug when he was 12 and began a career which would

lead him to perform in theater, movies and television.

But his love for the world of horses never left. While he was an understudy in the Broadway play, "How to Succeed in Business," Terwilliger used his spare time to begin inventing contraptions that would ease the lives of horsemen. His first creation was the Protecto Vest. "It was the first vest ever invented for the protection of drivers," he said.

As time went on, Terwilliger's inventions became famous in the horse racing world. In the early 1990s, he was granted the honorary title of "Kentucky colonel" for his ingenuity.

Today, Terwilliger lives in Clawson and presides over his company with his wife, Myra. He said his home location is ideal because his factories are in Warren, and he can test his inventions at the Hazel Park Harness Raceway. "(If) I want to do research, I go to the track real easy," he said. "I use the horses as

a guinea pig."

But while he takes care of some of his business duties nearby, Terwilliger's lifestyle as a cutting-edge inventor sometimes takes him out of town. He has given lectures on his products all over the world, including nations like France, Italy, Malta and Germany. "I just came back from a trip to Martinique in the Virgin Islands," he said. "I got a chance to speak French."

Although his entry into the Michigan Harness Racing Hall of Fame sealed his legendary status, Terwilliger said he is not ready to hang up the saddle just yet.

"I'm about ready to release a new invention in the next month or two," he said. "It's a new type of hopple (leg device) for a pacer racehorse. It helps keep its stride."

For more information, go to [www.protectohorse.com](http://www.protectohorse.com).

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