

## Grass Roots Campaign to Honor Eight Belles Off to Good Start

(May 14, 2008 – Charlotte, NC) A movement to petition Churchill Downs to honor the filly, *Eight Belles* is gaining speed on the internet. The online petition asks that prior to the 135th running of the Kentucky Derby, “8 Bells” be rung in memory of the horse who tragically broke down following this year’s race.

“The response has been overwhelming,” says site founder, Joni Massengale. “We had over 5,000 signatures in just this first week. People from the US, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Australia and other countries are visiting the site to sign in.”

In the days that followed the May 3rd race, there has been a whirlwind of debate between animal rights activists and those who defend the sport of Thoroughbred Horse Racing. “We’re getting petitioners from both sides of the argument,” says Massengale. “That was what I hoped. There is always room for improvement in safety regardless of the sport. When NASCAR legend Dale Earnhardt died on the track, it was in part due to the overwhelming support he had from fans that encouraged the sport to make sweeping changes to its policies and put a great deal of time and money into research. If the memory of *Eight Belles* could do the same it would be fantastic.”

The petition, located at “8BellsForEightBelles.org” gives those that sign an opportunity to leave comments, some of which are posted on the site. There is no personal information being collected other than name, city, state and country and there is no solicitation for money.

“The comments we’ve received express the variety of reasons this horse touched so many of us,” says Massengale. “Some want to show their love or hatred of the sport, their support of her connections or are taking this as an opportunity to grieve. It’s all very personal. For myself, my love of horses began like many as a little girl. The fact that *Eight Belles* was a filly competing in a traditionally male race was something I can connect with and it had me cheering for her the whole way.”

A nautical term coming from the ringing of a ship’s bell to tell time, “8 bells” is also a euphemism to signify that a sailor’s watch is over such as at the time of his or her death.

*Eight Belles* was named in honor of artist N.C. Wyeth’s summer home, named for a Winslow Homer painting. Owner Rick Porter added an “e” at the end to give it a more feminine touch.

*Note:* Ms. Massengale is available for further comment by email at “webmaster@8bellsforeightbelles.org” or by phone at 704-726-9003.