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## Virginia Gold Cup 2003

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The Virginia Gold Cup is more than just an annual steeplechase race. It has become one of the year's key social events, a sort of Ascot or Epsom Downs for Washington's twenty-to-thirty-something set. Talk about a great way to make friends: Singles and groups mix and mingle at pre-race tailgate parties, enjoying the weather, the food and drink and (maybe) the horses while checking out the opposite sex.



Make sure you wear a stylish hat to the Virginia Gold Cup. (washingtonpost.com File Photo)

Since this is a society event, "appropriate afternoon dress" is required. What that means is up to you. The official [Gold Cup Web site](#) recommends "a sportswear look for women and khakis for men," as well as blazers and ties. But hey, if you have a white linen suit in your closet, this is a good time to bring it out. Women often opt for sundresses or stylish skirts and flowery hats -- there's an annual hat competition that rewards the most outlandish and most stylish. However, dress codes differ, especially along the youthful North Rail viewing area.

Gates open at 10 a.m., and opening ceremonies begin at 12:30. Tickets are not available at the gate, so visit the Gold Cup Web site or call 800/69-RACES in advance. There are three areas for watching the race: Members Hill (exclusive, for serious race fans), the North Rail (where younger Washingtonians gather) and the South Rail (family atmosphere). A limited number of tickets for each area is available through various social groups or with a car pass, which admits up to six people in one car. Vendors around the course sell food and drinks, and you're welcome to bring your own tailgating supplies; but no glass bottles are allowed.

Most of the action at Gold Cup -- whether on Members Hill or along the North Rail -- takes place in tents that are not open to just anyone. If you want to socialize with people you didn't come with, your best bet is to join one of the groups organizing bus trips to Gold Cup.

### University Row

Over the past few years, University Row has become the primary social area for younger fans of the Gold Cup. Run by the umbrella group Capital Alumni Network, 2002's University Row welcomed 1,800 representatives from more than 40 different colleges and universities, ranging from local universities to Notre Dame, Arizona State and the University of Texas. This year, at least 45 alumni groups are officially attending. "Anchor" schools -- the ones that host tents -- are Old Dominion, Virginia Tech, William & Mary, Oregon State, Purdue, the University of Central Florida, Arizona State, the University of Michigan, Penn State, Notre Dame, Boston College and American University. Other schools share space with those anchors. However, all tents on University Row are fenced together, so you're not stuck with alumni from your school -- it's possible to wander between areas or mingle on the common terrace. Of course, anyone can attend, with or without school affiliation. All guests can partake of

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the open bars and buffets throughout the tents.

Tickets for the event are available through the Capital Alumni Association's [Web site](#), although some alumni groups are selling their own tickets at varying prices.

Buses to The Plains leave Ballston Common Mall between 10:30 and 11:30 and return around 6 -- University Row closes at 5:30.

#### **D.C. Society of Young Professionals**

A relative newcomer to the Gold Cup scene, the D.C. Society of Young Professionals has a large chalet tent along the North Rail. The cost is \$89 for a bus trip, full open bar, lunch buffet, snacks and afterparty at the Capitol City Brewing Company. It's \$70 if you get to The Plains on your own, and includes a parking pass. Buses leave Union Station at 10. Tickets can be purchased on the society's [Web site](#).

#### **Party DC**

The bus-trip package includes luxury buses to and from Gold Cup; four North Rail chalet tents; a lunch buffet; an open bar with beer, wine, liquor and soda; and post-race parties at Clarendon Ballroom and Lulu's. Tickets start at \$69.99 for bus tickets and \$49 for walk-up tickets, which provide access to the party but do not include transportation or the crucial parking pass. Buses leave at 10 from Clarendon Ballroom and Lulu's. They depart from The Plains at 6 and return to the two clubs, where the entertainment includes college-rock band Fighting Gravity (at Lulu's) and dancing to DJ Shock (Clarendon Ballroom). Visit the Party DC [Web site](#) for more information.

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