

Northeast/Mid-Atlantic

CONNECTICUT DELAWARE MAINE MARYLAND MASSACHUSETTS NEW HAMPSHIRE
NEW JERSEY NEW YORK PENNSYLVANIA RHODE ISLAND VERMONT VIRGINIA WEST VIRGINIA



New Ambassador

Najja Thompson is the new executive director of NYTB

Najja Thompson takes the helm of the New York Thoroughbred Breeders

BY BOB EHALT | PHOTOS BY SKIP DICKSTEIN

LIFE-CHANGING EVENTS OFTEN happen with little or no warning.

For 39-year-old Najja Thompson, one of those magical moments took place Oct. 20 when he was casually perusing various racing websites.

While taking in the industry's news of the day, one story caught his eye and set his mind in motion.

It was a news item about Jeffrey Cannizzo's decision to step down after slightly more than 12 years as the executive director of the New York Thoroughbred Breeders and the organization's need for a replacement.

Immediately Thompson thought to himself, "Why not me?"

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- 10 stakes horses in 2020, incl. **BANKIT** (\$816,675) MSW, 2nd **G3** by a head OP; **NIKO'S DREAM** (\$282,150, GP SW on turf); **COLLEGEVILLE GIRL** (\$270,526, BEL SW), etc.
- **Nationally ranked #5** Fourth Crop Sire
- Sales prices up to **\$260,000** 2YO, only sire outside KY with **\$100,000** yearling in 2020
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SOLOMINI | by Curlin | \$5,000 *Bred 123 Mares in 2020, most in NY*

- *Arguably the best 2YO race record to retire to NY*
- **Won G1** Los Alamitos (before DQ) over **McKinzie, Instilled Regard**, etc.
- 2nd Breeders' Cup Juvenile-**G1** over **Bolt d'Oro, Firenze Fire, Free Drop Billy**, etc.
- 2nd Front Runner S.-**G1** over **Take The One O One**
- Out of half-sister to **MIDSHIPMAN-G1** (Champion) and dam of **FROSTED-G1**



REDESDALE | by Speightstown | \$3,000

Dominating winner of **1st 3 starts**
Average Beyer in the **90s (95 high)**
G3 in final start, earned **91 Beyer**
Out of a full sister to **DANEHILL**



TEUFLESBERG | by Johannesburg | \$2,000

Sire of Grade I Breeders' Cup
Sprint winner **TRINNIBERG**,
Champion Sprinter. Avg. Earnings
Per starter \$55,422, nearly 16X fee

2020 LEADING SIRES IN NEW YORK



For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2021 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstret SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2020 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	BIG BROWN (05, Boundary), Irish Hill & Dutchess Views Stallions	\$5,000	132/57	2/5	1/2	(Somelikeithotbrown, \$277,860)	\$2,761,404	*818	26	1.04	1.44
2	CENTRAL BANKER (10, Speightstown), McMahan of Saratoga Thoroughbreds	\$6,000	106/49	4/4	3/4	(Bankit, \$278,850)	\$2,593,842	175	6	1.34	1.20
3	FREUD (98, Storm Cat), Sequel Stallions New York	\$5,000	101/34	5/6	3/5	(Dot Matrix, \$181,250)	\$2,080,790	*1338	54	1.47	1.22
4	MISSION IMPAZIBLE (07, Unbridled's Song), Sequel Stallions New York	\$2,500	93/43	3/3	3/3	(Dream Bigger, \$106,350)	\$1,682,867	237	7	1.11	1.18
5	BELLAMY ROAD (02, Concerto), Irish Hill & Dutchess Views Stallions	\$5,000	115/46	0/0	0/0	(Hell N Wild, \$138,945)	\$1,538,700	*706	32	1.13	1.23
6	BUSTIN STONES (04, City Zip), Waldorf Farm	\$2,500	58/28	2/2	1/2	(Jakarta, \$245,727)	\$1,493,324	233	10	1.33	1.29
7	COURAGEOUS CAT (06, Storm Cat), Questroyal North	\$2,500	73/24	0/0	0/0	(Our Last Buck, \$164,080)	\$972,803	219	7	0.89	1.06
8	GIANT SURPRISE (09, Giant's Causeway), Rockridge Stud	\$2,500	37/20	0/0	0/0	(Groovy Surprise, \$78,125)	\$661,846	115	2	1.30	1.23
9	MICROMANAGE (10, Medaglia d'Oro), Rockridge Stud	\$2,500	32/14	0/0	0/0	(Microsecond, \$120,940)	\$522,127	56	0	0.76	1.29
10	TEUFLESBERG (04, Johannesburg), McMahon of Saratoga Thoroughbreds	\$2,000	36/15	0/0	0/0	(The Great Johanna, \$95,219)	\$503,348	164	4	1.16	1.06
11	WAR DANCER (10, War Front), Irish Hill & Dutchess Views Stallions	\$7,500	28/6	1/1	0/1	(Step Dancer, \$96,100)	\$476,995	68	1	0.88	1.25
12	HONORABLE DILLON (10, Tapit)	N/A	50/10	0/0	0/0	(Awesome Debate, \$56,880)	\$426,042	104	0	0.54	1.07
13	BANK HEIST (07, Maria's Mon), Kaz Hill Farm	\$1,000	28/9	0/0	0/0	(Robber Bob, \$52,070)	\$379,284	91	1	0.80	1.28
14	SOARING EMPIRE (07, Empire Maker)	Died, 2018	23/12	0/0	0/0	(Reason to Soar, \$57,542)	\$338,515	73	0	0.86	1.08
15	MAJESTIC CITY (09, City Zip), Irish Hill & Dutchess Views Stallions	\$2,500	32/5	0/0	0/0	(The Important One, \$75,515)	\$312,180	55	0	0.54	1.06
16	A SHIN FORWARD (05, Forest Wildcat), Rockridge Stud	\$2,500	16/6	0/0	0/0	(Ryuno Center, \$102,970)	\$277,352	34	0	0.54	0.82
17	SLUMBER (GB) (08, Cacique), Rockridge Stud	Private	6/1	1/2	0/1	(Fluffy Socks, \$226,880)	\$247,850	16	1	2.14	0.80
18	GOLDEN TICKET (09, Speightstown)	Pnsd	24/9	0/0	0/0	(Bayou Bougie, \$43,250)	\$192,805	44	0	0.36	0.80
19	EFFINEX (11, Mineshaft)	Died, 2017	17/5	0/0	0/0	(Effinity, \$46,950)	\$165,181	50	0	0.49	0.95
20	ENCAUSTIC (04, Broad Brush), Foggy Bottom Farm	Private	19/4	0/0	0/0	(It's Your Call, \$45,781)	\$154,915	51	0	0.44	0.69
21	COSMONAUT (02, Lemon Drop Kid)	Pnsd	19/5	0/0	0/0	(Goodbye Brockley, \$27,880)	\$127,325	101	4	0.94	1.04
22	ZIVO (09, True Direction)	Pnsd	12/2	0/0	0/0	(Mani Padi, \$27,920)	\$75,064	22	0	0.31	0.82
23	MIRACLE MAN (02, Yankee Victor)	Died, 2015	2/1	0/0	0/0	(Je's Shooting Star, \$56,328)	\$71,378	11	1	2.10	1.54
24	AL KHALI (06, Medaglia d'Oro), Keane Stud	\$2,500	4/2	0/0	0/0	(Big Al's Gal, \$36,023)	\$61,003	9	0	0.63	1.06
25	WILDCAT BRIEF (06, Forest Wildcat)	N/A	6/1	0/0	0/0	(Reggie's Buddy, \$19,356)	\$48,388	17	0	0.67	0.66

"When I saw Jeff was leaving, I became intrigued with becoming a part of the New York Breeders," Thompson said. "I had been involved with the racing end of the business, but I always understood the necessity of breeders in the sport. Without them, we don't have a sport."

At the time, Thompson was working in the human relations department of the New York Racing Association after about five years with the organization's media relations staff and four prior to that in the

marketing department.

Thompson is a lifelong racing fan, grew up near Belmont Park in Westbury, N.Y., and had an uncle, Larry Stewart, whose small breeding operation had produced a few stakes winners and gave Thompson an understanding of the various elements that determine success or failure on a farm.

"I believed I had the skills to help the program keep moving forward," Thompson said.

About a month and a half later an NYT search committee came to the same conclusion. It chose him as the replacement for Cannizzo and broke a racial barrier in the process as Thompson's Dec. 7 hiring made him the lone African American working as the executive director of a Top 5 state breeders' organization.

"It's about time to have some diversity," said Thomas Gallo III, NYT's president of the board of directors and a member of the three-person search committee. "He was the right person. It's a very positive move. It brings a new perspective to the job. Change is good. You have to look at it as an opportunity to move forward and do things better."

Aside from serving as the executive director of the NYT, the organization also tapped Thompson to replace Cannizzo on the boards of both NYRA and the New York Breeding and Development Fund, bringing a vital minority voice to two of the most important cogs in the New York racing and breeding industries.

"Working in all of these roles with the NYT, NYRA, and the Breeding and Development Fund is an honor and a privilege. I'm thankful for the opportunity to build off the contributions African Americans have made in the sport. For me to be in a position as the executive director of what I consider the best state-bred pro-



Thompson chats with Waldorf Farms' Dr. Jerry Bilinski

2020 LEADING SIRES IN MARYLAND



For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2021 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2020 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	GREAT NOTION (00, Elusive Quality), Northview Stallion Station	\$7,500	92/42	6/7	6/6	(Karan's Notion, \$173,131)	\$2,383,819	389	26	1.49	1.21
2	GOLDEN LAD (10, Medaglia d'Oro), Northview Stallion Station	\$5,000	54/23	2/3	0/2	(Air Token, \$169,647)	\$1,618,170	113	3	1.52	1.32
3	FRIESAN FIRE (06, A.P. Indy), Country Life Farm	\$3,000	75/31	2/2	2/2	(Fiya, \$171,526)	\$1,460,803	232	8	1.16	1.24
4	BANDBOX (08, Tapit), Northview Stallion Station	\$2,500	47/28	1/1	1/1	(Artful Splatter, \$188,717)	\$1,454,624	85	2	1.38	1.28
5	BOURBON COURAGE (09, Lion Heart), Anchor & Hope Farm	\$2,000	47/22	1/2	0/1	(Double Crown, \$150,625)	\$1,189,923	88	2	1.22	1.13
6	SEVILLE (GER) (08, Galileo)	Died, 2017	85/23	0/0	0/0	(O K Game On, \$120,535)	\$1,070,472	*205	2	0.60	1.24
7	SUPER NINETY NINE (10, Pulpit), Country Life Farm	\$2,000	55/26	0/0	0/0	(Breviary, \$95,194)	\$1,067,160	88	0	1.01	1.34
8	STREET MAGICIAN (04, Street Cry), Legacy Farm Stallions Standing at Roland Farm	\$2,000	43/15	2/4	0/2	(Street Lute, \$290,220)	\$1,011,377	143	6	1.12	1.27
9	ORIENTATE (98, Mt. Livermore)	Pnsd	54/26	0/0	0/0	(Cannon's Roar, \$105,353)	\$985,029	*863	32	1.22	1.54
10	IMAGINING (08, Giant's Causeway), Anchor & Hope Farm	\$2,000	46/13	1/1	1/1	(Monday Morning Qb, \$140,155)	\$876,408	94	1	0.98	1.38
11	¶ MOSLER (11, War Front), Country Life Farm	\$4,000	25/10	1/1	1/1	(Miss Nondescript, \$84,090)	\$451,511	71	1	0.94	1.31
12	BUFFUM (08, Bernardini)	Died, 2019	21/8	0/0	0/0	(Starting Tour, \$61,299)	\$413,553	33	2	1.45	1.23
13	NICANOR (06, Dynaformer)	Pnsd	19/10	0/0	0/0	(Seany P, \$115,075)	\$406,565	44	0	0.78	1.04
14	PETIONVILLE (92, Seeking the Gold)	Pnsd	24/13	0/0	0/0	(Graves Island, \$67,679)	\$392,778	*762	42	1.25	1.28
15	TRITAP (09, Tapit)	Died, 2016	17/8	0/0	0/0	(Tap the Mark, \$86,565)	\$373,071	41	1	1.21	1.35
16	OUTFLANKER (94, Danzig), Shamrock Farm	\$2,500	18/6	0/0	0/0	(Nick Papagiorgio, \$126,377)	\$369,122	*572	21	1.32	1.11
17	¶ UNCLE LINO (13, Uncle Mo), Northview Stallion Station	\$4,000	17/7	0/0	0/0	(Singlino, \$115,625)	\$339,225	54	0	1.01	1.42
18	CUBA (01, Not For Love)	Died, 2020	8/4	1/2	0/1	(Laki, \$241,030)	\$329,945	25	1	1.27	0.93
19	MEDALLIST (01, Touch Gold), Northview Stallion Station	\$2,000	15/10	0/0	0/0	(Flashy Kyem, \$70,928)	\$299,662	206	7	1.27	1.30
20	LOUIS QUATORZE (93, Sovereign Dancer)	Died, 2017	11/6	0/0	0/0	(True Boldness, \$60,535)	\$253,876	*992	21	1.13	1.29



© BENOIT PHOTO

Thompson's uncle, Larry Stewart, bred multiple grade 2 winner Get Funky

gram in the country, it is a tremendous thrill," Thompson said. "I look at myself and people like Jason Wilson (president and COO of Equibase Company) as ushering in change in the industry. I'm here to run with that, and I'm not shying away from it. We want to see expansion and development in the sport for everyone across all racial spectrums to help erase the economic disparities that exist in horse racing."

Thompson's road to his leadership position with the NYTB started as a child. Living on Long Island and having grandparents who had a home in Queens Village, N.Y., (the part of New York City that borders Elmont where Belmont Park is located), he would often accompany his uncle, a Turf and Field Club member, to the races at the NYRA tracks.

When Thompson's family moved to Florida in 1991, the racetrack trips shifted to Gulfstream Park and Calder. Meanwhile, Stewart

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2020 LEADING SIRES IN PENNSYLVANIA



For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2021 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstret SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2020 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	JUMP START (99, A.P. Indy)	Died, 2019	155/71	2/2	2/2	(Galerio, \$229,425)	\$3,295,004	*1456	53	1.39	1.26
2	WARRIOR'S REWARD (06, Medaglia d'Oro), WynOaks Farm	\$5,000	155/81	5/6	4/5	(Night Ops, \$334,000)	\$2,967,957	*611	20	1.02	1.32
3	WICKED STRONG (11, Hard Spun), Pin Oak Lane Farm	\$3,500	144/61	3/4	0/3	(Evil Lyn, \$199,534)	\$2,427,173	*223	3	0.89	1.29
4	EL PADRINO (09, Pulpit)	Died, 2017	86/40	3/4	1/3	(Whereshetoldmetogo, \$151,625)	\$2,151,317	188	4	1.32	1.25
5	FLASHBACK (10, Tapit), Diamond B Farm	\$3,500	121/58	1/1	1/1	(All West, \$97,558)	\$2,127,788	229	2	1.01	1.53
6	POSEIDON'S WARRIOR (08, Speightstown), Equistar Training and Breeding	\$5,000	96/45	1/3	0/1	(Firenze Fire, \$545,100)	\$1,969,913	*219	2	0.98	1.08
7	BOISTEROUS (07, Distorted Humor), Diamond B Farm	\$3,000	60/27	1/1	1/1	(California Kook, \$163,860)	\$1,120,323	115	2	0.86	1.06
8	SMARTY JONES (01, Elusive Quality), Equistar Training and Breeding	\$3,500	57/20	0/0	0/0	(Dreams Untold, \$146,400)	\$986,618	*814	27	1.35	1.66
9	TALENT SEARCH (03, Catienus), Diamond B Farm	\$2,500	42/20	0/0	0/0	(Final Shot, \$114,919)	\$823,738	*168	3	1.03	1.17
10	WEIGELIA (01, Safely's Mark), WynOaks Farm	Private	47/21	0/0	0/0	(Smooth B, \$69,110)	\$736,581	*155	7	1.36	1.05
11	ICE BOX (07, Pulpit)	N/A	71/32	0/0	0/0	(Its Cold in Dehere, \$86,069)	\$708,202	298	2	0.62	0.97
12	UPTOWNCHARLYBROWN (07, Limehouse), Diamond B Farm	\$7,500	28/9	2/3	2/2	(Wait for It, \$208,610)	\$703,145	61	4	1.77	1.01
13	DESERT PARTY (06, Street Cry), Godstone Farm	\$2,500	46/18	0/0	0/0	(Qian B C, \$47,785)	\$557,950	248	6	0.93	1.28
14	ALBERT THE GREAT (97, Go for Gin)	Pnsd	21/10	0/0	0/0	(Geebert, \$84,825)	\$434,698	*413	9	1.09	1.09
15	NORMANDY INVASION (10, Tapit), Pin Oak Lane Farm	Pnsd	38/11	0/0	0/0	(Ron Don Scorese, \$51,042)	\$425,253	70	0	0.49	1.18

used Florida as the base for his breeding program, which produced Get Funky, a grade 1-placed grade 2 winner who earned \$781,675 from 2006-11, and Mayan King, who earned \$173,014 for owner David Cassidy of "The Partridge Family" fame.

When college beckoned, Thompson attended Florida State University.

"I went to school for history with a minor in computer science and thought I'd go into law or work with computers," Thompson said.

Yet what tugged at Thompson's heart was working in the Thoroughbred racing industry, an opportunity that presented itself in 2011 when he joined NYRA's marketing department.

"Getting into racing was a dream come true," Thompson said. "When it's something you love, it's not work."

In 2015, American Pharoah's Triple Crown season, Thompson moved over to NYRA's press office, where he made a name for himself while honing his communication skills and serving as a liaison for television media covering NYRA races.

"The racing community can be frustratingly insular and resistant to change. Najja is refreshingly open to new ideas and optimistic about the future of the sport and the broader industry. Those qualities make him a natural ambassador for New York racing, and he will be a terrific advocate for the interests of New York's Thor-

oughbred breeders," said Pat McKenna, NYRA's director of communications and media relations since 2016.

Thompson said he enjoyed working at NYRA and was grateful for the experience and training he received in his nine years there.

"I was thankful for my time at NYRA where I was mentored by people such as Eric Wing, John Durso, Jenny Kellner, Pat McKenna, and Keith McCalmont (all in the NYRA press office) and people like (television analyst) Andy Serling who were a great help to me," said Thompson, who shifted to human resources in 2020.

The overall education Thompson received at NYRA was viewed by Gallo as a main reason that he was the choice of a selection committee that also included NYTB board members Dr. Joan Taylor of Stepwise Farm and Mallory Mort of Gallagher's Stud.

"Najja's résumé stuck out because of his connections, his experience with NYRA. We got a lot of good feedback on him. It was 100% positive with no reservations from anyone," said Gallo, who operates TJG Sales Agency and Blue Stone Farm. "His interview was above the rest. He interviewed very well. He already had a good, in-depth knowledge of New York Thoroughbred Breeders, the Development Fund, and the relationship between the two. The positive response to his hiring we heard from people all across the industry



Thompson touches base with Jim Bond at the trainer's Song Hill Farm

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in the selected region (stallions that have died or been exported prior to the 2015 breeding season are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available Northern Hemisphere statistics through December 31, 2020. As supplied to *The Blood-Horse* by The Jockey Club Information Systems, Inc., earnings include adjusted money from Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Adjusted earnings are put on par with average North American earnings from the previous year. For example, the average North American purse in 2019 is \$25,300 or 53% of the 2019 average purse in Japan. To put earnings on par, all Japanese progeny earnings are multiplied by 53% before being credited to a sire's progeny earnings. Hong Kong earnings are adjusted by 17%; Singapore by 85%. Current year stakes winners include all N.H.-foaled black-type stakes winners worldwide. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners include all countries. (A ¶ indicates a sire represented by his first crop to race).



SEEKING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HORSERACING INTEGRITY AND SAFETY AUTHORITY

The nominating committee of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act is seeking input on members of the board of directors of the HISA Authority as well as members of its two standing committees: Anti-Doping and Medication Control, and Racetrack Safety.

The board of directors will have nine members and the standing committees will have seven each. The board and committees will comprise individuals from outside the equine industry and persons with Thoroughbred industry experience and expertise.*

**Please send your recommendations, including qualifications,
to contact@hisanomcom.org**

*To avoid conflicts of interest, the following individuals may not be selected as a member of the board or as an independent member of a nominating or standing committee:

- (1) An individual who has a financial interest in, or provides goods or services to, Thoroughbreds involved in training and racing.
- (2) An official or officer — (A) of an equine industry representative; or (B) who serves in a governance or policy making capacity for an equine industry representative.
- (3) An employee of, or an individual who has a business or commercial relationship with, an individual described in paragraph (1) or (2).

2020 LEADING SIRES IN WEST VIRGINIA



For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2021 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstret SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2020 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative			
									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index	
1	FIBER SONDE (05, Unbridled's Song), Beau Ridge Farm	\$1,000	96/53	8/12	8/8	(Chief Randel, \$191,336)	\$2,457,512	278	18	1.34	0.80	
2	WINDSOR CASTLE (98, Lord Carson)	N/A	75/34	1/1	1/1	(V. I. P. Ticket, \$97,048)	\$1,418,929	388	16	1.00	1.00	
3	DESPITE THE ODDS (06, Speightstown), Bybee Road Farm on Avonwood	\$1,500	48/26	0/0	0/0	(Odd Gal, \$120,844)	\$1,114,144	79	0	1.06	1.20	
4	CHARITABLE MAN (06, Lemon Drop Kid)	Died, 2016	66/33	0/0	0/0	(Charitable Spenny, \$69,708)	\$1,105,558	190	2	0.84	1.03	
5	LIMEHOUSE (01, Grand Slam), O'Sullivan Farms	\$2,500	61/26	0/0	0/0	(Lymebyrd, \$37,056)	\$676,784	*477	23	1.11	1.11	
6	EXCLUSIVE QUALITY (03, Elusive Quality)	Died	44/24	0/0	0/0	(Tomarie, \$75,382)	\$594,501	352	7	0.88	1.05	
7	MACHEN (08, Distorted Humor)	N/A	35/21	0/0	0/0	(Soul Machen, \$56,019)	\$543,746	81	0	0.66	0.76	
8	DENIS OF CORK (05, Harlan's Holiday), Taylor Mountain Farm	\$750	29/15	0/0	0/0	(Cameron Street, \$41,644)	\$342,834	*141	6	0.70	1.01	
9	BULLSBAY (04, Tiznow), Pellinor Lane	\$1,500	26/6	0/0	0/0	(Maythehorsewithu, \$76,215)	\$288,220	111	3	1.05	1.17	
10	SWISS YOVELER (94, Eastern Echo)	N/A	18/10	0/0	0/0	(Alpine Moon, \$49,667)	\$243,108	788	15	0.96	1.02	

only reinforced that we had made the right decision.”

For Gallo, hiring Thompson produced a happy ending to a two-month period that started with a huge headache when Cannizzo, who led NYTB through a period of great development and growth and transformed the scope of the executive director’s job, told him he was stepping down to take a position as NYRA’s senior director of government affairs.

“When Jeff called me and said he was leaving, I was stunned. I think I threatened him with bodily harm,” Gallo said with a laugh. “Jeff made it a multi-faceted job with a lot of communication, lobbying in the Capitol, and using face time to grow relationships with politicians. He had taken what was mostly a clerical job and turned it into a job that covered all the bases. He elevated the status of the job across the nation.”

When Cannizzo gave his notice, he told Gallo he would stay on for another three

months to help with the search process and train his successor, which gratified Gallo.

“It was an arduous process, but Jeff was nice enough to give us 90 days’ notice,” said Gallo, who is also the manager for Dream Maker Racing. “The way things turned out, with Jeff spending time with Najja last month, we are already going in the right direction.”

Gallo said the communications skills Thompson developed during his days with NYRA will play a vital role in his new position, allowing him to publicize the program on a national level and interact with the politicians whose support is vital to propelling the state’s breeding industry forward.

“One of the big challenges is increasing our visibility,” Gallo said. “Some people outside of New York may not realize how much money we give away, and with Najja’s communication skills he can get the word out there. That can attract new mares and stallions to New York State and increase

the horse population here. If we get more horses, it helps NYRA and the bettors by increasing field size and the handle.”

Being a fan of New York-breds since the days when he would watch and wager on horses such as Funny Cide, Commentator, and Say Florida Sandy, Thompson is looking forward to promoting the breed in New York and making the state a more attractive home for the sport’s highly productive mares and stallions.

“A key thing for me is that I want to elevate the New York-bred brand and showcase the great New York-breds we have like Tiz the Law and so many other grade 1 winners,” Thompson said. “We want to continue to attract top-quality mares and stallions. We want to continue working with the Development Fund to enhance the rewards offered through our stallion series. We want to support year-round racing in New York and solidify winter racing. Another of my main initiatives is working with Fasig-Tipton to get the state-bred sale back in Saratoga in the summer. It was canceled last year due to the pandemic, but I’m fairly confident we’ll get it back.”

As Thompson settles into his new position, he says he’s relishing a chance to see the sport from a different perspective than the one he enjoyed at the racetrack.

Yet at the same time, the sport would be wise to embrace the perspective Thompson will bring to the industry at a time when social justice and diversity are at the forefront of the nation’s attention.

“With this job I’ve been given a view of the sport through a wider lens,” Thompson said, “and I’m truly looking forward to helping the sport I love.”

Bob Ehalt is a senior correspondent for BloodHorse.



Thompson’s background with NYRA set him up to succeed in his new position