



# A STARTING GATE

*Amplify Horse Racing  
provides first step into the  
Thoroughbred industry  
for youth and young adults*

By William Bowden  
Photos by Arden Barnes



*Amplify president and co-founder Annise Montplaisir gives Keeneland College Scholarship Day participants a tour of the paddock.*



**E**ric Resendiz was first in line when Amplify Horse Racing kicked off its mentorship program in August 2021. The Bluegrass Community & Technical College student was paired with Ben Henley, general manager of Airdrie Stud. Henley showed Resendiz the farm's operations and took him along to the Keeneland September yearling sale for a close-up look at the home of the world's largest Thoroughbred yearling auction.

Amplify Horse Racing is a nonprofit organization dedicated to introducing youth and young adults primarily in the 15–25 age group to the myriad possibilities for becoming involved in the Thoroughbred industry. Resendiz is taking full advantage of its resources as he contemplates a career in the racing business.

His education continued last summer when Resendiz journeyed to Saratoga Springs, New York, for a behind-the-scenes tour of Saratoga Race Course conducted by Annise Montplaisir, president and co-founder of Amplify. He met with trainers and veterinarians and saw the backside operations of a racetrack, which fit in with his goal of working on the training side of the business.

The tour was hosted by Amplify with collaboration from the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, New York Racing Association, and National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame, which is located in Saratoga Springs.

"It's been a cool experience getting all of those insights," said Resendiz, who is pursuing an associate degree in equine studies. "With my mentorship I've been able to network and get my foot in the door a little bit. It's been a great experience with Amplify."

### Off to a flying start

The pairing of Resendiz and Henley is one of many success stories in the young life of Amplify Horse Racing. The organization is an outgrowth of a business plan Montplaisir submitted as the final requirement of her studies with Godolphin Flying Start, a two-year



*Eric Resendiz has taken full advantage of Amplify's resources as he contemplates a career in horse racing.*

management and leadership training program in the international Thoroughbred racing and breeding industry. Her friend and co-founder Madison Scott now serves on the Amplify board of directors.

"The Thoroughbred industry, as opposed to industries comprising other breeds, did not have a first-step educational platform on the national level, singularly focused on getting youth and young adults involved in racing," Montplaisir said. "Great work has been done in that regard on a state level or by specific programs, and Amplify intends to collaborate with and help to grow those existing initiatives."

Montplaisir brings a rich and varied background to her role as

# Making a Difference

AMPLIFY HORSE RACING

Amplify's leader. At age 12 she was a volunteer racetrack ambassador at North Dakota Horse Park in her hometown of Fargo. She later saddled up and ponied horses to the starting gate, then became director of communications at age 19. She also completed an internship at the American Quarter Horse Association.

After graduating from North Dakota State University in 2017, she moved to Lexington, where she completed internships with Fasig-Tipton, Keeneland, and Mill Ridge Farm before her Godolphin education.

Montplaisir created Amplify in 2019. She then worked as the equine education coordinator for the Kentucky Equine Education Project (KEEP), which folded her Amplify work into her job description. That allowed the foundation to serve as an incubator for her to continue developing Amplify on the national level.



*Clockwise from top, Montplaisir greets young race-goers at the Amplify Horse Racing booth at Keeneland on College Scholarship Day Presented by Lane's End. She shows Mohammad Alkhirat how to read the odds in the racing program. Montplaisir and her tour group visit the winner's circle and present the Best Turned Out Award after a race.*





Top, LaTonna Wilson talks about equine veterinary medicine during an Amplify Horse Racing tour at Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital. Above, participants watch an operation as they visit different parts of the hospital.

In fulfilling its mission, the organization aims to amplify and expand on both the existing educational programs in the industry, such as Keeneland's College Scholarship Day Presented by Lane's End, as well as new resources of its own, including mentorships, an Equine Careers Tour Series, and podcasts.

Horse Racing Hangouts are virtual learning sessions streamed live to Amplify social media platforms and have featured subjects

such as farm administration, exercise riding, and yearling sales prep. Participants can ask questions of industry professionals, who explain their careers and the fundamentals of the horse racing business.

Beginning in January 2023, Montplaisir will devote all her energies to Amplify while KEEP continues to be an industry partner. Amplify also functions as the U.S. affiliate of Together for Racing International, a global initiative to promote the Thoroughbred industry.

### The Keeneland connection

A key factor in Amplify's fast start out of the gate is its rewarding collaboration with Keeneland and the many educational programs the racetrack already had in place before Amplify came along to bolster those efforts.

"We believe our company's mission is to build the next generation of fans for our sport," said Kara Heissenbittel, Keeneland's senior director of operations and community relations. "Keeneland and Amplify have become wonderful partners in this effort. We have a series of programs throughout the year to reach different age groups, and Amplify has helped us fill in some gaps and take them a step further."

An excellent example of those efforts is the presence of Amplify during Keeneland's College Scholarship Day Presented by Lane's End. This event, supported by the Kentucky Thoroughbred Association, offers students free admission for one racing day and a chance to win valuable scholarships while also seeing racing in terms of career possibilities.

Amplify has a booth at the event and adds to the students' activities by coordinating tours through the paddock to see riders get a leg up, then out to the winner's circle for the owner's experience. Discussions about career opportunities and an introduction to the Amplify mentorship program are also offered.

That's where Resendiz comes in as a Keeneland College Ambassador, an academic-yearlong program that lets students assist with special events and learn about marketing, promotions, guest services, and other areas of operations. "We collaborate with Amplify on the tours that day and help promote the Keeneland brand," he said.

"Keeneland doesn't have the staff and bandwidth to do all of those things," Heissenbittel said, "but we can provide the platform for Amplify to come in and be an additional resource to take the experience to the next level."

Amplify is also involved during the Keeneland Kids Club Family Day Presented by Kentucky Children's Hospital events in the spring and fall for the program for children ages 12 and under.



*Timothy Littau channels the broadcast journalist he hopes to become while posing in front of a video he created at Saratoga Springs during an internship on the Saratoga Special.*

#### ABOUT AMPLIFY HORSE RACING

Amplify Horse Racing is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit funded by donations and grants.

For more information visit [amplifyhorseracing.org](http://amplifyhorseracing.org)

in that discipline at Marquette University.

“My goal is to be an on-air broadcast journalist covering Thoroughbred racing,” said Littau, who is executive news producer at his campus television station and podcasts creator for Amplify. “I have a lot of passion for the sport and want to instill that in new fans and deepen that feeling in existing fans.” For inspiration he has studied videos of racing broadcast luminaries such as Bob Costas, who covered the Kentucky Derby for NBC for nearly two decades.

A bit uncertain about whether Amplify would support his interest in journalism, Littau was pleased when his mentorship application was gladly accepted. He was paired with Tom Law, editor of the Saratoga Special, a twice-weekly newspaper covering racing at Saratoga Race Course. Montplaisir also spent a summer working for the Special.

Law was so impressed with Littau that he offered him a

“Amplify may be there with tack so the kids can touch and feel some of the materials the horse and jockey use,” Heissenbuttel said, thereby bolstering the educational value of those events. An Equipony, a mechanical device that simulates what a jockey feels aboard the horse, is another attraction that Amplify makes available for the children.

#### The next Bob Costas?

Becoming a jockey, trainer, or an owner might be among the first occupations that come to mind when considering how Amplify could help someone get started in the business. The organization’s umbrella, however, covers much more than that.

“When someone thinks about the Thoroughbred industry, they think primarily of horse racing,” Montplaisir said. “They don’t immediately think of all the jobs associated with that. There is work everywhere in the industry that may involve insurance, sales, transportation, veterinary care, aftercare for retired racehorses, officiating, and more.”

She could include journalism in that list, which would encompass the career aspirations of Timothy Littau, a senior majoring



*Rancho San Miguel office manager Holly Brown, right, continues to benefit from her professional relationship with Jordyn Egan, above, who mentored her.*





summer internship on the paper. While there, Littau had the opportunity to join Law in a presentation titled “Amplifying the Future of Racing,” where they spoke of the value of their mentorship. The event was co-hosted by Amplify and the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame.

“Without Amplify, the mentorship with Tom Law and then interning on the newspaper would not have been possible,” Littau said. “And I certainly could never have imagined myself speaking at the Racing Hall of Fame at age 21. It’s been a phenomenal experience.”

### Confirming a choice

Holly Brown had already taken a big first step into the Thoroughbred industry when a mentorship with Amplify allowed her to validate her career choice and open the door to a wider view of the business.

Brown is office manager at Rancho San Miguel, a large Thoroughbred breeding and sales prep operation in Central California. Through her Amplify connection she found a mentor who has become an important source of support and guidance for

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— ERIC RESENDIZ

her budding career in the racing business.

“I had traveled around for several years holding various jobs, even working with wild burros in Texas, and had little bits of exposure to Thoroughbreds along the way,” she said. “Then the job opening here at Rancho San Miguel was paired at about the same time with my Amplify mentorship. It all drew something out in me to want to be with racehorses.”

For her mentorship Brown was paired with Jordyn Egan, executive director of the California Thoroughbred Owners Association and an Amplify board member. Egan has brought industry connections and encouragement to Brown as the two enjoy an ongoing professional relationship that has continued far beyond the three-month formal mentorship period.

“I found my passion in this industry on the business end of things, understanding what makes it work,” Egan said. “Holly has that same analytical, business mind-set and has worked to improve the processes of the farm where she works. I’ve encouraged her to seek out connections and work hard.”

Brown drew inspiration from hearing Egan describe her rise

in the business that began after graduation in 2004 from the University of Arizona, where she earned a Bachelor of Science from the Race Track Industry Program. Said Brown: “I really didn’t know if I was in the right job until Jordyn told me about her past. She helped me see a bigger picture of the industry and how many women were involved, all the opportunities for growth. That helped solidify my choice.”

### She’s just getting started

Montplaisir has big plans in mind for Amplify as its profile and influence begin to spread across the nation and even into Canada for the mentorship program.

“Our goal is to work with a variety of states and racing jurisdictions to promote existing programs, then create initiatives of our own that fill in the gaps,” she said. “We’ve piloted a lot of things in Kentucky. The work we’ve done with Keeneland, especially, has helped us develop a framework for how we want to work with tracks across the country.”

Supporting the coming generations of career professionals in the business while creating new fans of racing underlines Amplify’s all-encompassing tagline: “Thoroughbred racing is not just a sport of kings ... it is a sport for everyone.” **KM**



Montplaisir says Amplify has developed a framework that will help it work with tracks across the country.



Whitney Fields, Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital staff member, welcomes the Breeze family to an Amplify Equine Careers Tour of the facility. Margaret (far left) and Troy (far right) are pictured with their children (from left), Julia, Megan, Marshall, Thomas, and Trevor. They have created their own Thoroughbred operation using Amplify resources.

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

If horse racing could be compared to a game of poker, the Breeze family of Tollesboro, Kentucky, has gone all in.

Margaret and Troy Breeze, along with their five offspring, have used the expertise gained from attending all of the Equine Careers Tour Series events offered by Amplify Horse Racing as a basis for creating their own family Thoroughbred breeding, training, and racing operation literally from scratch. “We have a neighbor who has racehorses and we started helping out there,” said Thomas, oldest son in the family. “We then discovered Amplify and it’s taken off from there.”

The Amplify career tours put participants in direct contact with industry professionals

in areas such as breeding, foaling, managing and marketing stallions, and veterinary medicine. The tours have proved invaluable to the Breeze family in building their business, down to the detail of selecting a horse van to purchase, which was informed by a visit to Sallee Horse Vans.

The friend who owns racehorses played a key role in getting the family fully into the industry.

“He was very helpful in teaching us about the business,” Margaret said. “He took us to Belterra Park in Cincinnati and introduced us to his trainer. He suggested we purchase a horse in a claiming race.”

That horse is Keen Mind, who came home a winner in his first outing under the Breeze family banner, a \$12,500 maiden claiming race at a mile-and-a-sixteenth at Belterra. The family has since added a stallion and mare to their brood.

The racing bug has bitten Thomas so much that he has decided not to pursue the video game programming career that his college studies at Shawnee State University would prepare him for, but instead plunge into the high-stakes world of Thoroughbred racing.

He’s joined there by his parents and siblings, all of whom take part in the family business to some degree. The children are homeschooled, which means the business can be incorporated into their school day. Daily chores include mucking out the stables and helping at three neighboring horse farms with more than 20 horses stabled.

“We have a large family, each with varying interests and skills,” Margaret said. “Amplify has shown us that we can build a family business around the great sport of horse racing where each of us can contribute in a unique, meaningful way.”