

# Billy Glass: Advocate for Equitation

## Leader in the Horse Show Industry Is a True Equine-Inspired Success Story

By Lindsay Brock

**B**illy Glass remembers the first horse show he attended like it was yesterday. A self-proclaimed city kid growing up in Buffalo, New York, his first steps near a show jumping ring were in his hometown at the Buffalo International. Now after several decades of tireless work in the horse sport industry, Billy still recalls those formative days as an adventure.

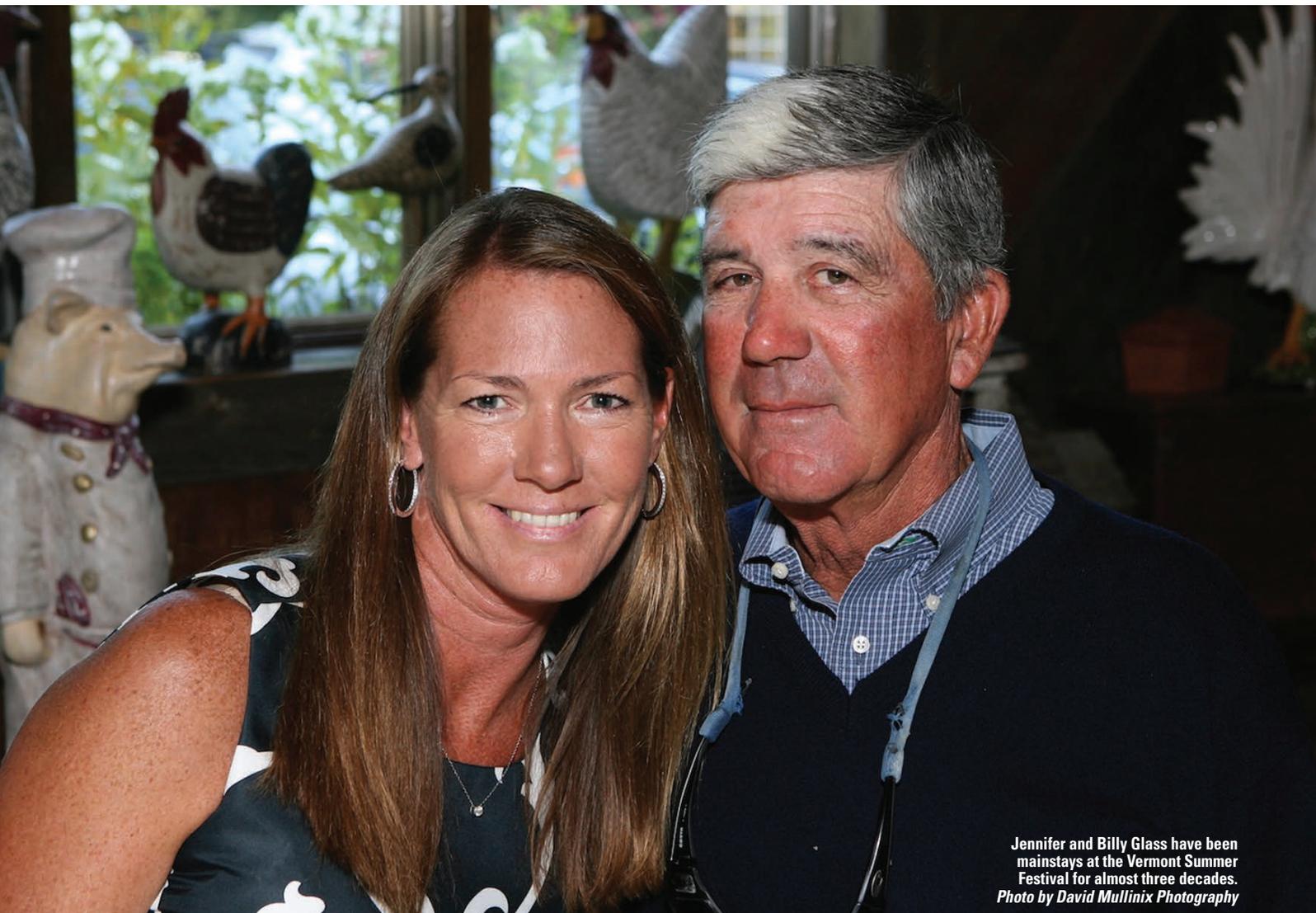
Billy started grooming when he was 16 years old and, two years later, dropped out of high school to pursue whatever path the horses would lead him down. While not a rider himself, Billy got his start at the most hands-on level as a groom. His first job was for J. Basil Ward

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in Ohio before moving on to positions with Chucky Graham in western New York and the Sifton family in Toronto, Canada.

“I was a high school drop-out and I wanted a little adventure,” recalled Billy. “I’d never touched a horse until I was 16. A buddy of mine told me that I could drive a truck, take care of horses and see the world. That’s what led me to do it.”

While Billy knew he’d found his place among horses, he climbed his way up through the sport, always looking for the next opportunity. His list of endeavors includes running his own training business in Cazenovia, New York, for roughly



Jennifer and Billy Glass have been mainstays at the Vermont Summer Festival for almost three decades. Photo by David Mullinix Photography



eight years, joining U.S. show jumping rider Debbie Stephens in founding Centennial Farm in Tampa Bay, Florida; and doing his fair share of course designing. Then he decided to make a move to 'the other side' of the business and set his sights on horse show management.

"My time training had run its course," said Billy. "That's when I decided that I enjoyed organizing shows more than I did actually participating in them."

## Behind the Scenes

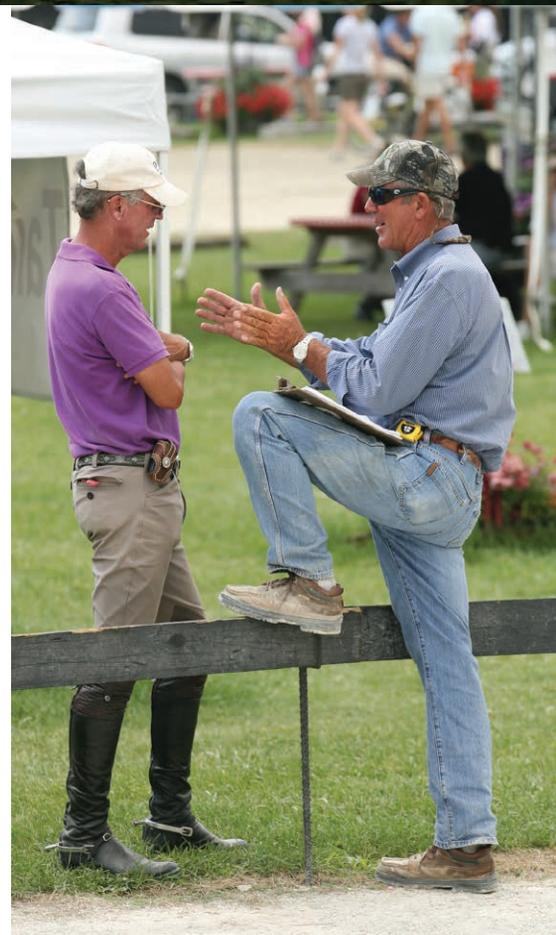
Browse through any old U.S. hunter/jumper show prize list and Billy has probably played a management role at one time or another. From working at the Fairfield and Ox Ridge Hunt Clubs to the Washington International Horse Show, his career has run the gamut.

In 1994, however, Billy broke the mold. He and fellow show manager Oliver Kennedy unveiled what's now one of the most successful indoor horse shows in the country: the Capital Challenge Horse Show. Giving a home to the Ariat Adult Medal Finals and the Taylor Harris Insurance Services (THIS) National Children's Medal Finals at Capital Challenge, Billy quickly became an innovator in equitation competition.

Given the connection, it came as no surprise when another one of Billy's shows, the Vermont Summer Festival, began attracting some of the best equitation riders in the nation.

Billy estimates that he started with the six-week Vermont Summer Festival almost 30 years ago. He spends each summer in the foothills of the southern Vermont mountains alongside his wife, Jennifer, who has served as the show's awards coordinator for almost as long. But Billy has done more for the show than he lets on.

"I always noticed a great nucleus of equitation trainers spending their summers in Vermont," said Billy. "Historically, the equitation rings in Vermont would showcase the highest-level riders. We've had so many of the finalist winners, from Maclay and USET to Ariat and THIS, compete at Vermont over the years. They set the bar."



**Top Photo:**  
When home in Florida, Billy pursues his passion for fishing.  
*Photo courtesy of Billy Glass*

**Bottom Photo:**  
Billy (right) speaks with exhibitor Chuck Waters at the Vermont Summer Festival.  
*Photo by David Mullinix Photography*

## Equitation Boot Camp

That high standard was one that Billy wanted to uphold and nurture. As a result, "Equitation Tuesdays" were introduced at the Vermont Summer Festival in 2013 and the six-week circuit quickly became dubbed "Equitation Boot Camp" by riders and trainers alike.

Tuesdays at Vermont see a frenzy of young riders and national champion hopefuls with tunnel vision for qualifying and preparing for year-end finals. Their hope is that the summer competition will land them in the show rings for prestigious year-end equitation finals. The Equitation Tuesday schedule, which is held in addition to equitation offerings taking place each week, features classes ranging from the THIS Children's Medal to USEF National Hunter Seat Medal and ASPCA Horsemanship qualifiers.

"It had never been easy to win an equitation class in Vermont; a fifth-place ribbon there is often times a winning round at other shows," said Billy. "So, in order for those riders to qualify for finals, they were running around early in the week at different horse shows trying to get points.

"To jump on board with how the system works, we created Equitation Tuesdays to serve our customers," continued Billy. "It's a vehicle for equitation riders to get additional mileage and ultimately qualify for finals."

## Big Equitation Names

The "build it and they will come" mentality did not apply in Vermont, as the big names in equitation were already in attendance, according to Billy. Missy Clark of Vermont-based North Run, Val Renihan of Findlay's Ridge, Bobby Braswell of Terrapin Hill Farm and Old Salem Farm's Frank Madden are all familiar faces ringside.

"We've always seen two things in the equitation rings at Vermont: big numbers and high-level competition," said Billy. "By adding the Equitation Tuesday, we never felt we were watering down the avenue to qualify. We were instead creating additional opportunities for what was already there: a large number of very talented and quality riders."

Billy has also seen the success of equitation riders spill over into other rings in Vermont. He recalls watching former North Run rider

Kristy Herrera win in hunter derby competition last year, as well as 2015 ASPCA Maclay Final winner McKayla Langmeier lead the victory gallop in the amateur jumper ranks.

"Good competition draws more competition and I see new faces every year," said Billy, who now makes his home in Bookelia, Florida, where he can often be found fishing. "We offer a lot of classes, but I'd say Tuesdays offer some of the best courses and stiffest competition of the whole horse show."

While Billy maintains that his skills as a fisherman are much better than his skills within the horse show industry, a quick glance at his accomplishments within the horse world – Vermont's national equitation standing being only one of them – points to much more. A trailblazer from the grassroots level to the pinnacle of horse sport, Billy is a true equine-inspired success story. **S**