

Voice



Star of Broadway's 'Beautiful' Headlines Viscardi Annual Fundraiser

There was music in the air at the 34th annual Reach for a Star Luncheon, which raised over \$235,000 to benefit the accessible extracurricular programs for children with severe physical disabilities from the Henry Viscardi School (HVS) at The Viscardi Center.

Special guest Chilina Kennedy, lead in the Broadway hit, *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, performed a song set for more than 425 attendees at the Crest Hollow Country Club on April 5. A group of HVS students had the opportunity to attend, with second graders joining Chilina on stage to sing "You've Got a Friend" and "I Feel the Earth Move."

"It was a pleasure to be a part of the luncheon this year, to learn about the Viscardi School, and to share Carole King's music with the incredible audience of students, parents, staff, and supporters of the school," Kennedy said. "The best part for me was meeting the students and singing with them. They are truly inspiring."

The Luncheon began with a cocktail hour that included a fabulous array of more than one hundred auction and raffle prizes. At the end of the event, Kennedy was presented with a portrait painted by HVS senior Mariah to commemorate the visit and demonstrate the importance of extracurricular activities and after-school programs.

For many young learners from HVS, who often require special transportation, assistive technology, and life-sustaining medical supports throughout the day, options for socializing outside the classroom are limited. The Reach for a Star Luncheon was established to bolster funds for activities like clubs, adapted sports, dance therapy, and recreational overnights, which afford students the means to spend time with friends outside of school, broaden their interests, and share new experiences.

According to John D. Kemp, President and CEO of The Viscardi Center, this year's event has already made a difference.

During his speech, he announced that the school plans to double its Friday Night Recreation sessions.

"Today is a day to celebrate the impact you've made on young, beautiful Viscardi lives," Kemp told supporters. "These after-school programs, when added to their rich academic curriculum, shape the character of these students for a lifetime."

HVS graduate Adeline Joshua echoed his statement. Joshua, who received a Bachelor of Science degree in International Relations and Affairs from Georgetown University and now works as a Government Information Specialist at the U.S. Department of State in Washington D.C., described how these after-school activities taught her about leadership and advocacy, built her confidence, and sparked an interest in politics.

"Everyone is capable of doing great things if given the support," she said.

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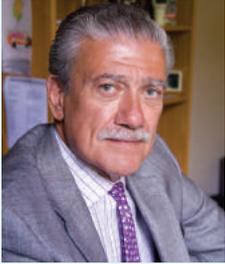
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Pick up a periodical. Scour the Internet. Every day you'll read about another "fight" children and adults with disabilities

are in. "Fights" for fair, meaningful job opportunities as the unemployment rate for those with disabilities is double that of nondisabled individuals. "Fights" for an enriched education at schools where they can access the curriculum in real-time through technology and soar not only academically, but socially because they can also be full participants in sports and clubs. "Fights" for accessible transportation so they, too, can get to and from their places of employment, worship and recreation. "Fights" to select and keep their personal care assistants. "Fights" to choose where they live, versus being forced to live oftentimes in age-inappropriate nursing facilities and institutions. "Fights" for quality healthcare. "Fights" for timely repairs to their wheelchairs – their only mode of mobility and their lifeline.

83% of people with disabilities acquire their disability during their lifetimes as the result of an illness or injury. This shows how quickly any of our lives, and those of our loved ones, can dramatically change.

As a person with a disability, this election year, I ask you to be mindful of where disability fits in our local and national candidates' agendas and platforms. Get out and vote. Elect leaders who believe in an inclusive society and have the vision and passion to foster a country where everyone is valued and can succeed.

83%! You never know what your next "fight" could be.

John D. Ken
President & CEO

Supporter
SPOTlight

Viscardi vs. FNBLI –
More Than a Friendly
Game of Hoops



When executives from The First National Bank of Long Island hit the court several years ago to take on the Henry Viscardi School varsity Cougars for a game of wheelchair basketball, they likely didn't envision it spearheading the Bank's strong commitment to people with disabilities and a long-term partnership with The Viscardi Center. Despite a losing streak, the bankers are still going hard in the paint, taking on the Cougars several times a year, and lending not only their time, but their talents. Led by Michael N. Vittorio, President and CEO, who has instilled a corporate culture that is committed to the local communities it serves, the Bank's staff is helping to build financial literacy and workforce preparedness in the students and adults the Center serves.

The Bank regularly hosts students from the Henry Viscardi School's business skills classes at a local branch. There, the high schoolers who are often making their first trip to a bank learn how to open an account, use online banking and the ATM, and protect their privacy. This valuable insight assists in their transition to the adult world and independent living.

The brainchild of Vittorio, the Bank hosted a Career Day for a group of Viscardi 9th graders. The programming included sessions with Vittorio and members of the senior management team. The experience let the students explore a wide range of careers and learn about all aspects of operating a financial institution.

The Bank's dedication hasn't stopped there. Its senior managers have participated in a practice interview day at the Center, conducting interviews, reviewing resumes and providing tips to adults with disabilities in the Center's vocational training and employment placement services to further prepare them for job searches. In addition, since Vittorio was honored at our annual Celebrity Sports Night in 2013, staffers have continued to volunteer at the event each year. Over a dozen Bank employees will join us for this year's 50th Celebrity Sports Night, featuring Eli Manning and Bryant Gumbel, on May 19.

The Bank's "human" investment has paid high dividends for both organizations.

Meet Heidi

One HVS graduate helps others navigate the future.



It didn't take long for Heidi to settle into her job as an Evaluation Assistant at The Viscardi Center. For this Henry Viscardi School alumna and former participant in the Center's Business Skills Program, it was a lot like coming home.

Heidi first enrolled as a student at the Henry Viscardi School when she was just four years

old, and attended until she graduated from high school. The East Rockaway native then went on to earn a B.A. degree in Sociology from Molloy College, and later became employed at the Long Island Children's Museum—a position she held for 12 years.

But after temporarily relocating to New Jersey, re-entering the workforce proved challenging. So Heidi returned to her alma mater, this time registering in the "Navigating the Future" program at The Viscardi Center, which prepares adults with all types of disabilities for in-demand office jobs. During the program, she updated her computer knowledge—even boosting her typing speed to 50 WPM—and built a professional network.

She also gained work experience by administering on-site consumer vocational assessment tests, which are used to determine career options for each individual.

As a self-proclaimed "people person," encouraging individuals during the

evaluation process came naturally for Heidi. "I've always wanted to serve as a role model and motivate others with disabilities," she said. "I have this desire to make a difference in people's lives."

Then last winter, it happened—Heidi saw an online job listing for an Evaluation Assistant at The Viscardi Center. Confident in the training she received from the program, she applied, using internal contacts as references. A formal offer soon followed.

Now, Heidi is excited about forging a new career path and guiding others in the community toward their goals. Moving forward, she aspires to conduct sit-down assessment meetings with individuals and their families.

Even when Heidi isn't behind her desk, she stays on the grind. A favorite pastime includes wheeling the length of the Long Beach Boardwalk, then back again. "To move beyond your limitations, you need to push yourself," she said.



At a local Petco, a group of students are learning the ins-and-outs of visual merchandising, stocking, and product inventory, while also strengthening important social skills by assisting shoppers and interacting with staff. This hands-on worksite training helps students discover their vocational options and interests, and prepares them for paid employment in the future. That way, they can better determine what they want—and what they don't want.

out & about

By participating in community-based work experiences around the area, young people in our Youth Transition Services Program can close the gap between school and the adult world.

AWARDS & ACCOLADES



Final projects never tasted so good. The first batch of graduates from the inaugural Culinary Skills Training Program, which prepares youths and adults with disabilities for professional careers in hospitality, completed the class by cooking and serving a multi-course lunch for family and friends. Each participant emerged from the program with fresh culinary chops, a portfolio, and a refined resume—all the right ingredients for employment in and around the kitchen.

"[Participants] worked as a team to create the menu, shop for the ingredients, prep and cook the food, and determine what could be prepared in advance," said Rob Foley, Viscardi's Culinary Skills Program Instructor.

Since graduation, many have already been placed in suitable jobs—with one participant securing employment at Eataly in NYC.

NewsBytes



Find out what "beautiful" means to students from the Henry Viscardi School. Visit our YouTube channel to watch the video screened at the 34th annual Reach for a Star Luncheon at www.youtube.com/user/AbilitiesOnline



Learn how one animal lover turned her passion into a fulfilling career with a little help from the Employment Placement and Job Coaching services at The Viscardi Center. Read Jenna's story at viscardicenter.org/stories/meet-jenna.html

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Show Your Disability Pride!

March, walk and roll with us at the 2nd annual Disability Pride Parade in New York City. July 10 at 11 a.m.

Visit ViscardiCenter.org for details.

You're

I N V I T E D

50th Annual Celebrity Sports Night

19 | The Viscardi Center
MAY | Albertson, NY

Featuring Eli Manning, *New York Giants quarterback*, Bryant Gumbel, *Host of HBO's "Real Sports"* and dozens of sports legends.



4th Annual Golf Outing

14 | Glen Head Country Club
SEP | Glen Head, NY

Round of golf, elaborate cocktail reception, on-course enhancements & silent auction.



For tickets, sponsorships and more information about these fundraisers, visit ViscardiCenter.org or call 516.465.1595.

YOUR LASTING IMPACT

Polio had a sudden, lasting impact on James Blesh. James Blesh had a sudden, lasting impact on The Viscardi Center. Last year, the Center received a planned gift from his estate. A gift that funded a portion of the Center's most critical needs.

An avid baseball player and photography enthusiast, Mr. Blesh developed polio in middle school. While the limp paralysis led to the use of a wheelchair, he completed his secondary education and went on to attend Hofstra University. He later earned a degree at St. John's University.

Through his work as an engineer at General Electric (GE), Mr. Blesh's father learned of the work of our founder, Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr., and hoped he would serve as a mentor for his son. Dr. Viscardi, and those working at the Center on projects for GE and other leading companies, were living proof that, when given the right tools, people of all abilities could be productive, successful employees and contributors to our communities.

After moving to Florida, Mr. Blesh landed a job at a power company where he worked for 25 years in data processing. His bequest continues Dr. Viscardi's mission to educate, employ and empower children and adults with disabilities so that they, too, can lead meaningful lives like he did.

For more information about Planned Giving opportunities, contact the Development Office at 516.465.1594.

