



Celebrity Chef Maria Loi Brings “Taste of Greece” to Viscardi

Celebrity Chef Maria Loi spent an evening at The Viscardi Center this fall to showcase some of her famous Greek cuisine and support the organization’s mission to educate, employ, and empower people with disabilities. The Mediterranean food extravaganza benefitted the Center’s Culinary Skills Training program, which prepares adults with disabilities for in-demand careers in the food service industry.

As part of their Culinary Skills Training curriculum, program participants served an intimate group of attendees a sampling of staple dishes from Loi’s Manhattan-based restaurant, Loi Estiatorio, while Loi performed a live cooking demonstration featuring *spanakopitakia* (mini spinach pies), *tyropitakia* (cheese-filled pastries), and other traditional mainstays. Following a discussion about the health benefits associated with the “12 Pillar Foods” from her award-winning cookbook *The Greek Diet*, Loi concluded the festivities with a meet-and-greet and book signing.

“My mission in life is to change the world, one healthy Greek bite at a time,” she said. “By sharing my knowledge, and creating

memorable and educational experiences, I can effect change in the world, and make a positive difference in people’s lives.”

An internationally-renowned restaurateur, author, entrepreneur, and philanthropist, Loi was unanimously re-elected the Ambassador of Greek Gastronomy by the Chef’s Club of Greece in 2016. Loi donated her time to The Viscardi Center after learning that she and the organization both shared one goal — to bring people in the community together.

“What The Viscardi Center does, providing a lifespan of programs and services that educate, employ, and empower children and adults with disabilities, speaks to my heart and soul — this is why I do what I do, to give back to the community,” Loi said. “Anything I can do to help elevate people’s lives and personal experiences, I want to do.”

Stay up-to-date on programs and events that enhance the lives of people with disabilities. Visit us at ViscardiCenter.org.

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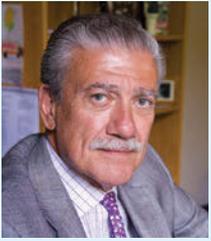
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Employ. Employ. Employ. The words of Victor Calise, Commissioner of the NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, and the

resounding theme at last month's National Disability Employment Awareness Month held by the National Business & Disability Council at The Viscardi Center.

Our robust panel discussion gave employers in the room insight and tips for increasing their companies' hiring, retention and advancement strategies/practices for increasing employment of people with disabilities. I was joined by Jim Sinocchi - Head of Disability Inclusion, JPMorgan Chase & Co.; Bob Bilak - Director, Crew Relations & Compliance Programs, JetBlue Airways; Clinton Brown III - Manager Business Planning, Altice USA (and a Henry Viscardi School graduate) and John Sasso - Associate Director, EY Technology, Abilities Champion, Ernst & Young, LLP.

Some key points from the conversation:

- Diversity, and people with disabilities in leadership positions, can make a company stronger.
- If you called a person in for an interview, you liked what you saw on his or her resume. The fact that a disability may be disclosed at an interview doesn't change the fact that you thought the person was qualified for the job. Go ahead, make the hire!
- Flexibility and equal access to software/applications enhances the productivity of all people in the workplace. Remember: reasonable accommodations should be made for all!

I encourage you to visit our Blog at ViscardiCenter.org to read more about employment-related topics impacting the disability community. And then... hire, hire, hire!

John D. Kenz
President & CEO

Supporter
SPOTlight

J.R. Martinez:
A Life of Service



When J.R. Martinez joined the U.S. Army at age 19, he whole-heartedly choose to serve. Six months after enlisting, he was deployed to Iraq. Two months later, Martinez was driving a Humvee when its left front tire hit an IED; Martinez suffered smoke inhalation and severe burns to more than 34 percent of his body. He spent 34 months recovering in a medical facility and has undergone more than 30 plastic surgery and skin graft surgeries. The incident ended what he thought was a lifetime of service.

Fast-forward to today. The now actor, author, motivational speaker, Season 13 winner of ABC's *Dancing with the Stars*, and friend to Viscardi – having visited the Center and attended its annual Celebrity Sports Night fundraiser — has found new ways to serve.

Over a cup of coffee arranged by Mariah, a Henry Viscardi School alumna, we caught up with J.R. and learned why Viscardi is still on his mind and in his heart.

Q: What has kept you connected to The Viscardi Center since your initial visit?

A: Like others, the first time I visited the Henry Viscardi School I walked away so inspired by the kids. As an outsider, I

thought I'd be giving something to them, but it is actually the opposite — they give you more. They are overwhelmingly positive and have such a strong sense of community and belonging. By staying involved and supporting Viscardi, I can help ensure the future of another wave of students who can benefit from attending this amazing school.

Q: What did you personally take away from the visit?

A: I am in awe of the resiliency of the children. And, they really don't want you to be in awe of them, they just want you to see all of their abilities... and I did. I have yet to see, or visit, a place like Viscardi.

Q: Do you have a philosophy on philanthropy?

A: When you're in the military, you fall in love with the idea of service, of being part of something bigger than yourself. I've continued to lend my voice and tell my own story because it has become a source of philanthropy, a way to help others and a way for me to serve for the rest of my life. Viscardi gets to the root of the issues of people with disabilities and takes a direct route to fulfilling its mission and empowering individuals.

Meet Meghan

How She Found the Recipe for Success...



There's no better feeling than earning a living by doing meaningful work that brings out the best of your talents. Just ask Meghan, a determined young woman on the autism

spectrum who, with support from Viscardi, turned her passion for creativity into a rewarding career at a local King Kullen bakery.

Meghan takes great pride in tying on her apron each morning before she prepares dough for the oven, weighs and labels delectable cookie platters, arranges fresh pastries in the display case, and assists customers. But for Meghan, now at her job for nearly two years, the icing on the cake is the profound sense of accomplishment and belonging she experiences as a respected participant in the workforce and community.

"Working in a bakery has helped me feel more comfortable being on my own," she said. "The best part about my job is that I've been given the tools to be independent."

With a talent for sketching and drawing, Meghan turned to The Viscardi Center to bring her artistic endeavors to the working world. She received one-on-one guidance

from a Viscardi placement specialist, who connected her unique needs and interests to an appropriate role. Today, she receives on- and off-site assistance from a Viscardi job coach dedicated to helping her reach her full potential on the job — that way, Meghan has the confidence to do what she loves week after week.

By gaining and sustaining long-term employment that promotes social skill development and provides a reliable paycheck, Meghan's success story is still in the making. She has dozens of plans for the near future, including building a savings fund, replenishing her wardrobe, and managing her own cell phone bills. As for now, her biggest aim is to master cake decorating and piping techniques at the bakery.

"I'm always learning new things at my job," Meghan said. "I work with great people, and it makes me feel proud that I can stay busy and spend mornings in a happy environment."

out & about



Alexa Williams, Henry Viscardi School at The Viscardi Center Class of 2016 Salutatorian, appeared on the annual national education media event *American Graduate Day 2017*, which aired live on public media stations from coast-to-coast in October. Now a freshman at St. John's University, Alexa shared her experiences at Viscardi and her plans to pursue law in the future.

For six years, *American Graduate Day* has showcased compelling stories of commitment, perseverance, and triumph in education. This year's theme focused on the importance of academic mentorship in an effort to inspire and motivate others across the country to get involved by guiding young people toward successful careers.

View the segment at ViscardiCenter.org.

NewsBytes



Viscardi and JetBlue have teamed up to help people with disabilities reach new heights. Check out the in-flight video feature shown on JetBlue Airways flights nationwide during the month of October to find out how we're helping to improve passenger accessibility and broaden employment horizons for people with disabilities.

Watch this video and more at YouTube.com/AbilitiesOnline.

AWARDS & ACCOLADES



This fall, Viscardi President and CEO, John D. Kemp, received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Washburn University's School of Law — his alma mater. The award is bestowed on graduates who have cultivated highly distinguished careers, and whose contributions are recognized as significant in their chosen field.

Attorney Pedro Irigonegaray, a former classmate, remarked on the honor: "John, by his example, has taught the world that a person's ability to succeed in life, to accomplish great things, to reach unreachable heights is directly in proportion to their commitment to purpose, and that if one is truly committed, physical limitations can be overcome and incredible success achieved — not only personally but for all humanity."



Mentors wanted!

The Viscardi Center's Mentoring Initiative seeks positive adult role models to pair with at-risk youth and students with disabilities.

To get involved, call 516.465.1548.

You're



Baseball in Black & White: The Watercolors of James Fiorentino

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For tickets, sponsorships, and more
info, visit ViscardiCenter.org or call
516.465.1595.

YOUR LASTING IMPACT

The "Art" of Giving

When Dutch-American abstract expressionist artist, Willem de Kooning fulfilled a request made to him by Rory Calhoun, former Executive Director of the Guitar Workshop in Roslyn, he generously donated an original oil painting to be sold as part of Mr. Calhoun's fundraising efforts to create a Music Therapy program for children with disabilities. No one could have imagined that the proceeds from its sale would benefit the Henry Viscardi School more than thirty five years later. But, that's exactly what happened.

The painting's long road to auction at Sotheby's is a fascinating tale that Mr. Calhoun loves to tell. It begins with his visit to the east end home of the artist and ends with the painting selling for \$500,000 in New York City — significantly higher than its anticipated value of \$300,000. Mr. Calhoun selected the Henry Viscardi School as a co-beneficiary of the auction purchase price — site unseen.

Almost a year after his initial call to The Viscardi Center, Mr. Calhoun was able to see firsthand how the gift is continuing to provide an enriched educational experience for the children with severe physical disabilities the school serves. During his visit, he recounted all of the benefits of having music in your life, "Music improves one's self-esteem and, like art, it is very subjective. The Henry Viscardi School is better than I could have imagined."

Mr. Calhoun, warmed by knowing the Viscardi students will continue to have music in their lives, hopes others will consider making a gift of art to benefit The Viscardi Center.

