The Viscardi Center started 2022 by proudly welcoming Dr. Chris Rosa, formerly the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Inclusion Initiatives at CUNY, as our new President & CEO. Get to know Dr. Rosa in this special issue!

While I’ve cherished every moment of my first month at The Viscardi Center, I’ve come to appreciate my mornings here the most. Early mornings at The Viscardi Center are magical! Anticipation is in the air, as accessible school buses arrive with kids eager to start their day, and educators eager to greet them. Program participants check in and enthusiastically launch into another day of readying for careers, building independent living and self-advocacy skills, and immersing themselves in the laughter, banter, and fellowship of Viscardi community.

At the President’s Office, as our leadership team and I arrive, in stark comparison to joyfully noisy bustle of the day to come, we’re greeted by an almost reverent quiet. In the still of the early morning, you can almost feel the ubiquitous presence of our founder, Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. — “Hank” to those who had the privilege of knowing him personally. While we never met, it’s in these early mornings that I feel as though I’m coming to know Hank intimately. I start my day by rolling past his perfectly preserved office, a vivid reminder that here, we’re all part of something bigger than ourselves — a legacy of service, leadership, and advocacy, by and for people with disabilities. In that moment, I not only feel the weightiness of the sacred responsibility for humbly leading this life-changing organization — of meeting the lofty expectations that Hank set in place — but also the exhilarating lightness of serving side-by-side with my new teammates to empower people with disabilities to chart their own futures.

In these quiet moments, if you listen closely, you can hear Hank’s words encouraging us:

“Empower people with disabilities to show what they can do; to make self-directed choices about their lives!”

“Be relentless in creating opportunities!”

“Demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit; build partnerships!”

“Lead with humor!”

“Enjoy the connections... the magic happens when true believers collaborate in pursuit of our mission!”

“Above all, ensure that people with disabilities' voices are heard!”

It’s in this spirit that we forge ahead together, building upon our mission to connect people with disabilities to high-quality education and meaningful employment. To meet children and adults “where they are,” and provide them with the tools to address their needs. To be on the leading edge of emerging issues impacting people with disabilities and their families, including financial empowerment; postsecondary transition; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and disability identity and culture. And, as a new day unfolds before us each morning, to ensure that everyone can harness all the opportunities it brings.

Dr. Chris Rosa, President & CEO
Where did you go to school when you were a boy? — Jeremy P., 12th Grade
Where do you live now? — Fanta D., 6th Grade
I went to elementary at PS:163, then intermediate/middle school at IS:237, which is named for Rachel Carson who is an environmentalist. I went to Francis Lewis High School: GO PATRIOTS! I still live in my childhood home which is 6 blocks away from my elementary school in Flushing, Queens.

How many people are in your family? Do you have a big family? — Ricardo A., 5th Grade
I have a younger sister named Christina and a younger brother John, who also uses a wheelchair.

Do you have any pets and, if so, what are they? — Nicolas F. and Lauren R., 6th Grade
I don’t have any pets now. A long time ago I had a canary named Enrico who lived a long life. I love dogs and can’t wait to meet Sunny!

Do you have a disability like us? If so, what is your disability? — Asaad, RAMP
Yes, I have muscular dystrophy and have used a wheelchair since I was 12 years old. My brother John also has MD and uses a wheelchair to get around. Also, I love that you used the word ‘us,’ as it connects us all as a community and, together, we will change the world.

You have Dr. before your name. What is your doctorate in? — 8-1 Class
I have a PhD which makes me a Doctor of Philosophy in sociology. I have a concentration in American Disability Culture. A culture means the unique way a group of people see, understand, and interact with the world around them. I believe that people with disabilities have their own culture, just like other groups which connects us as a family.

Why were you interested in working at Henry Viscardi School? — Adryana N., 6th Grade
I believe that Viscardi Center and School are a beacon of hope for all generations. I always knew of The Viscardi Center and remember telling my friends I was going to learn to drive there. I knew of Dr. Viscardi, and believe his work is a shining example of empowerment and inclusion. This is the best job in the nation, and it is a dream come true to follow in Mr. Kemp’s footsteps.

What was your first job ever?
— Angelic M., 12th Grade
My first job was when I was 14 in New York City at the Mayor’s Summer Youth Employment Program. I was the editor of the program’s newsletter at the New York Youth Medical Center which is now part of NYU.
Earlier this winter, Henry Viscardi School 11th-graders Kyle G., Hanna M., and Yasmine M. virtually sat down with Dr. Rosa to ask questions submitted by their peers for the school newspaper, the *Cougar Chronicle*. Here’s a snippet of their interview!

**Did you do well in school? What was your favorite subject?** — Mike C., RAMP
I have always been a strong student. My mother was a high school teacher who put a strong emphasis on studying and working hard, learning the material, and understanding the world around you; not just learning for the test or the grade. I would say my favorite subject was social studies and later history, which probably led to my doctorate in sociology.

**What is your favorite food or drink?** — Ismaeel A. and Lauren R., 6th Grade
I love a good cheeseburger. Actually, I am always looking for new places that have good cheeseburgers, so if you know any, let me know. Also, I am Italian, so Italian food is always a favorite, but better than any other Italian food is my mother’s lasagna.

**What are some ways you think you can improve the community of TVC and HVS to bring everyone together?** — Jaser K., 11th Grade
I would like to qualify this answer, put some parentheses around it, until I get the opportunity to spend some time here and get the vibe of the community. I cherish the opportunity for people to get together and to share a pride and an identity. I would like to work with the leadership of the Center and School, as well as you and your teachers, to make time and opportunities for us to connect socially, through civic engagement, advocacy, and education.

**When is your birthday?** — Tessah M., 5th Grade
My birthday is March 13th, and I am a Pisces. As a water sign, I am supposed to be empathetic and a good listener and like to think I am.

**How accessible were things when you were growing up and do you think they have gotten better since then? In what ways do you think things can still improve?** — Anonymous
When I went to kindergarten things were not all that accessible, but that started to change as time went on and different acts and laws came into effect. The ADA changed things and accessibility for everyone. The biggest change I have seen recently is that New York City now has accessible taxis and Ubers. Now I can use my phone to call a cab or an Uber on demand that can take me anywhere I need to go. I believe that your generation of advocates will go to a different model of inclusion.

**How will you make the school better for us?** — 6-1 Class
When I worked at CUNY, the best part of my job was working with students to give them a voice. My approach is to listen closely and hear your needs and concerns. I want to work closely with the student councils and show that you have a voice here.

**What do you like to do when you’re not working?** — 3rd Grade
I love sports, especially the Mets! I ran into Coach Joe and a few Viscardi students at an Islanders game recently. I am also really into ‘old people music,’ mostly classic rock. Have you guys ever heard of Bruce Springsteen? Well, I consider myself and my brother groupies for him. I have been to 129 Bruce Springsteen concerts, in 20 different arenas, and 10 different states.
Don’t Miss the Action: Celebrity Sports Night – May 19, 2022

For over 50 years, Celebrity Sports Night has raised funds for The Viscardi Center’s most critical needs. Watch for exciting details about this signature event that allows us to educate, employ, and empower children and adults with disabilities.

Tickets, sponsorships, and more info at ViscardiCenter.org/sportsnight

YOUR LASTING IMPACT

Despite ongoing challenges presented by the pandemic, The Viscardi Center has not wavered in its delivery of life-changing programs and services serving children and adults. This year, we can work together to bring new opportunities for achievement and success to our community. Your support makes it possible for people with disabilities to learn and develop skills in safe environments equipped with cutting-edge technologies and staffed by knowledgeable experts in education and employment. This year:

★ 170 Medically fragile children are attending in-person K-12 classes.
★ 2,500+ Youth and adults with disabilities are benefitting from education and employment services.
★ 3 Newly expanded programs are reaching diverse populations, including: young adults over age 21 continuing their learning, veterans looking to re-enter the workforce, and budding entrepreneurs set on bringing fresh ideas to market.
★ 2 Reconstructed areas on Viscardi’s campus – our state-of-the-art Independent Living House equipped with smart home tech and our fully accessible Aquatic Center – will offer high-quality programming that enhances the curriculum for students.

Every donation helps to ensure that children and adults with disabilities at The Viscardi Center can continue to receive what they need to learn, work, and stay active and fulfilled. Want to make an impact? Call 516.465.1593 or give a gift online – we’re now accepting Venmo, PayPal, and ACH donations – at ViscardiCenter.org/donate