

Nissequogue Village

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Living

A Social Publication for the Residents of Nissequogue Village



Nissequogue Resident, food writer **Nancy Vallarella**
serves up the dish on the *Taste of Smithtown*



Regina Calcaterra and Pat Westlake

THE DISH ON THE TASTE OF SMITHTOWN By Nancy Vallarella

Some of the most remarkable and inspiring people reside within the enclave of Nissequogue. Many altruistic activities take place here. Smithtown Yacht Club's Veteran Regatta, Nissequogue Country Club's Carol Baldwin Breast Cancer Fundraiser, the Nissequogue Volunteer Fire Department and EMS are standout, noteworthy events and organizations. This goodwill and pay it forward attitude has a reach beyond this village of magnificent beauty into and throughout the Town of Smithtown.

A little over 9 years ago, Senior Resources of Long Island (SRLI) formed when a group of Smithtown business professionals united to deliver a full range of quality services to seniors and their families. "Many people in the group were also members of the Smithtown Rotary," mentions Howard Essensfeld, SRLI's Treasurer and former Nissequogue resident. SRLI President, John Cinque stated, "We wanted to plan a social event for networking purposes. Gift of Life was a rotary sponsored charity. It organically became a fundraiser from the start."

Patricia Carley, Smithtown Rotarian, SRLI member and Director of Community Relations at Sunrise Senior Living in Smithtown offered up use of the facility and in 2005 the first Taste of Smithtown was born.

Gift of Life helps to finance heart surgeries for children in third world countries. Mr. Essensfeld, who is also the co-chair for the rotary sponsored Gift of Life of Nassau and Suffolk County, recognized with other members the need to include additional charities that directly aid families within Smithtown.

This past November, for the 8th consecutive year, venue host Mercedes-Benz of Smithtown (located in Saint James) opened its doors to 40 local culinary business with an estimated 300 attendees. Every city and village within the Town of Smithtown was represented along with local celebrities. All volunteered their talents, goods and services. Junior and senior citizens worked together in behalf of three charities: Gift of Life, Smithtown Children's Foundation and Smithtown Emergency Food Pantry.

Pat Westlake, Director of the Smithtown Emergency Food Pantry reports upon taking her position five years ago that the pantry serviced 60 to 80 families per month. Today they assist over 2,400 families a year. "We are solely funded by local contributions from Smithtown residents and businesses. We do not receive help from outside organizations. Fundraising from the Taste of Smithtown helps to fill the void."

This year's event presented a chance for Ms. Westlake to thank special guest, New York Time's best-selling author and former resident, Regina Calcaterra. "I appreciated the opportunity to mention to Ms. Calcaterra that after having read her memoir (*Etched in Sand*), I was inspired to change the pantry's policy. We now allow teens to receive food without the presence or completion of paperwork from a parent," remarked Westlake.

Regina Calcaterra's story of her and her siblings raising each other under the radar of authorities in local communities to include Saint James and Nesconset confirms that poverty and need exist within affluent and upper middle class communities.



Christina Alcure, Kim Deery and Christine Fitzgerald | Photos by Jae Hartzell

No one knows this better than the founders of the Smithtown Children's Foundation. Nesconset residents Christine Fitzgerald, Christina Alcure and Kristy Jaeger (a.k.a. Smithtown's Angels) have been aiding Town of Smithtown families that have encountered financial and emotional stress for the past seven years. They have been successfully fundraising and recruited residents of all ages along with local businesses large and small to join the cause from all over Smithtown. "The Taste of Smithtown affords us public exposure and the ability to network with local business. We run many fundraisers throughout the year. We are always looking for people that would like to join SCF's effort to support the community," affirms co-founder Christine Fitzgerald. Funds raised by Smithtown Children's Foundation are used to aid Smithtown families and provide over \$10,000 in Smithtown school district scholarships.

Smithtown's youth played a huge role in this year's event. Both Smithtown High School East and West students gave of themselves and received honors for giving back to the community.

SHSW student and Girl Scout, Kim Deery, was presented with a Smithtown Children's Foundation Community Service Award for her outstanding effort in

collecting school supplies for Smithtown's children in need. Also from SHSW, Hailey Germano, Miss New York Junior Teen was present to greet and meet guests. Representing Smithtown High School East was the rotary sponsored Interact Club. They did an excellent job assisting the event's many attendees. Student photographer Troy Hallahan volunteered his time and talent delivering great pictures and memories.

Past Smithtown Rotary President, Tom Gillen was present to recognize Vice President of Mercedes-Benz of Smithtown, Nancy Buzzetta by awarding her the Paul Harris Fellowship Award. Paul Harris founded Rotary in 1905.

Don Donneruno (The Cake Don) fresh from season 4 of TLC's The Next Great Baker was on board to deliver an inspirational message of reaching for your dream and to reach out to pay it forward. The Cake Don's Cake-A-Wish program provides a custom birthday cake to a nominated underprivileged child in the New York Metropolitan area. The cakes are delivered to the child's school where the celebration can be shared with classmates.

Sara Fingerman, Smithtown High School alumni and now Lifestyle Editor



Don Donneruno "The Cake Don" | Photos by Jae Hartzell

for Milieu Long Island magazine sponsored the event by bringing along Milieu's holiday issue for everyone.

Culinary businesses, large and small, from every area of Smithtown turned out to support the community and put their best food forward for the event's attendees. In addition, many donated raffle prizes. The Krantz family of PRC Industries in Saint James supplied an array of small appliances and other area business donated services.

A silent auction was held on specialty print art. Local celebrity guests (Regina Calcaterra and Don Donneruno) chipped in by providing for auction a signed copy of Etched in Sand and a cake decorating class with "The Cake Don". Cigar rolling and on-site massages were also available for attendees.

Throughout my 15 years of residency, when asked to name the best thing about living in Nissequogue or the Town Of Smithtown, my response has been, "The people." One of the greatest examples of the community supporting community from every village and city within the town is- The Taste of Smithtown.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on past and the upcoming 10th annual Taste of Smithtown - find and LIKE us on Facebook.