

Staten Island Advance

FOOD Day

SECTION

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Skills



Skills for Success

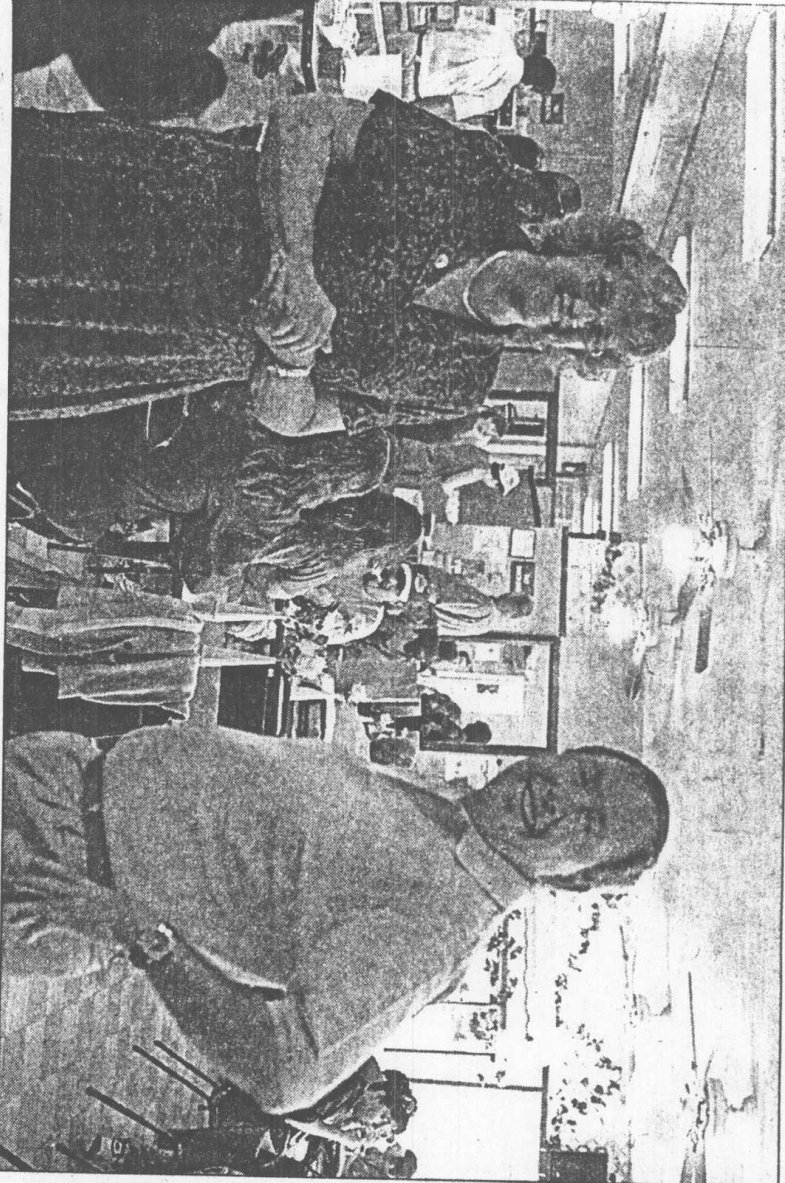
Lifestyle Cafe offers
restaurant training
for disabled

Page D 9

Chef Christopher DeRenzi, left, works
with Joe Pellecchia in the kitchen at the Lifestyle Cafe

ADVANCE PHOTO ■ IRVING SILVERSTEIN

Page 2



Eth Fromkin, deputy executive director of Lifestyles for the Disabled, and Richard Salinardi, executive director.



Mary Pannese serves lunch at the Lifestyle Cafe.

ADVANCE PHOTOS ■ IRVING SILVERSTEIN

Agency finds jobs for developmentally disabled clients

JANE MILLZA
ADVANCE FOOD EDITOR

"We do whatever we can to find something each person can do," said Lifestyles for the Disabled's deputy executive director Beth Fromkin. "We do everything we can to find a job each person can

now" and the disabled learn to do things for themselves as far as their abilities allow."

Individuals who are mildly to severely retarded as well as those who have dual diagnosis are involved in the Lifestyles for the Disabled programs. They range in age from 21 to 60. About 75 percent of the people involved in Lifestyles for the Disabled live at home; others live in apartments or in community residences where there's always a support staff available.

Service coordinators attached to the agency work with consumers and their families to make sure individual goals are met. They'll

The restaurant concept complemented other programs set up by the agency since it was established in 1994. According to Salinardi: "Our goal always is to create a productive environment for consumers to do something positive."

Staff members, Camille Disefano and Angela Donatone, have been employed in the program since its beginnings. They've noticed the progress the disabled consumers have made since the menu consisted only of breakfast items.

"When they added lunch, we got more delivery orders," recalled Mrs. Disefano, an Amnendale resi-

bled as "an agency without walls" because of its outreach to the community.

A laundry project, for example, services the state's multiply disabled unit and day treatment programs. A housekeeping team, meanwhile works in various buildings on the premises as well as in senior citizen housing in various Staten Island neighborhoods.

The community beautification team started as an affiliate of the Borough President's Office several winters ago when the Island experienced severe snow and ice storms. A telephone hotline called for Lifestyle workers to remove snow from sidewalks all over the

Team members work in cemeteries, plant flowers in conjunction with the Lynne Steinman Foundation, and do yard cleanup for heart patients and the elderly. They even have contracts with several Staten Island business firms to do paint and clean-up work.

Lifestyle's functional academic and computer programs give consumers the choice of learning a variety of independent living skills, travel training, safety measures and telephone skills they need to maintain jobs in the community. Math, reading and instruction on money handling also

Page 3

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Agency finds jobs for developmentally disabled clients

By JANE MILZA
ADVANCE FOOD EDITOR

"We do whatever we can to find something each person can do," said Lifestyles for the Disabled's deputy executive director Beth Fromkin. "We do everything we can to find a job each person can do."

Typical is the messenger service developed specifically for two consumers who found the Lifestyle Cafe's restaurant setting too restrictive.

Their job now is to deliver daily menus to people working in nearby buildings.

"It gives them a sense of self-esteem. We have to continue creating environments where individuals can work according to their own abilities," said Ms. Fromkin, who is enthusiastic about each phase of the project.

"The field has come such a long way; people are much more aware of the developmentally disabled

now, and the disabled learn to do things for themselves as far as their abilities allow."

Individuals who are mildly to severely retarded as well as those who have dual diagnosis are involved in the Lifestyles for the Disabled programs. They range in age from 21 to 60. About 75 percent of the people involved in Lifestyles for the Disabled live at home; others live in apartments or in community residences where there's always a support staff available.

Service coordinators attached to the agency work with consumers and their families to make sure individual goals are met. They'll even accompany consumers to clinics, and speak with them on a daily basis.

"We think they all can work in some way," said the executive director Richard Salinardi. "This is like going to Harvard," he said, noting how jobs are adapted to meet consumers' needs.

The restaurant concept complemented other programs set up by the agency since it was established in 1994. According to Salinardi: "Our goal always is to create a productive environment for consumers to do something positive."

Staff members, Camille Distefano and Angela Donatone, have been employed in the program since its beginnings. They've noticed the progress the disabled consumers have made since the menu consisted only of breakfast items.

"When they added lunch, we got more delivery orders," recalled Mrs. Distefano, an Annadale resident. "The cafe started with eight consumers, each with a special job, and they only worked three days a week. It really expanded because the people who participated did such a good job and were able to do more."

The program's executive team refers to Lifestyles for the Disa-

bled as "an agency without walls" because of its outreach to the community.

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The community beautification team started as an affiliate of Borough President's Office several winters ago when the Island experienced severe snow and ice storms. A telephone hotline called for Lifestyle workers to remove snow from sidewalks all over the borough.

Once their skill was established, the Borough President's Office would ask for their help whenever requests came in for such projects as fence repairs and yard cleaning.

Now crews are sent into the community on a regular basis.

Team members work in cemeteries, plant flowers in conjunction with the Lyme Steinman Foundation, and do yard cleanup for heart patients and the elderly. They even have contracts with several Staten Island business firms to do paint and clean-up work.

Lifestyle's functional academic and computer programs give consumers the choice of learning a variety of independent living skills, travel training, safety measures and telephone skills they need to maintain jobs in the community. Math, reading and instruction on money handling also are available.

A related trip program gives consumers an opportunity to take day trips with staff members to museums and such historic Manhattan sites as Battery Park and the South Street Seaport.

finest herbs, common in chicken and fish dishes and as a basis for salad dressings.

On its own, tarragon used to be a common ingredient in chicken salad; its sprig of a chicken before roasting. But rosemary, basil, cilantro, flat-leaf parsley and other flavorful herbs pushed it aside.

It also has the misfortune of being an essential ingredient in the cholesterol-laden bearnaise sauce and other creamy white sauces that are somewhat out of fashion.

■ Tips offered on

how to buy and use the herb

By JEANNIE MCMANUS
ADVANCE WASHINGTON BUREAU

Tarragon should be used with discretion. Like bay leaves, too many tarragon leaves can overpower a delicate dish or other herbs. When paired with parsley, chives and chervil, it forms the traditional French blend known as

How to buy:

There are two kinds of tarragon: French tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculoides*) is the sprig or potted plant you are most likely to see in your grocery store or nursery.

It has a refined yet distinct flavor, essential to French cuisine. You are much less likely to encounter Russian tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculoides*), which has a bitter flavor and lacks the licorice subtlety of the French version. The two are similar in appearance, so if your herb plant is not marked, check at the garden store.

In the grocery store, it's safe to assume you have the French version.

How to use:
Sparingly, sparingly, sparingly. But substitute it for herbs you've grown tired of in some of your reliable dishes: chicken salad with grapes (instead of parsley), poached salmon (instead of dill), scrambled eggs (instead of chives), marinated tomatoes (instead of basil).
Rub tarragon on roast chicken (instead of rosemary) or mix it with your turkey stuffing (instead of sage). When using tarragon in

cooked dishes, it is best to add it at the end, as heat tends to decrease its flavor.

Don't bother drying tarragon; its flavor will be lost. Instead, if you have extra, transform a simple white-wine vinegar by placing a sprig in its bottle. Cut tarragon leaves in summer, blanch in boiling water briefly, then freeze them in a plastic bag. They will keep until winter, when you can fold them into a white bean soup at the last minute.

Too much tarragon can overpower a delicate dish

Page 4

Skills' training and jobs allow personalities to blossom

Lifestyle Cafe offers developmentally disabled people a chance to learn job skills

BY JANE MILZA
ADVANCE FOOD EDITOR

Jim Anderson was more than just bored in his former job at a sheltered workshop for the disabled. He wanted out.

His disabilities prevented him from learning to read, but he knew he could do better — if he had a chance.

Angela Privitera, meanwhile, spent her days in a day treatment center. The daily routine wasn't challenging enough for her either. Given skills' training and jobs in the Lifestyle Cafe, both Jim and Angela's personalities soon blossomed, according to staff members.

Jim now is "the main grill person" in the cafe, working under professional chef Christopher DeRenzi, a graduate of Johnson & Wales University's hospitality and restaurant management program. Typical of the work done by employees for the Disabled, the parent agency, staff members designed an alphabetical code — since no one can't read — to identify grill orders for him.

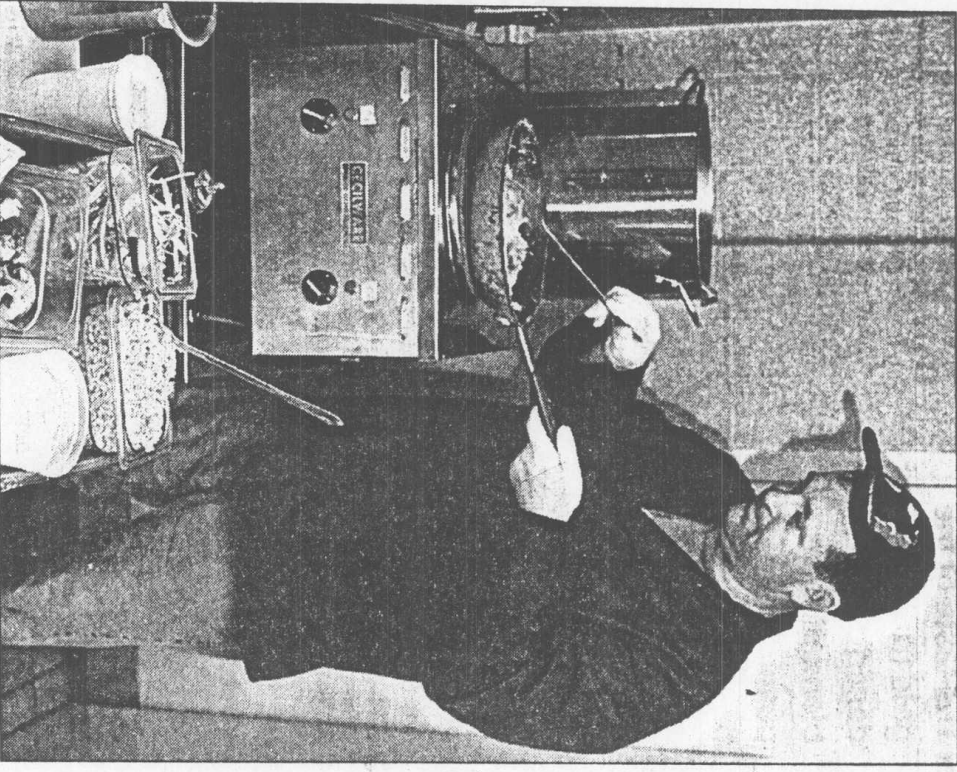
As the main grill person, Anderson, arrives for work each morning at about 7 a.m., and now has no trouble filling orders for eggs or french toast for breakfast and, with equal attention, turns out perfectly grilled hamburgers,



Angela Privitera serves a patron at the Lifestyle Cafe.

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Rotating jobs include cooking, waiting on tables, calling out order numbers and, in general, keeping the 50-seat eating area tidy and clean before the crew heads home at 3 p.m. Three times a week, a staff person escorts consumers, on a rotating basis, to neighborhood supermarkets where they buy fresh produce, replenish the cafe's perishable stock



Jim Anderson cooks in the kitchen of the Lifestyle Cafe.

summers to work in the restaurant field," said Salnaradi, who Ms. Fromkin calls the creative half of the executive team. "There probably aren't enough real hands-on training programs out there that go far enough. People hesitate to let the consumers work around a hot stove and do other work around a kitchen."

"This gives them an opportunity

on seven-grain bread that's been lathered with basil pesto and topped with bacon, lettuce and tomato.

Another favorite with cafe patrons is DeRenzi's special of yellowfin tuna served with sesame noodles and a soy dipping sauce.

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Page 5

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Typical of the work done by Lifestyles for the Disabled, the parent agency, staff members devised an alphabetical code — since Jim can't read — to identify grill orders for him.

As the main grill person, Anderson, arrives for work each morning at about 7 a.m., and now has no trouble filling orders for eggs or French toast for breakfast and, with equal attention, turns out perfectly grilled hamburgers, Philly Steaks, quesadillas and daily specials for the lunch crowd.

"Jim's so happy about his work, we have trouble getting him off the grill so others can have a turn," said Beth Fromkin, deputy executive director of the parent agency, Lifestyles for the Disabled.

"The day treatment program wasn't for Angela," recalled Ms. Fromkin, speaking of Ms. Privitera's former placement. "Now she comes in here happy every day, sets up, serves the hot dogs and cleans up at the end — all by herself. Learning to work independently, in itself, is an achievement in any food operation."

"Their whole personalities come out working here; they learn to be more social together and get a feel for working with the public and handling food," said Ms. Fromkin, as she looked across the dining room to see Angela's smiling face looking at her from behind the well-stocked hot dog cart.

Elsewhere in the cafe, people, like Joe Pellecchia, work side-by-side with the chef; Mary Panese, meanwhile, cheerfully circles the tables, taking menu orders.



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Angela Privitera serves a patron at the Lifestyle Cafe.

Rotating jobs include cooking, waiting on tables, calling out order numbers and, in general, keeping the 50-seat eating area tidy and clean before the crew heads home at 3 p.m. Three times a week, a staff person escorts consumers, on a rotating basis, to neighborhood supermarkets where they buy fresh produce, replenish the cafe's perishable stock and, in general, learn the art of food shopping.

"They get the feeling of a productive environment; they know there's a real purpose to the work — they must get the product out," explained Ms. Fromkin. "Everyone has a responsibility."

The Lifestyle Cafe, a casual, open-to-the-public eatery, is now in its fourth year at 930 Willowbrook Rd. in Building 17H, on the grounds of the Staten Island Development Disabilities Services Office (SIDDSO).

As an agency, Lifestyles for the Disabled has been dedicated for the past six years to helping developmentally disabled Staten Islanders find the right work setting. With that as his goal, Richard Salinardi, the executive director, decided to launch the cafe concept.

A longtime faculty member at the Hungerford School, Clifton, Salinardi also is area coordinator for Special Olympics which started on Staten Island 28 years ago and now involves over 600 developmentally disabled borough residents.

"I saw the potential of our con-

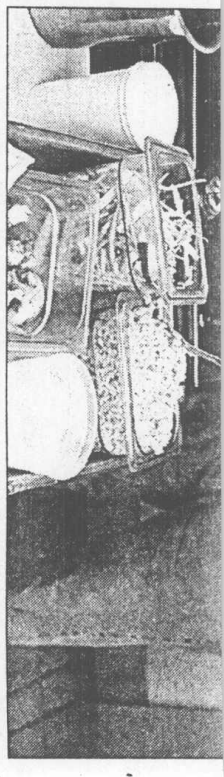
sumers to work in the restaurant field," said Salinardi, who Ms. Fromkin calls the creative half of the executive team. "There probably aren't enough real hands-on training programs out there that go far enough. People hesitate to let the consumers work around a hot stove and do other work around a kitchen."

"This gives them an opportunity for real lifetime experiences. They have to have expectations. They have to have customers, a sense of pressure and a product people want to eat. I can honestly say we now have 15 to 20 people working in the cafe, many of them comfortable in the kitchen, learning knife skills, cooking and able to choose and buy the food they need."

In planning the cafe, Salinardi conferred with SIDDSO director Robert Witkowski about securing space, and before long the project was underway. Staff and consumers spent the next seven months cleaning stainless steel kitchen equipment, painting the walls, scrubbing down the floors and bringing in refrigeration.

"We brought in experts to consult and advise; we wanted them to give us a real critique of the place," said Salinardi. Peter Roscoe) Roskowsinski, owner of R.H. Tugs, Livingston, and Pete's Eats in Travis, who has a reputation for giving jobs to the disabled, was among those who came forward.

The staff knew they were on the right track when after helping in its set up, Roskowsinski returned



Jim Anderson cooks in the kitchen of the Lifestyle Cafe.

the cafe, checked it out and said: "I want to retire and work here."

"Everybody was thrilled," recalled Salinardi.

The menu, which changes weekly and with daily specials, was developed by chef Christopher DeRenzi, a Staten Islander who attended Monsignor Farrell High School and graduated from Susan Wagner High School before setting out for Providence, R.I., to hone his culinary skills at Johnson & Wales University.

The staff is delighted with the variety of inventive dishes he's turned out since taking charge of the kitchen in February, 1999. "I spent time in fine dining restaurants, and I intended to pursue it for a while," said DeRenzi. "That was before I found there was something beyond the hustle and bustle of fine dining."

"I had no previous experience working with this population, but it's given me wonderful expertise," said DeRenzi. "It's very rewarding, and nice to have flexibility," he said, adding, "Everyone here is very much interested in learning; they want to succeed. You just have to have patience in teaching them the skills."

While many patrons enjoy a simple lunch, others are enticed by the chef's specials, including items like Pasta Primavera, combining broccoli, zucchini and carrots in a delicate cream sauce, shrimp risotto or his much-lauded salmon seared with steamed leeks and salmon club sandwich where the seafood is grilled and served

on seven-grain bread that's been lathered with basil pesto and topped with bacon, lettuce and tomato.

Another favorite with cafe patrons is DeRenzi's special of yellowfin tuna served with sesame noodles and a soy dipping sauce. "In a fine-dining restaurant you'd pay \$18 to \$20," said DeRenzi. "Here, the full meal costs less than \$5." Even prices on the regular menu — like a hamburger for \$1 and French fries for \$1.25 — won't break the bank.

In off hours and on weekends, the Lifestyle Cafe is open to consumers and their families, as well as those affiliated with Special Olympics, who have the option of using the room for private parties and family get-togethers.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for them; they can have the room set up, the boys and girls will cook and work at the party — and they get paid for it," explained Ms. Fromkin. "It's a wonderful place to come for a party — it's safe and there's no rental fee."

The restaurant program isn't for everyone, Ms. Fromkin admits, adding, "Some people don't like the pressure of working in this kind of environment; some wouldn't have the skills or the temperament."

"We teach them how to be successful at whatever they do by giving them opportunities to meet their skills, help them develop self-esteem and they work with a good support staff."