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ABC 7'S EMMY
AWARD-WINNING
CATHY
VLAHOGIANNIS

+

INTERVIEW
WITH **MICHAEL KUTZA**
& **BENJAMIN NEWBY**

ALEXIS COZZINI AND RYAN BESHEL
TALK RESORT WEAR

EXCLUSIVE REPORT:
JULIUS LaCOUR NYC FASHION WEEK DEBUT

OPA!

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ABC 7'S EMMY AWARD-WINNING CATHY VLAHOGIANNIS GREEK ROOTS

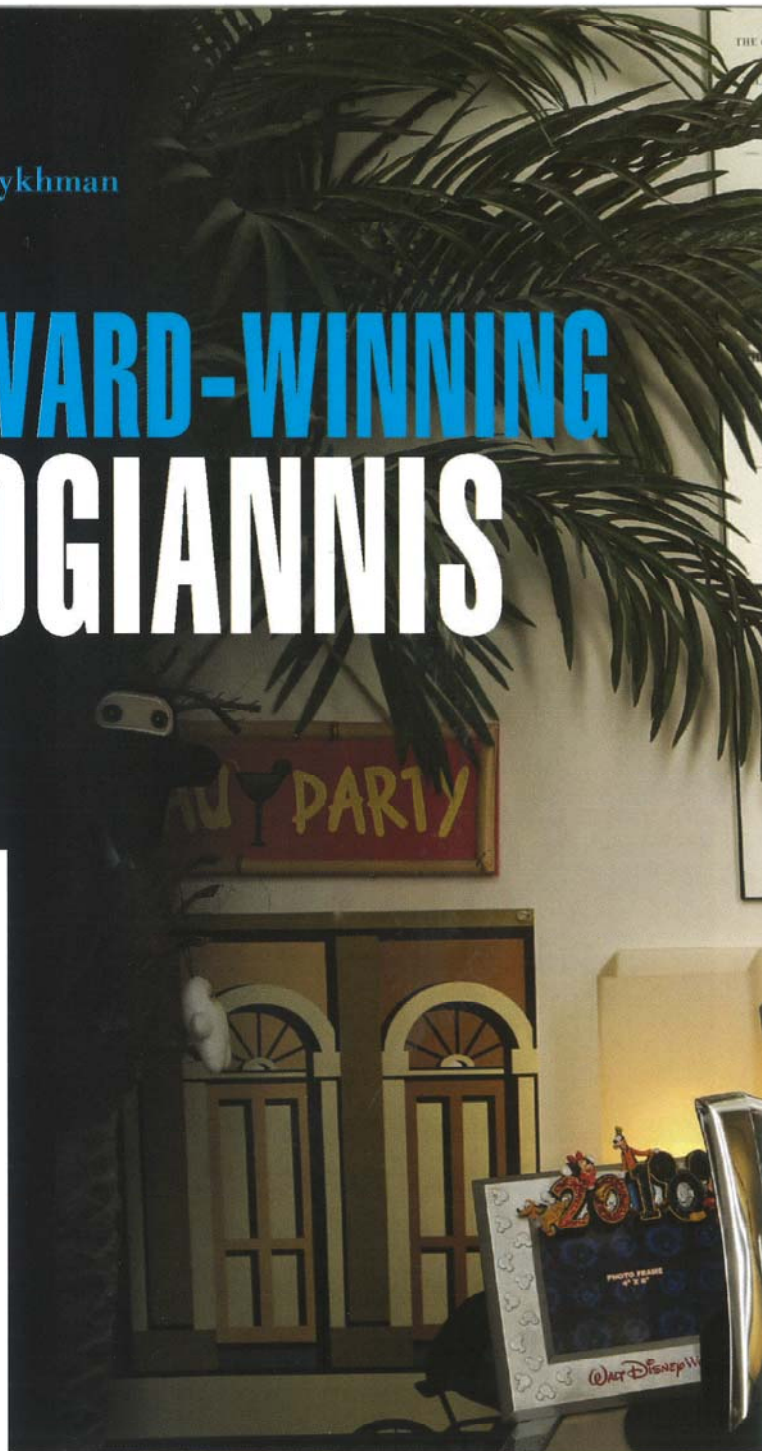
ABC7 TELEVISION PRODUCER CATHY VLAHOGIANNIS PETITE FIVE-FOOT-TWO FRAME BELIES HER BUOYANT SPIRIT. BEFORE HER 34TH BIRTHDAY, THE BRIGHT GREEK-AMERICAN BRUNETTE FROM THE NORTHWEST CHICAGO SUBURB OF ELMWOOD PARK – THE LAND OF BLUE COLLAR FOLKS WITH THICK CHICAGO ACCENTS – HAD ALREADY WON THREE EMMY AWARDS FOR HER WORK AT ABC. TWO EMMYS WERE AWARDED FOR HER PRODUCTION WORK ON THE WEEKLY ENTERTAINMENT AND LIFESTYLE SHOW, 190 NORTH, HOSTED BY CHICAGO'S JANET DAVIES. THE THIRD WAS FOR HER WORK ON THE MAGNIFICENT MILE LIGHTS FESTIVAL, THE TELEVISED PARADE HER DEPARTMENT PRODUCES LIVE EACH YEAR.

No stranger to working on popular live televised events and parades, the *Countdown Chicago 2013* she produced with Edgar Vargas for ABC's New Year's Eve celebration brought in an enormous 17.4 rating and 40 share – with more than 600,000 households and four out of every ten television's tuned in at the stroke of midnight. She also created, launched, and produced two successful programs for ABC's Live Well Network.

However, it's not the attention that inspires her pursuit of excellence. Instead, she says it's her strong upbringing and family values that fuel her daily efforts.

"I know every step forward I take is one that speaks well of my family," she said. "For me, the awards don't mean much. I am my worst critic and if I am happy with the work I produce, then that's good enough for me! The most important thing my parents ever taught me was to never give anyone a reason to talk badly about my work."

Aside from being asked whether her life is like *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, Vlahogiannis adores her heritage. She especially enjoys the way Chicago Greek-Americans treat each other like family – an as-



pect she is able to harness to tell the larger story of Chicago's vibrant Greek community. One of her fondest memories is visiting her parents' hometowns in Greece, including her mother's place of birth, Patras, a place where Vlahogiannis learned to drink Frappe long before Starbucks made the frozen coffee drink cool. Her father is from Argalasti, near Volos, the idyllic mountain town in northern Greece where Jason stole the fabled golden fleece in the famous myth of "Jason and the Argonauts." With this heritage, how could she not love storytelling?

"My Greek upbringing influenced me in so many ways," she said. "I learned the value of hard work and earning your place at the big table. Growing up, I constantly heard stories of friends and family making good on the risk and investment their parents had made for them."



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Her family worked hard to instill her with a deep understanding and appreciation of Greek culture and identity. From kindergarten to eighth grade, her parents sent her and her brother to Socrates School; half the day they studied math, social studies, science and English, while the other half of the day they learned Greek history and philosophy.

“At the time, I didn’t understand why I had to go to a school that was so different from the schools the kids in my neighborhood were going to,” she remembered. “But now I am truly thankful my parents scraped their pennies together to give my brother and I a great education rooted in our cultural identity.”

From a very young age, Vlahogiannis developed a love for broadcasting. She grew up watching ABC 7 and could not wait to watch the 10 o’clock news with John Drury, Mary Ann Childers, and Tim

Weigel. When she was a little girl she would watch “Friday Night Videos” and pretend she was a VJ, introducing each song. To do her homework, she would sit on the bed, in front of the mirror in her parents’ room and host “The Homework Show.” Sunday nights she stayed awake to watch “Wild Chicago” and “Artbeat” on WTTW. Once her family got cable, she would wait for “Weather on the 8’s” to come on *The Weather Channel* and stand in front of the TV, pretending she was a television weather reporter like Andy Avalos.

“When I was a teenager, I would buy blank cassette tapes and record my favorite DJs on B96, Rock 103.5 and Q101. When I turned 18 and went to college, I decided I was going to do whatever it took to be a part of it [the broadcasting field].”

It was actually her favorite band that inspired her to follow her passion. “As strange as it may sound, it was the Beastie Boys who in-



AT OUR FAMILY'S MONASTERY. GREECE 1993. LAST TIME I WAS THERE



GREEK PARADE. 1987



WITH MY DAD. 1992



GRADUATION CLASS SPEAKER. 1993

spired me to chase my dreams," she revealed with a laugh. "I knew they got their start straight out of high school, so when I went to college, I thought if they chased their dreams when they were my age, I could too!"

Incidentally, she happened to run into one of the Beastie Boys' group members, Adrock, at The Metro later on in her career. "I had the chance to tell him how much his band's music and story had inspired me. He was so positive and told me I was on the right track. Definitely one of the coolest moments of my life!"

She began her broadcasting career in radio at Triton College's local station, 88.9FM WRRG. When the opportunity came up to audition for an on-air shift, she auditioned, landed the spot, and loved every minute of it. One day, while she was interviewing The Dub Pistols at the Metro, she ran into someone who worked for 92.7 Kiss FM, Chicago's newest pop station at the time. He mentioned they had an opening in their marketing and promotions department, so she applied and followed up repeatedly until she got the gig.

"Working at Kiss FM was great, but I soon realized I wanted to be a part of a station with a national radio show." This time, she applied for a job at Q101 in marketing and promotions, and in what seemed like the blink of an eye, she was working at one of the most prominent alternative rock stations in the country, alongside Mancow Muller, one of the country's most provocative radio personalities.

One day, Mancow asked her to voice something for him. "I guess he liked what he heard because he asked me to come back the following morning to hang with him and the rest of his Morning Madhouse – on the air," she recalled with excitement. "There I was, 20 years old, on the air with radio's most motley crew!"

And, he just kept asking her if she could come back. She would do radio station promotions at night, then turn around to be on the air with Mancow the following day at 5 a.m. She kept up this routine for a while, until she was asked to work on-air full-time for the show.

"I worked side by side with a dozen guys, all creative and really good at what they did," she said. "They showed me the ropes of on-air broadcasting and off air producing. It was a crazy, intense, fun time in my life, and I still can't believe that I was a part of it."

Although, she met many famous people over her past fifteen years in broadcasting, ranging from Russell Crowe to Lenny Kravitz, her favorite run-in was while working with Mancow – even though, technically, she only met him over the phone: the late Henry Hill. (Yes, *that* Henry Hill – the real life mobster that "Goodfellas" is based on!)

Vlahogiannis had booked Hill to call in to the Mancow Show for an interview one morning, but he never did. A couple of days later, Hill called her – from jail – to explain that he had been arrested and was deeply sorry he had to miss the interview. "He wanted to reschedule," she remembered incredulously. "I told him I was glad he called back because he was going to get me in hot water with Mancow. He said, 'You tell Mancow to be nice to you, otherwise, I'll whack him!' I guess your boss has to be nice to you when Henry Hill has your back!"

Despite her affection for radio, once Vlahogiannis turned 23, she decided it was time to hang up her radio hat and begin pursuing her big dream of working in television.

"I figured I was young, so that was the time to risk it all," she revealed. "So, I said goodbye to my on-air producing gig with Mancow for an *internship*." Fortunately, that internship happened to be at the number one news broadcasting station in Chicago, ABC 7. She began working with the morning news team and she was determined to

“ I WASN'T BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON IN MY MOUTH; I JUST KNEW WHAT I WANTED TO DO AND WAS WILLING TO WORK HARD TO MAKE IT HAPPEN ”



CAP SLEEVE BEAD GOWN, \$395 BY ADRIANA PAPELL AT BLOOMINGDALE'S 900 N SHOPS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX GOYKHMAN | STYLING BY MARTA CEBRAT, FACTOR ARTIST | MAKE-UP BY LP MAKE-UP ARTISTRY



COUNTDOWN CHICAGO 2011



WITH JANET DAVIES



WITH ONE OF MY TV MENTORS, JANET DAVIES



get a job as a producer in local programming. Soon, she was recommended to Janet Davies. "She and I clicked, and the next thing I knew, I was a local programming producer at the number one station in Chicago. I wouldn't be where I am today if Janet Davies – and, of course, Mancow Mueller – hadn't given me a chance. They both met me when I knew only a little, but they each took me under their wing and taught me everything I know today. I will forever be grateful to them."

The rest is television history, and she has been working at her dream job at ABC ever since. As she followed her passion, Vlahogiannis says there is nothing she does not love about her job. "Everyday, I get excited to go to work," she said. "I never think twice about putting in a sixteen hour day because it's true what they say: 'Find a job you love and you'll never work a day in your life.' That definitely applies to me!"

Of course, this is not always a breezy feat. "I spent hours and hours thinking about work and how to make what I do better," she revealed. "Being a television producer is incredibly satisfying to me because I am a part of the creative process from start to finish."

At the end of the day, she relishes producing content that is relevant and interesting to people, working together with a talented team to introduce her audience to new and interesting things through her eyes. She enjoys spending her free time with her parents, going on trips, to the movies, or to the mall.

"Parents won't be around forever, so I try to do my best to spend time with them and let them know how much I appreciate them," she said,

Both of her parents immigrated to the U.S. from Greece in the mid-'70s where they met and married in Chicago in 1977. Her father worked as a big machine mechanic at Brach's Candy Co., and her mother held a variety of jobs from factory worker to insurance agency clerk. Growing up, people constantly told Vlahogiannis that "people like her" (children of working-class immigrants who lived paycheck to paycheck) could not work in a creative field. In college, naysayers also told her that to make it in broadcasting she would have to move to a million little cities before she could make it in Chicago.

"Well, I've been working in the broadcasting field in Chicago since 1998," she said. "My greatest triumph is defying the naysayers."

Although she does not consider herself a role model, she hopes people will be inspired by her story to pursue their own goals. "I would hope they realize that if I can set a goal and make it a reality, anyone can do it," she said. "I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth; I just knew what I wanted to do and was willing to work hard to make it happen." ❧

CATHY'S FAVORITE CHICAGO SPOTS

"I love everything about Chicago: the neighborhoods, the people, the food, the nightlife," Vlahogiannis said. "It's my city, there's no other place quite like it."

FAVORITE OVERALL RESTAURANT:
Untitled. "An 18,000 square foot speakeasy/supper club themed venue. Untitled has a great ambiance, tasty food, delicious cocktails, and fun live music! I can't say enough good things about this place!"

FAVORITE GREEK RESTAURANT:
The Athenian Room. "Like most Greek people I love my food extra lemony and with lots of feta cheese. This is the first time I haven't had to order extra lemon or feta at a restaurant! And, the steak here is absolutely the best I've ever had."

FAVORITE NIGHTCLUB:
The new Dolphin. "I love going there on Sundays for Boom Boom Room, the longest running club night in the country. It's unlike anything else going on in the city."

FAVORITE PLACE TO RELAX:
Alliyu Spa. "I love taking time for myself with a chakra balancing and massage therapy combo. I always leave feeling relaxed and grounded."

FAVORITE MOVIE:
Adventures in Babysitting and **Feris Bueller's Day Off.** "These two great films that capture the essence of Chicago. Also, *The Kid Stays in the*

Picture, the story of film producer Robert Evans. When I first saw this movie, the editing blew me away and the story inspired me."

FAVORITE STORES/BOUTIQUES:
Mojo Spa. "A fun Greek owned business in Wicker Park where you can pick up handmade beauty products like little soaps that look and smell good enough to eat!"

Astrowifey. "If I need a show-stopping manicure, Ashley Crowe, a.k.a. Astrowifey hooks up the best nail art in town!"

Tigerlilie. "Owner Angelica Rivera specializes in vintage 'dos. It's the only place where I will get my hair done for special events."

OTHER CHICAGO FAVORITES:

Artopolis. "When I'm looking for a quick and delicious lunch, this Greektown cafe is my go-to spot."

Hala Kahiki. "I love all things tiki and this place in River Grove is one of my favorites! They serve up tasty tropical drinks in a kitschy ambiance."

Johnnie's Beef. "Every Chicagoan has their favorite beef stand, and for me it's Johnnie's – and, it's not just because it's located in my hometown of Elmwood Park! The beef sandwich here has a flavor like no other!"

Café Iberico. "The Spanish tapas here are phenomenal! And, the sangria is even better!"