

The Nicholas Center receives \$25K grant

Funding from Peter & Jeri Dejana Foundation intended to support TNC Chocolate Lab

The Nicholas Center was awarded a \$25,000 grant from the Peter & Jeri Dejana Foundation. The funding will support the TNC Chocolate Lab and the center's broader mission of creating meaningful vocational, social and community opportunities for individuals with autism.

The grant comes as the Nicholas Center celebrates the first anniversary of its storefront operations, the TNC Chocolate Lab.

The recognition follows a landmark year for the Lab, which was recently named "Best Startup 2025" and is now featured in Taste NY shops across New York State. The funding will help the Lab provide high-level vocational training, expand its community reach, and sustain programs that foster independence and belonging for participants.

"We are profoundly moved by this generosity," said Stella L. Spanakos, co-founder of The Nicholas Center. "At the heart of the TNC Chocolate Lab is the belief that everyone deserves a seat at the table — and a chance to thrive.

This transformative gift from the Peter & Jeri Dejana Foundation provides the essential resources to turn that vision into a reality for our participants

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE NICHOLAS CENTER



The Nicholas Center Chocolate Shop staff joins with Dejana Foundation grant representatives for a special grant announcement.

every single day, proving that when a community comes together, the results are truly sweet."

Beyond chocolate and gift production, the grant supports

a holistic approach to inclusion, including retail training for approximately 30 individuals per week, community engagement events and "Social Lab" activities

that provide a safe environment for creative expression and social connection.

By supporting these initiatives, the foundation is helping

bridge gaps in traditional funding, ensuring TNC's programs remain accessible and impactful for the Port Washington community.

Getting ready for Annual Freezin' for a Reason Polar Plunge

Event to raise money for Special Olympics

BY MICHAEL CAMPBELL

The Special Olympics New York will hold its annual Freezin' for a Reason Polar Plunge on Feb. 7 at North Hempstead Beach Park.

Participants can donate to the Special Olympics New York to participate in the plunge, with the proceeds supporting sports training and competitions for New Yorkers with intellectual disabilities.

The event is sponsored by the Town of North Hempstead,

North Bay, H2M Architects and Engineers, Liberty Coca-Cola Beverages, and Nestlé Health Science Foundation with their contributions also going to support the organization.

"We don't charge them for anything," said Rebecca Hoffman, the director of development for the Special Olympics New York. "So they have the opportunity to train and compete in 22 different Olympic-style sports all at no charge to them or their families."

So far, \$12,679 of its \$70,000 goal has been raised.

Erin Lipinsky of Great Neck, who has been involved with Special Olympics New York since 2004, is the top individual contributor, having raised \$2,514 so far this year.

Lipinsky has repeatedly broken the fundraising record for New York. Last year, he set a new record of \$32,000 and this year he has set a goal of \$35,000.

Last year, over 150 people participated. This year, Hoffman said that she expects to see an additional 100 participants taking the plunge.



PHOTO BY JOE OGINSKI

Erin Lipinsky at North Hempstead Beach Park for the 2024 Freezin' For A Reason Polar Plunge.