

## Our History 2010-2021



**2010**

### Trailblazing Trio

Stella Spanakos and Paul Kitsos were making plans for their son Nicholas' transition after high school. Struggling with the options available, they started to talk about what was needed to address the tsunami of young adults with Autism transitioning from high school. The need for a place to develop vocational and life-skills necessary for the work environment, opportunities for community engagement, and most importantly, a path to gainful employment.

Sadly, tragedy intervened, and Stella's husband died suddenly on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010. She contacted her friend **Nicole Sugrue** (a mom to son Adem, a young man on the autism spectrum), with whom she discussed her vision. In addition, she contacted a young man **Patrick Bardsley**, who was in graduate school and had worked with Nicholas at summer camp for the past few years.

Discussions began to create The Nicholas Center for Autism and a social enterprise Spectrum Designs. Stella purchased their first DTG machine, and in her barn, they started writing protocols and task analysis for all the skills necessary to print t-shirts. Attorney William M. Spanakos filed the necessary documents with NYS for 501c (3) status.



**2011**

### A New Home

February 11, 2011: New York State granted both organizations 501c (3) status. Stella purchased 416 Main Street to relocate both organizations in their new home in Port Washington, New York.

Nicole started developing the program, participants were welcomed, and by the year's end, several local school districts were sending their students.



On the anniversary of her husband's death, the inaugural Night In White was celebrated in his honor, all attendants were asked to wear white. Held at Shelter Rock Tennis and Country Club, the room was filled with a beautiful sea of white attire. Funds were raised to help grow the new social enterprise, Spectrum Designs. This event continues and is the cornerstone of annual fundraising events and honors a person or family that has been instrumental to the growth and support of both organizations.





**2012**

**“You’re Going to Need a Bigger Boat...”**

Needing more space and equipment to respond to the growing apparel requests, The Nicholas Center for Autism and Spectrum Designs move to larger quarters at the Port Washington Community Chest Building (382 Main Street, Port Washington, NY.) The Nicholas Center doubles capability and training opportunities. Expanded space allows for more participants and broader vocational training.

United Spectrum of the World social media campaign engages people from all over the WORLD - with photos from Afghanistan to Zurich - a different country was represented every day for a whole month.



**2013**

**Widening our Reach. Doubling our Capacity.**

The Nicholas Center for Autism contracts with local school districts to provide life skills and vocational programs.

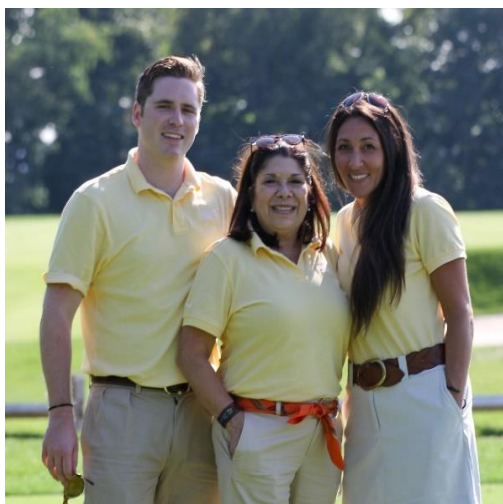
Our 3<sup>rd</sup> Night in White honoring the Beyer family and celebrating our many achievements through the year!



**2014**

**Fore! Increasing Reach with a Successful Golf Outing.**

1<sup>st</sup> Annual Golf Outing held, raising funds for both organizations – widening reach and awareness of our important mission – offering hope and opportunity.





**2015**

**New Skills. New Products. New Adventures.**

Opportunities for pre-vocational support & training and paid employment increase with the addition of 2 new social enterprises -Spectrum Bakes (gourmet treats) & Spectrum Suds (boutique laundry).

The Nicholas Center Navigators provide pick-up and drop-off services for Suds – making important face-to-face connections within the community.



**2016**

**Growth Continues – a Purchase is Made.**

The Nicholas Center for Autism and, partner agency, Spectrum Designs provide 580 hours/week of authentic vocational training provided to 31 high school students. Total overall reach – 60 individuals and their families. The possibility of purchasing a building for Spectrum Designs becomes reality. The Believe Capital Expansion Campaign is launched. Discussions and negotiations follow, a contract is signed and a 7,500 sq. ft. building is acquired just steps away from the current location.

TNC becomes a NY State OPWDD Provider (Office of People with Developmental Disabilities). With assistance of then, New York State Senator Jack Martins.

Sibling Society formed to bring siblings of individuals with Autism together for support, connection and fundraising. 1<sup>st</sup> event is held in May.





**2017**

**A Landmark Year**

Nicholas Center becomes a Medicare Provider- strengthening our commitment to serve People with Developmental Disabilities. Nicholas Center impacts the lives of 45 individuals and their families

Vocational Center developed- a controlled setting that replicates, trains and reinforces the tasks and skills required in Spectrum Design social enterprises and outside industries.

*From Main Street with Love*, created custom towels & pillow line for resale.

Books for Dessert developed – a Library Literacy program

The Nicholas Center Navigators forge important partnerships within the Port Washington Community, including local businesses and non-profits. Navigator News launched. Reinforcing our Community Involvement-The Business Improvement District (BID), contracts The Nicholas Center to Keep Port Clean.

The purchase of TNC’s first van allows for easier community travel.

The Nicholas Center education platform supports 25 individuals who become gainfully employed at Spectrum Designs.

Wellness Center is developed – promotes healthy active lifestyles and incorporate fitness, healthy eating habits and wellbeing.

The Nicholas Center teams up with Port Washington Detective Tony Guzzello for his Make a Child Smile Holiday and Toy Drive.



## 2018

**A Day to Celebrate. A Dream Realized. Values are Important.**

Celebration and ribbon cutting at the new Spectrum Designs HQ - 366 Main Street, Port Washington, NY - Grand Opening Ceremony welcomes press, community, elected officials, families and staff. Co-founders express gratitude and realization of a dream.

The Nicholas Center staff is now housed in 3 locations on Lower Main Street in Port Washington, NY – offering vital support, training, peer connection and life skills.

Rock & Roll Concert added to the calendar, as a fundraising event for both organizations. The first Rock & Roll Concert was held at the Mansion at the Village Club of Sands Point. All attendees were asked to “dress like a rock star”.

End of Summer Jam free community concert at Sunset Park, Port Washington, NY. TNC participants perform. Becomes an annual event.

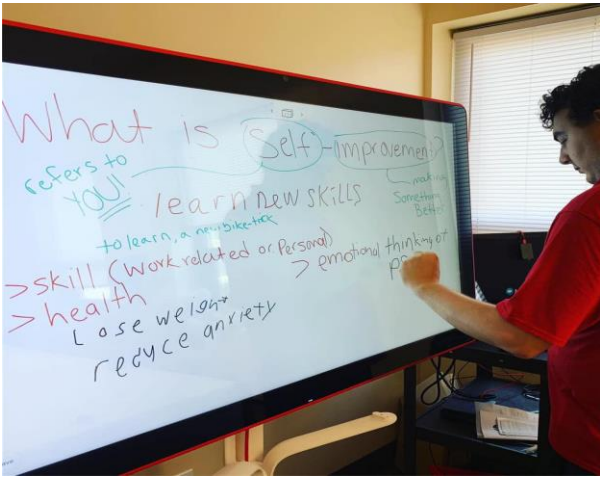
The Nicholas Center codifies Core Values.

Grant awarded to create the ‘Managing a Mission Manual’ - to showcase and share our journey and mission.

TNC partners with LIU Brooklyn School of Occupational Therapy, and Hofstra University School of Occupational Therapy.

Community integration is an important TNC core value. TNC team participates in community events, such as Pride in Port Parade each fall.





## 2019 Connecting through Tech

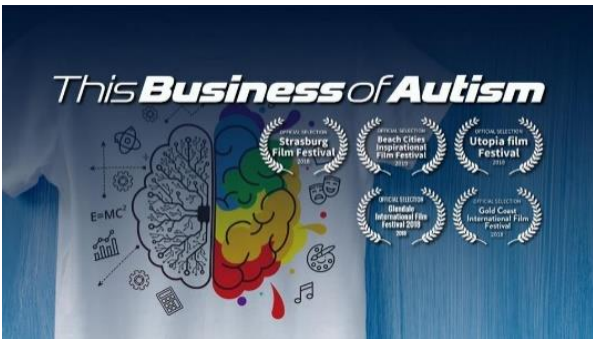
The Nicholas Center is awarded the Allison Keller Education Technology Grant, enabling the purchase of a Google Jamboard to broaden our teaching capabilities and reach.

Our documentary film, "This Business of Autism," the story of The Nicholas Center and Spectrum Designs Foundation, is viewed at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC. Film is subsequently viewed at Hartwick College (Stella's alma mater) in conjunction with Temple Grandin's appearance, in over 15 independent film festivals worldwide and available online.

13 Founding Families commit to bringing The Nicholas Center and Spectrum Designs to Westchester, NY. Regional Economic Development Grant awarded to support this expansion.

NYS Empire State Business Award – "the most impactful and socially innovative agency of its kind in New York State."

TNC TEDx Talk "Be Selfish: Embrace Neurodiversity" with Director of Workforce Development, Dave Thompson and TNC Participant, Josh Mirsky.



**2020**

**Growth is Good - Pivot & Expansion!**

COVID-19 Pivot – remote programming launched. TNC’s team of 35 coordinators & direct support staff ensured 90 participants with Autism had access to a continuum of service, routine, and the comfort of seeing familiar faces - offering 4 -Zoom choices/ per hour every week, including: communication & social skills, personal health skills maintaining previously acquired vocational knowledge, guided virtual field trips, exploration of new languages, exercise regimens, and dance parties!

TNC expands to Pleasantville, NY - serving 13 Founding Families.

Graduates! TNC and Spectrum Designs graduate 11 participants in their 1st Screen Print Certificate program - expanding skills and opportunities.

Industrious! TNC inter-office snack cart, the Cruisin’ Cantina is launched, promoting financial literacy and customer relations.

The Nicholas Center is honored by Plant a Row for helping to grow their program in Port Washington.



**2021**

**Inspiring Story. Amazing Journey.**

10th Anniversary Year – The Nicholas Center rebrands with a new logo, website, and programming including: remote programming - *Zoomiverse, powered by TNC*, in-person vocational skills, community work via The Navigators, and in-home and at-job support.

Since 2011, TNC has provided:

*120 individuals support with their transition into adulthood after federally mandated school programs end*

*22 community partnerships at work with TNC*

*12 months of full day meaningful programming, community inclusion and work-based opportunities*

*30 individuals with autism are gainfully employed*

*85 individuals receive vocational training annually*

The Nicholas Center allows and encourages individuals to follow their passions and interests, hone social and vocational skills, and gives them a chance to live productive and fulfilling lives.

*The Nicholas Center*  
**Innovate, Inspire & Include**

