

# IN THE LEAD



Long Island Business News  
BEST STARTUP BUSINESSES







## TNC CHOCOLATE LAB

**K**nown as a company focused on sweet treat with a special mission, TNC Chocolate Lab offers delicious treats, training and jobs to autistic individuals who face 85% unemployment and under-engagement following their academic careers.

“My son, Nicholas (the ‘Nicholas’ of The Nicholas Center), inspired me to create a social enterprise to offer vocational training and job opportunities to individuals on the autism spectrum, an often marginalized population who have much to offer and the desire to do so,” says Stella Spanakos, co-founder, The Nicholas Center. We have seen when individuals are offered training, support and hope—confidence grows, jobs are secured and miracles happen. We are proud to be part of this movement.”

One of the biggest challenges faced by TNC is creating a business model that successfully integrates individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities through work. Making accommodations, meaningful vocational training in both culinary arts and retail management, and customer engagement opportunities—all while operating a business.

TNC Chocolate Lab began as a vocational training program at its Port Washington headquarters, relocating to a brick-and-mortar storefront in 2024. The building has since become a destination, and a gathering place where community members can engage with employees. It also serves as a place to build awareness surrounding autism and empathy for these young adults through community experiences and engagement.

<https://tncnewyork.org/tnc-chocolate-lab>

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