

Jane Milza

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Devoted champion of the disabled, beloved by all

By Marjorie Hack | For the Staten Island Advance

Nationwide, Jane Milza is well-known in culinary circles as a savvy food editor and a fount of information about what goes on in a kitchen. After all, she dished out recipes and technical advice for some 33 years as editor of the Staten Island Advance's popular Food section.

And while she's also widely known and respected on Staten Island for her professional chops, there's another side to Mrs. Milza that does not generate as much buzz: As a volunteer, she's been advocating for special-needs children and adults ever since her fourth child, Stephen, was born with several disabilities that resulted from him contracting the rubella virus as a fetus.

"Stephen required getting involved. You network with people to get more services for the disabled. You network to teach other families and guide them to what's available," she said. She admits that you also find support for yourself by jumping in.

There aren't many relevant agencies and support groups on Staten Island that she hasn't touched in this capacity.

According to Dana McGee, executive director of Community Resources in Travis, Mrs. Milza will mark her 21st year on that agency's board of directors in April. Fourteen years ago, she came up with the idea of a "Pasta Bowl" competition and continues to assist with this highly successful "friend-raiser" to this day.

Mrs. Milza serves as vice-president of the board of directors for the Staten Island Center for Independent Living. Through this group, she taught a cooking class for two years, emphasizing nutrition, to special education students from the Hungerford School in Clifton and New Dorp High School.

There's more

She's an active member of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Council; a member of the Borough President's Committee for People with Disabilities, and a member of the Parent Support Group of A Very Special Place. She's a founding member of the Staten Island Parents of Hearing Impaired, and in 2014, she was on the planning committee for the Centennial Celebration of the Daughters of Divine Charity.

She has repeatedly supported signature food-based fundraisers staged by the Staten Island Heart Society and Eger Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center. She coordinates with high-school culinary instructors when they are looking for nominees for the annual Jane Milza Culinary Scholarships, and she consults at the Harvest Cafe, a Staten Island restaurant where people with disabilities receive food preparation instruction

and service training.

She's been a volunteer judge at countless cook- and bake-offs over the years, and she's received so many awards, they are simply too numerous to mention — except for the prestigious James Beard Foundation's "Newspaper Editor of the Year Award."

She's done it all while working full-time at the Staten Island Advance, substitute teaching on an ongoing basis, running a successful food service business, and raising five children.

Yet, the effort hasn't seemed to tire her out; in fact, it seems to have exhilarated her.

"If you're going to have a disabled person in your family, Staten Island is a great place to live," said Mrs. Milza. She noted that over the course of her involvement, "services grew tremendously," though she admits that the future looks less rosy now.

How she started

Mrs. Milza is the youngest of eight children born in Bayonne to Edward A. Tierney and Mildred (Foley) Tierney.

Though her family had long summered in a gated community at Graham Beach, next to Midland Beach, it wasn't until Jane turned 5 in 1939 that the group relocated for good to Staten Island, moving into 817 Fingerboard Rd., now known in the Milza family as Tierney Corner. Mrs. Milza recalls nothing but good times at Tierney Corner where the house had a big party room and Brady's Pond was just steps away from the back yard. At her father's direction, she attended St. Sylvester's School. "He said you become involved with your church," recalled Mrs. Milza. He was right. "My first experience volunteering was through church."

She went on to St. Joseph Hill Academy; earned a bachelor's degree in English literature from the former Notre Dame College on Grymes Hill (she remains president of its alum-



Jane Milza is at home in any kitchen but here at the Harvest Cafe she is especially comfortable with Chef Nick DiBartolomeo.

nae club), and earned her master's degree in library and information science from St. John's University in Queens.

When she started working at the Advance, she was just a college student and was given assignments related to the social desk; later, she edited the high-school pages.

Mrs. Milza will coyly tell you that

she hasn't gone far in life; after all, she points out, she lives just three houses away from the home in which she grew up. But don't let her fool you. She's had such a journey that few could match it.

For more photos and a complete story, visit blog.silive.com/women_of_achievement.



Jane and her family at her son Stephen's birthday a few years ago.



Jane Milza helps workers at Harvest Cafe fold the day's napkins. From the left, August Periano, Jane Milza and Lisa Lu. (STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE PHOTOS/JAN SOMMA-HAMMEL)