

Columbus Day

Finding Professional Guidance Through CCF

Neither Carla D'Andre or Christine Caruso expected to forge a professional connection that would last over a decade when they met while planning the 2003 Columbus Day Parade as volunteers through CCF.

Caruso was completing her final year at Queens College, having been awarded a scholarship through the Columbus Citizens Foundation's scholarship program, which helps hundreds of elementary, high school and college students pay for their education every year. She was considering a career path in insurance after graduation and D'Andre, an insurance executive who's worked for Willis Group Holdings and now runs her own brokerage and advisory firm in Miami, Fl., suggested she keep in touch if she had any questions about getting into the business. Caruso did just that, finding a mentor in D'Andre who helped her navigate her early professional life.

"At each and every turn, I would seek advice and guidance from Carla," says Caruso, who now works for Starr Indemnity and Liability Company as a Professional and Financial Lines claims manager. "It was important to me that I would make the right, well informed and carefully thought out decisions as I knew that every decision would potentially affect my next opportunity. She has been my 'professional rock.' When I look back at my career advancement and where I stand today, I wouldn't be where I am if it wasn't for Carla guiding me."

Caruso is one of several young professionals D'Andre has mentored over the years, several of whom she met through CCF, as well as her membership on the

Executive Advisory Board for St. John's University School of Risk Management Insurance and Actuarial Science, her past corporate career positions and the student internship program she now operates at D'Andre Insurance Group, the namesake company she now heads in Florida.

"The foundation is an extraordinary organization and the members are quite special," says D'Andre. "There is a common thread of values which links us: We are grateful for our families, opportunities and success. We want to see others have similar opportunity, achievement and fulfillment, which is why mentorship works 'hand in glove' with the academic scholarships we provide students. As I



observe and admire Christine's ongoing success, I feel great pride in her achievements, including the newest position she holds at Starr."

Today the two women are hoping to recreate the informal mentorship experience they created for themselves for current and future recipients of CCF scholarships by encouraging them to find mentors among the foundation's esteemed and professionally successful members. It's an aspiration Caruso says stems from her own experience with the program and D'Andre.

"I have never taken what the Columbus Citizens Foundation provided to me for granted," she says. "It has been an honor and a blessing to be a scholarship recipient. This is why I continue to be part of the advancing of the foundation's mission to support and provide a positive image of the Italian American culture."