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For Immediate Release

**QUEENS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HOSTS THE**

**2023 BUSINESS PERSONS OF THE YEAR AWARDS GALA**

***High-profile event honored business leaders from an array of industries***

***For Photos,*** [***Click Here***](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/1cx5amek2ca1zioarsg3l/h?rlkey=ftlrjgx38k1rualcbylix6pux&dl=0) ***(Photo Credit: Emma Leavy)***

***QUEENS, NY*** *(December 6, 2023) —* On the evening of Wednesday, December 6, hundreds of business, government and community leaders from throughout Queens gathered at Terrace on the Park in Flushing Meadows–Corona Park for the Queens Chamber of Commerce’s annual Business Persons of the Year Awards Dinner. The evening recognized **Kevin O’Toole**, Chairman of Board of Commissioners, The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey; **Jen Hensley**, Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs, Con Edison; **Hon. Peter Vallone, Sr.**, Former Speaker and Democratic Majority Leader, New York City Council; **Eden G. Egziabher**, Founder and Owner, Makina Cafe; **Jennifer Walden Weprin**, Executive Director, Queens County Farm; and **Jackie Donado**, Vice President, Strategic Programs, Queens Chamber of Commerce.

“Each year, we have the privilege of recognizing outstanding individuals who have left a mark on the Queens community and demonstrated leadership, innovation, and dedication in their chosen fields,” said **Tom Grech, President and CEO of the Queens Chamber of Commerce. “**This year, it is our honor to recognize Kevin O’Toole, Jen Hensley, the Honorable Peter Vallone, Sr., Eden G. Egziabher, Jennifer Walden Weprin, and Jackie Donado for their unwavering commitment to excellence, coupled with vision and entrepreneurial spirit. Each has made incredible contributions to our thriving business landscape, and we take great pride in their accomplishments.”

“It is wonderful to see the Queens Chamber of Commerce honor this group of local leaders who have contributed so much to the well-being of our borough,” said **Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.** “Congratulations to all the winners of the Chamber’s Business Persons of the Year Awards. Queens is a better place thanks to their commitment to our community.”

During the event, the crowd heard from the honorees. The award for honoree Peter Vallone, Sr. was accepted on his behalf by his son, Paul Vallone. Tom Grech also addressed the crowd and expressed his excitement about the future of Queens.

“The future of Queens is bright, and I am so excited to see some game-changing projects for the borough moving ahead, including a 25,000 seat NYCFC soccer stadium, which includes a 250-room hotel and 2,500 units of all affordable housing, and a plan for Metropolitan Park, which will transform 50 acres around Citi Field into a sports and entertainment destination,” said **Grech.**

In an effort to bring holiday cheer to those who are less fortunate, the Chamber also hosted its 2023 Toy Drive at the event. Many new, unwrapped toy donations were collected from attendees.

**This year’s Business Persons of the Year honorees include:**

**Kevin O’Toole, Chairman of Board of Commissioners, The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey.**

*Kevin J. O'Toole was nominated to the Port Authority Board of Commissioners by New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and joined the Board on July 2, 2017. He was elected Chairman of the Board on August 3, 2017. As the founding and managing partner of O'Toole Scrivo, Kevin O'Toole's law practice encompasses toxic tort, environmental law, risk management, class actions, complex litigation, and corporate investigations. He is routinely called upon by Fortune 500 companies to obtain cost-effective, early resolution of complex matters and sought out to provide detailed analyses of sophisticated matters, evaluate case preparation, predict outcomes, and assist in the development of strategic risk management planning. Kevin has served as both National Coordinating Counsel for corporate clients and as the operational leader of multi-jurisdictional litigation teams responsible for trying dozens of high-profile multi-million-dollar matters.*

**Jen Hensley, Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs, Con Edison.**

*Jennifer Hensley is the senior vice president of Corporate Affairs at Con Edison, the energy company serving the 10 million people of New York City, Westchester, Orange, and Rockland counties. In her role, she oversees Government and Community Relations, Regulatory Affairs, Communications, Marketing, and Philanthropy departments. She is a member of the company’s Corporate Leadership Team.*

**Hon. Peter Vallone, Sr., Former Speaker and Democratic Majority Leader, New York City Council.**

*Peter Vallone is “Astoria” through and through. At a young age, Peter Vallone was well aware of the public service legacy he would carry on. The Vallone family not only carves an indelible mark in Astoria, but also in New York City. His dad, Judge Charles Vallone, would build a Boys Club in Astoria that remains a pillar in the community, and Peter, himself, would become a fabric of the city council, rising to its majority leader and speaker for nearly three decades. He helped build The Vallone Senior Residence on 21st St., which provides supportive housing to 100 seniors. But most remarkable, in the eyes of the Queen Chamber of Commerce, awarding Pete with this distinction is the mark he made shaping the city council’s influence, and governing the city. Twenty years after leaving public office, Mr. Vallone’s lobbying efforts have kept Queens at the forefront of receiving its due attention as a bustling borough. As a partner and governmental strategist for the Constantinople & Vallone Consulting LLC, Peter helps represent a number of firms and organizations, gaining grants and funding in order to better serve the community. “Service first” is a hallmark for Peter.*

**Eden G. Egziabher, Founder and Owner, Makina Cafe.**

*Eden Egziabher, owner and founder of the Ethiopian-Eritrean food truck Makina Cafe is the personification of her business. Though ethnically Eritrean, Egziabher was raised in Ethiopia until a war broke out between the two countries and her family had to move to the United States. In the United States, Egziabher said she felt there was a lack of representation of the food from her two homes and wanted to change that. Makina Cafe was born out of that goal to be at the forefront of expanding Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisine.*

**Jennifer Walden Weprin, Executive Director, Queens County Farm.**

*Jennifer Walden Weprin is the Executive Director of the Queens County Farm Museum - one of the longest continually farmed sites in New York State, dating back to 1697 - and the most visited cultural institution in Queens. Jennifer has led the largest agricultural expansion and operational plan in the organization’s 50-year history. She expanded food production and farmstand operations, increased public programming by 58% despite pandemic business interruptions, and built an unprecedented network of new partners and funders to support growth and public service. She has led the organization through its most robust DEIA initiative since its inception. In May 2023, Jennifer was named to the Queens Power 100 List by “City & State New York.”*

**Jackie Donado, Vice President, Strategic Programs, Queens Chamber of Commerce.**

*Jackie Donado has been with the Queens Chamber of Commerce for 15 years and has been instrumental in the fieldwork and outreach throughout the entire borough of Queens. Jackie is the former Managing Editor of “El Diario/La Prensa (NYC),” the oldest Spanish-language newspaper in the United States. She is a graduate of Universidad Autónoma del Caribe in Barranquilla, Colombia.*

**About the Queens Chamber of Commerce:**The Queens Chamber of Commerce is the oldest and largest business association in Queens, representing more than 1,400 businesses and more than 150,000 Queens-based employees. Its mission is to foster connections, educate for success, develop/implement programs and advocate for members’ interests. [www.queenschamber.org](http://www.queenschamber.org/)

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