



**QUEENS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION  
2023 ANNUAL REPORT**





### **REINVENTION - WHETHER BY CHOICE OR NECESSITY -**

is something we do regularly. The last three years have been chock full of reinvention: for ourselves; our organizations; and our city. In March, we will mark three years since everything changed. Like most of the world around us, we thought the Covid pandemic would be a temporary interruption in our lives. Wrong! It ripped everything apart in ways we could never have imagined. And by necessity, we reinvented so much, personally and professionally.

As the Queens Economic Development Corporation enters its 46th year, I look back and note how our organization has constantly reinvented itself. Founded in 1977 to revitalize neighborhoods, it was clear by the early 1980s that those neighborhoods could only be revitalized with support for the small businesses that were the microeconomies of their communities. To that end, we shifted and reinvented ourselves. Emphasis was placed on building stronger small businesses, which still compose the greatest part of our workforce.

Responding to changes in the borough's small business world has its challenges, and we've adapted, changed, and rethought how to better serve our clients. While neighborhood development and business counseling will remain core parts of our activities, we've added new programs over the years. In addition to the Entrepreneur Assistance Center and Women's Business Center, our portfolio has grown to encompass the Queens Tourism Council, the Entrepreneur Space Kitchen Incubator, Home Improvement Contractor Training, MWBE certification assistance, and Made in Queens. Most recently, we expanded our business competition, now known as the "Queens Tech + Innovation Challenge," that will award \$20,000 each to five businesses that demonstrate viable ways to reinvent technology, food and community service. Another new addition, Queens Together, serves local restaurants and food businesses that are the "dining rooms" of our neighborhoods.

This year's annual report profiles a few of the businesses we assisted as they reinvented themselves. In doing so, they have contributed to the local economy through added revenue, tax dollars, and jobs. They're great stories. One involves two teachers who knew there was a better way to help children explore their artistic talent. Another is about a mother who wanted to help her sons do their best in a new environment. Others include a young man who found a way to give back to his community through sharing great food, a woman who - inspired by her grandmother - embarked on a new career, and a married couple that proved that pizza cupcakes can be tasty without being messy!

QEDC might not make headlines that go viral, but it makes a difference in the lives of clients. I am proud of what we do and the staff that does it. I look forward to continuous reinvention.

Sincerely,  
**SETH BORNSTEIN**  
 Executive Director

# QEDC's PROGRAMS

**Business Counseling** is the core of all our programs. Clients can book appointments with our Advisory Business Consultants and receive individual assistance to help them start or grow their small businesses. Our consultants have backgrounds in planning, finance, marketing, operations, legal issues, social media, and food businesses. The counseling is free with a limit of four sessions per client. All appointments are virtual.

**Entrepreneur Assistance Center** offers hands-on training targeted to new and existing business owners. The primary goal is that participants complete a fully vetted business plan. Those who complete the eight-week, 60-hour program -- offered annually in October -- are automatically entered into the Queens Tech + Innovation Challenge and EAC Alumni Network, which serves as a support system and avenue for business development.

**Entrepreneur Space** is a 24/7 commercial kitchen in Long Island City for entry level food businesses seeking to bring their operations to the next level. It provides legal, reasonably priced facilities to make products while relieving new "foodpreneurs" of the burden of high start-up production and rental costs. In addition, the Entrepreneur Space offers access to business counseling, technical assistance, networking opportunities, marketing, and shared office space cubicles.

**Home Improvement Contractor Training** is an online, three-day course for individuals seeking to obtain NYC Department of Consumer Affairs licenses for their home improvement contractor businesses. The lessons are accompanied by one-on-one advisory services, such as consultations on permits and licensing, business development, procurement, and access to capital.

**M/WBE Certification** helps eligible, minority-owned businesses sell products and services to New York City and New York State agencies. Monthly orientation seminars teach how to become certified and offer step-by-

step introductions on selling to government agencies.

**Made in Queens** is a brand and a certification promoting locally made or designed products. MiQ's mission is to promote makers and help them sell their goods online and at retail locations, especially pop-up markets. MiQ helps local makers and manufacturers share their stories while growing and flourishing.

**Queens Tech + Innovation Challenge** is a signature program offered in cooperation with the Queens Borough President's Office. It provides entrepreneurship education, one-on-one start-up assistance, mentoring, and up to \$20,000 in seed funding. The program's mission is to drive innovation through entrepreneurship in the most diverse borough in the world. QEDC believes that inclusion is an economic imperative and entrepreneurship should be open to everyone, regardless of gender, race or birth.

**Queens Together** improves the health and vitality of restaurants and other food businesses in the borough. The program empowers owners with resources for best business practices, advocacy with city agencies, and introductions to officials. It also sponsors promotional programs and partnerships with community organizations to alleviate food insecurity.

**Queens Tourism Council** uses the "It's In Queens!" brand to promote attractions in the county through organized efforts by local businesses, cultural institutions, and government agencies. QTC fosters economic opportunities, travel, and tourism by letting visitors and residents know about the great places to visit, eat, play, and stay.

**Women's Business Center** helps women start and grow businesses and connects them to resources within their communities. WBC focuses on one-on-one counseling, specialized workshops, and networking opportunities which include the Power Networking Series and the Women's History Month Celebration. ■



# ART STRONG



**Getting creative**

**Queens has many pockets of creativity.** One of the newest is in a sparkling renovated storefront at 43-67 11th St. in Long Island City. Art Strong, a community arts-education company, opened there in 2021. Ashley Cavadas and Hannah Lokken met as students at Columbia University’s Teachers College and went on to work in the New York City public school system. As teachers, they helped students discover their creativity. In doing so, they realized the need for enhanced art programs for young people. They also noticed the population growth in Western Queens, especially Long Island City, due to an influx of families.

Transforming their art education into a business was a challenge. They learned of QEDC’s StartUP! business competition in 2017. Their goal was to win, but were pleasantly surprised by how much they learned. In 2018, they took QEDC’s classes in business operation, finance, planning, and marketing and met with business advisors to develop a comprehensive plan for the competition. Though they didn’t win, they received valuable feedback from judges and instructors that

**“They realized the need for enhanced art programs for young people”**

convinced them to enter the following year. With more knowledge and determination, they prepared an even better plan and won in 2019. They didn’t leave their teaching jobs yet, they began to focus on the new business.

The plan called for classes for toddlers and elementary school children after school and weekends as well as a summer camp. Finding space was their first order of business, and they found the perfect spot on a mixed-use block of LIC. It was near residential areas on the waterfront and Court Square with plenty of families with young children. And though LIC was an adult art Mecca with such museums as MoMA PS1 and SculptureCenter, there weren’t many places where young people could enhance their talents.

The pandemic caused them to rework their timing, but Cavadas and Lokken remained confident, and in June 2021, Art Strong launched. Since then they have expanded their programs and now work with children of all ages, teens, and families. It wasn’t their

intention, their business has become a catalyst for other new ventures in the bustling community.

Not only do they work at Art Strong full-time these days, Cavadas and Lokken have hired more than 10 part-time staffers and consultants. They are proof that creativity takes many different forms, including starting a small business. ■

<https://www.artstrongnyc.com/>

Building  
bodies to build  
a business

# BETTER BODY BOOTCAMP

“I started working out around age 13,” said Kaiser Serrajuddin, founder of Better Body Bootcamp. Hitting the weights and running five miles a day, Serrajuddin prided himself on being the strongest kid growing up. But for him, fitness was more than achieving a healthy lifestyle or an attractive body – it was a passion. And a little over two decades ago, he turned it into his career.

When Serrajuddin was in his early 20s, he began his career with a job at Bally Total Fitness, a popular exercise chain in the early 2000s. He quickly realized that the club was not where he wanted to continue his career and decided to embark on his own. After Bally, he established a partnership with a gym in Astoria, where he served as a fitness trainer. “I was essentially their training department,” Serrajuddin said. “That worked wonderfully but I found that there needed to be a way to give one-on-one service.” So, he parted ways with the gym, and in 2011, sought to create his own boutique fitness studio: Better Body Bootcamp.

When Serrajuddin started Better Body Bootcamp in 2011, the idea of a boutique fitness studio was still somewhat novel. Although a fan of gyms and the equipment they offered, Serrajuddin hoped to offer members an alternative form of exercise – one that was better suited to individual needs. “When you have gym equipment it is meant to isolate only one muscle group at a time. That actually is not conducive to the goals of the majority of the population,” Serrajuddin said. “If you are a physique competitor or bodybuilder competitor looking to hyper focus on specific muscle groups, then the gym is appropriate for you. Better Body Bootcamp’s class is meant to simulate what four to five hours of activity a day would look like.” People in Serrajuddin’s classes engage in a number of

exercises -- from cardio to strength building – all designed to improve the whole body.

Having opened a few new locations around New York, in 2019, Serrajuddin began franchising out Better Body Bootcamp to others interested in opening boutique fitness studios. “We were flying high,” Serrajuddin said about the state of Better Body Bootcamp upon entering the new decade. “We were pretty much signing a franchise a month.” Unfortunately, however, this rapid growth would not last. When Covid struck NYC in March of 2020, the planned locations were put on hiatus and the existing ones faced a tremendous challenge. “When Covid happened we had to shut our doors and we had to reopen slowly,” Serrajuddin said. “Before the vaccine, the population didn’t want to come in.” The pandemic left Better Body Bootcamp in a state of uncertainty it hadn’t witnessed

since the beginning.

Seeking ways to bring Better Body Bootcamp back on track, Serrajuddin and his team reached out to QEDC’s Entrepreneurship Assistance Center and met Beny Castro. Working with him, Better Body Bootcamp was able to acquire two New York State grants— one worth \$50,000 and another worth \$25,400— to help the business recover. “Post Covid, the game has changed so much,” Serrajuddin said. “That was a great opportunity for us to really catch up.” Despite the setbacks Better Body Bootcamp faced during the pandemic, Serrajuddin is confident that business is even better than it was before. So for those interested in a novel way to get in great shape, Better Body Bootcamp is worth checking out. ■

<https://www.betterbodybootcamp.com/>

**“I found that there needed  
to be a way to give  
one-on-one service”**

# QNSY

**Five years ago**, Jeremy Bohan and Tara Merdjanoff worked as captains and servers at some of the best known restaurants in New York City. The married couple also put on comedy cabarets at various clubs.

This all changed when Covid hit. With lockdown restrictions forcing restaurants to close, Bohan and Merdjanoff found themselves unemployed and unconfident that their jobs would ever return. “As time went on, it became clear that we wouldn’t be necessarily coming back to our restaurants,” Merdjanoff said. “We sort-of realized ‘oh, we have the opportunity to really make a transition.’” For the past few years, the couple envisioned and worked towards the creation of a beverage company. As experts in bartending, they understood the bottlenecks and challenges of serving mixed drinks, and they wondered if it would be possible to create a truly delicious canned cocktail. With no end to the pandemic in sight, Bohan and Merdjanoff devoted themselves fully to the idea, and QNSY Sparkling Cocktails took off.

By the time they went all in on QNSY, they were thoroughly prepared. For a number of years, the couple had consulted with QEDC Director of the Women’s Business Center Andrea Ormeño, one of the U.S. Small Business Administration’s resource partners designed to assist women in starting and growing small businesses. After taking QEDC’s New Idea to New Venture workshop, Bohan and Merdjanoff worked with Ormeño to create a business plan for

**“We were able to identify something that tasted good”**

QNSY. “Alcohol regulations are not straightforward,” Merdjanoff said. “It’s not like tennis balls, where you just go make some and then sell them.” These regulations posed some difficulty in getting QNSY off the ground, but in some ways they actually helped the company. New York does not permit the sale of wine and liquor in grocery stores. Beer, however, is fine. QNSY, which uses fruit juice and cane sugar as the alcohol base, avoids these restrictions and is regulated similarly to beer. “We occupy a unique lane; when we go to sell into a grocery store or beer depot, it’s a great opportunity

for that retailer,” Merdjanoff said, noting that retailers no longer have to turn away customers looking for these types of drinks. This led to tremendous growth in the ready-to-drink segment, and while QNSY has followed many of the trends of this segment, it prides itself on how it differentiates its drinks from the crowd.

“We are built ‘flavor first,’” Merdjanoff said. “Because of our background in bars and restaurants, we were able to identify something that tasted good.”

QNSY has grown dramatically over the past year and is now in nearly 250 stores across New York and New Jersey. Looking to the future, QNSY hopes to scale up production using a \$350,000 loan it got with help from QEDC’s WBC. When asked for advice to give to new entrepreneurs, Merdjanoff said to “ask questions and keep going.” These wise words have clearly led to success. ■

<https://www.drinkqnsy.com/>



**A flavor for every taste**

# QUEENS NIGHT MARKET

**On Saturday nights** during the warm weather months, Flushing Meadows Corona Park is bustling. Thousands come to enjoy culture and cuisine from around the world. Queens Night Market is the attraction. The weekly event, held from mid-April through late-October, serves to celebrate the cultural diversity of Queens by bringing together hundreds of independent vendors, each offering unique food or merchandise. A proven success, QNM is an experience the community looks forward to each year – though only a few short years ago, this was not the case. Back in 2014, the creation of a night market in New York City was only an idea, and an outlandish one at that. It was one man— John Wang— who dedicated a chapter of his career into making it a possibility, and turned QNM into a reality.

Born and raised in Arlington, Texas, Wang moved to NYC in 2009 to work as a mergers-and-acquisitions lawyer for Simpson Thacher & Bartlett. A recent graduate of Yale Law School and Yale School of Management, he sought employment at the prestigious firm to repay the debts of his education. He worked there for four years before quitting in 2013. “I realized I didn’t want to work for anyone anymore,” Wang said. “I felt like if I owned a business I’d be more passionate about it.” Inspired by childhood summers in Taiwan where he explored popular night markets, he conceived the idea of an NYC-based bazaar and set out to make it a reality.

Wang contacted many people to get QNM off the ground. “I was emailing the mayor, the governor...anyone who had anything to do with anything.” The process was long and difficult, but step by step he made progress. Searching for a location, he eventually determined Queens would be the best spot, and in particular, Flushing Meadows Corona Park. The New York Hall of Science gave it a place to operate, and the Queens Tourism Council offered support.

When QNM opened in April 2015, Wang didn’t expect a huge turnout. With 40 vendors, it was considerably smaller than he had

envisioned, so his expectations were relatively low for the number of patrons that would show up. “I thought a good turnout would be 2,000, 3,000 people,” Wang said, “but tens of thousands of people showed up.” The vendors quickly sold out, and the musical performers found it difficult to play. The scene was undeniably chaotic, but proved the idea was a success: people wanted to be there. This changed the process for recruiting vendors. Wang had

found it difficult to convince them to participate, but suddenly he had an overabundance of applications. “I got home, opened the vendor application site and I think I had 300 applications just in that 18 hours,” Wang said. “Since that day, we can always fill the space.”

With nearly 1,000 vendor applications each year, Wang is close to realizing his initial vision. “The goal for the Queens Night Market is to represent as many countries through our food and vendors as possible,” he said. Over the past seven years, the number has reached 95, a significant improvement from opening night. Wang strives to improve upon this number— as well as explore other endeavors for QNM.

Wang has also written an award-winning cookbook with his wife, Storm Garner, about QNM’s cuisine and the vendors who make it. Partnering with the Queens Economic Development Corporation, he has produced numerous free small business seminars and collaborated on “Fuel the Frontlines,” which hired QNM vendors to provide meals to health care workers during Covid’s height.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and Wang is often presented with pitches to open markets in other cities— although he consistently declines them. QNM, therefore, will remain an NYC institution. For anybody interested in a tremendous general experience and a tasty meal for \$6, QNM is a must and the perfect way to spend a Saturday night. ■

<https://queensnightmarket.com/>

**“The goal for the Queens Night Market is to represent as many countries through our food and vendors as possible”**



**Eat your way around the world**



The sweet  
smell of  
success

# SCENT BY HEAVEN

**For Gisela Andre,** candles are more than just a pleasant fragrance and a pretty sight. Ever since she was a young girl in Venezuela, she adored them. Her grandmother's house was filled with candles, and she loved to sit in front of them, taking in the aromas and watching them melt. Now, candles are the nostalgic bridge between her childhood in Venezuela and her adulthood in New York. Eight years ago, she decided to learn how to make her own, a hobby that is now her career.

During her first attempt, her process was far from refined. "When I started, I would buy candles from the dollar store, and remelt them," Andre said. "I started practicing, and through trial and error got better at making them." Eventually, she moved away from melting other candles for their wax and found a supplier that sells supplies to independent producers. By 2019, she had developed the skills and technical know-how to start her own business.

In 2019, Andre founded Scent by Heaven, her own candle company, at around the same time her son was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. At the time she was working for the city government in a customer service position, a demanding job that limited her time with her son. With Scent by Heaven, Andre looked to create a career that would offer flexibility to spend more time with her son by working from home. "I am able to do what I love, but at the same time, I am able to be there for him," she said. Andre also lauded her grandmother's entrepreneurial spirit. "I grew up in a business environment," she said. "My grandma had a jewelry business. She always told to us 'You don't want to be working for somebody, think of ways you can grow yourself or better yourself.'"

The name "Scent by Heaven" also comes from her grandmother.

When she was a child, her grandmother's nickname for her was "Cielo," the Spanish word for "sky" or "heaven."

Andre began by creating a website as an online platform to sell her candles, but found that she didn't get much traffic. She realized that customers wanted to have the opportunity to smell her candles, something they could only do in person. While at the Sunnyside Shines market, she was told about QEDC's Made in Queens program, which connects borough businesses to local retail opportunities. Andre reached out to the program's director, Michael Gillen, who certified Scent by Heaven as an MiQ business. "After I met Michael, I continued doing vendor's events," Andre said. "I would constantly send emails to him saying 'If you know of any vendor's events, I'm there!'" To this day, Andre stays in contact with Michael to help her find retail opportunities as local markets are still the primary driver of sales for her company.

Andre is in the process of creating a sister company that would focus on producing candles in an environmentally friendly way through the use of recycled alcohol bottles. "Candles use a lot of glass," Andre said. "During COVID there was a shortage of supplies." She believes using the glass from discarded wine bottles can remedy these shortages as well as provide an environmentally friendly solution to the mostly landfill-bound glass from these bottles. She also hopes to open a brick-and-mortar store for Scent by Heaven, allowing customers to come in and see her candles in person. For now, however, she will continue to sell through local markets, so if you see her and her candles at one, be sure to take in the aromas! ■

<https://scentbyheaven.net/>

**"You don't want to be working for somebody, think of ways you can grow yourself or better yourself"**



# THAI ROCK



**For three decades** Robert Kaskel worked almost exclusively for technology companies—starting a few of his own along the way. By 2010 however, Kaskel’s tech future became uncertain. “I started to not be comfortable with the company I had,” Kaskel said. To clear his head and distance himself from the business, Kaskel moved from Manhattan to the Rockaways. “While we were out here, we made a whole lot of new friends,” Kaskel said. “Somebody who I became friendly with suggested that he might be willing to back me if I decided to open up a restaurant. He said, ‘Your wife Metta is a great Thai cook and you guys are great hosts—the Rockaways could use some good Thai food.’” Kaskel quickly became enamored with the idea and he began his search for a place to open a restaurant.

He eventually came across 375 Beach 92nd St., where Thai Rock is located today. It was big, with plenty of room for diners to eat both inside and out, and had a beautiful bayside view, but it was also dilapidated. Renovating it would be a huge task, and a tremendous financial burden. Still, Robert and Metta knew this was the location they wanted. “It was just such a perfect spot,” Kaskel said. He quickly got to work putting together a business plan and presented it to his possible funder. But by that point the funder bowed out. Kaskel was set on opening a restaurant there, and he sought any way to fund it. “I ended up funding Thai Rock in three ways; savings, a couple of friends pitched in a little bit of money, and the rest of it was all done on credit card.” Kaskel said. “It was the craziest way to start a business like this.” Still, he and Metta found a way to make

## “The Rockaways could use some good Thai food”

the show to serve as a surprise guest and help promote Thai Rock. Kaskel, who had already worked with QEDC years prior, knew who MacKay was, but nonetheless found it fortuitous the show re-introduced him. It was then that MacKay informed him about the Queens Tourism Council, a program of the QEDC designed to promote tourism to the borough. MacKay encouraged Thai Rock to join, which Kaskel agreed to, and began promoting the restaurant. “It’s led me to a lot of good connections,” Kaskel said about QTC’s promotion of Thai Rock. “I get recognized now!”

Since recovering from Hurricane Sandy, Thai Rock has still experienced its fair share of challenges. Most notably the COVID pandemic. Thai Rock, however, has survived that too, shifting to take-out and delivery to stay afloat. Kaskel even believes, in some ways, this shift to take-out could serve as an opportunity. He believes the number of people ordering take-out will remain high, but people will eventually want to return to in-person eating and bars the same way they did before. In this way, Kaskel hopes to increase Thai Rock’s customer base. Whether or not this turns out to be true has yet to be seen, but Thai Rock stands as a success either way. A resilient business founded by resilient entrepreneurs, Thai Rock remains a culinary landmark in Rockaway, and is well worth the visit for those in search of great food and views. ■

[thairock.us](http://thairock.us)

# THE BOYS' ROOM

**Five years ago**, Cindy McField-Asamoah attended a panel discussion that changed her life. The topic was white women who teach Black boys at independent schools, and as a mother of two Black boys in independent schools, she had to attend. She listened to the panel - diversity directors, teachers, parents - finding their comments interesting and enlightening. As she left, she reflected on what she had heard and the experience of her children and those like them. After a few months, she came to a realization. "I felt like something was missing," she said. "I realized that it was an affinity program that needed to be in place." From the beginning of middle school to the end of high school, she was one of only three Brown students in her classroom, and for this generation, she wanted to give Black and Brown students a special space. McField-Asamoah decided to create The Boys' Room, a mentoring program for elementary-aged Black and Brown boys. To test the waters, she prepared a pilot program for the coming school year.

By the time she started The Boys' Room, McField-Asamoah was already a seasoned entrepreneur. For the previous five years, she had owned and operated Citi Mosaic Real Estate. The experience of launching and growing a real estate company had prepared her for starting a new business. She had the educational background necessary to create a mentorship program, too, as during her undergraduate years at Southern Connecticut State University, she had studied clinical social work. Nevertheless, she needed to find out if there was any demand for the business she wanted to create. She began by reaching out to the mothers of Black and Brown boys in independent schools. "I wanted to see if they would be interested if I were to create something like this," McField-Asamoah said. "I was receiving emails, texts, and calls

**“The certifications have opened up doors for me”**



from several different women who wanted their sons to be a part of this pilot program. Within a matter of a few days I had a group and had to start a waitlist.”

McField-Asamoah then turned her focus to creating a curriculum. She eventually settled on one that was designed to promote five core values: self-esteem; respect; awareness; belonging; and leadership. In the spring of 2018, she put the curriculum to test, meeting with the boys weekly. In 2019, McField-Asamoah turned it into a full-fledged company: The Boys' Room, LLC.

Looking to promote her business, she sought M/WBE (Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise) certification in 2020. Offered by New York State, M/WBE status creates opportunities for businesses owned by women or racial and ethnic minorities. She reached out to former QEDC Deputy Director Ricardi Calixte to help her navigate the complicated process of obtaining the certification for Citi Mosaic Real Estate and The Boys' Room. "We were working together for almost a year," she said. "If I didn't have his help, I don't think I would have been able to complete the certification process." McField-Asamoah is appreciative. "The certifications have opened up doors for me."

Since 2020, the company has grown significantly. It mentors approximately 50 students now, and it has expanded beyond New York. During the Covid pandemic, The Boys' Room began an online program that McField-Asamoah hopes to expand further. ■ <https://www.theboysroom.org/>



Mr. Met  
is a fan

# THE PIZZA CUPCAKE

**“Almost every night we were producing at the Entrepreneur Space”**

In 2015, when Andrea Meggiato asked his future wife, Michelle, out for the first time, he said it was going to be a “pizza date.” What he did not tell her is that – rather than going out to eat pizza – he would teach her how to make it. Andrea is from Italy, and worked as a chef since he was 16. In the Big Apple, he met Michelle through a mutual friend, and their relationship (and business) blossomed.

Before Andrea and Michelle officially launched The Pizza Cupcake, they made their pizza snacks for friends and family. It didn’t take long, however, for them to realize the opportunity they had. In January of 2018, Andrea quit his job and jumped full time into The Pizza Cupcake, and from there, the gourmet pizza snack made with premium Italian ingredients and trade-secret dough transformed into a business.

The Pizza Cupcake’s first corporate catering order came from Instagram in Los Angeles, but what really allowed the company to prove their concept was Smorgasburg, one of New York City’s most prestigious food markets. In fall of 2018, the couple met with the founders of Smorgasburg for a tasting. If they approved, The Pizza Cupcake would become a vendor for the season. “It’s one of those types of opportunities where if you get accepted it’s a stamp of approval for your concept,” Michelle said.

The day before their wedding, Andrea and Michelle received an email from Smorgasburg, accepting them to be a vendor. “When we got the call we were in Venice,” Michelle said. “We thought ‘this is the best gift!’ So, we didn’t go on our honeymoon.” The couple flew back to NYC to begin their business journey.

Back in Gotham, Andrea and Michelle quickly realized they would need a commercial kitchen to produce enough pizza cupcakes for Smorgasburg, which operates in Brooklyn. Through the search they came across the Entrepreneur Space operated by the Queens Economic Development Corporation. “The Entrepreneur Space was really helpful with everything that we needed to get the business up and running,” Michelle said. A few months into working there, they found themselves with another great opportunity. In April of 2019, the executive chef at Citi Field, home to the New York Mets, offered The Pizza Cupcake a stadium concession opportunity, allowing them to ramp up production significantly. “We started at the Entrepreneur Space with overnight shifts on weekends,” Andrea said. “After we started doing business with Citi Field almost every night we were producing at the Entrepreneur Space.” The Pizza Cupcake’s greatest opportunity, however, came in February of 2021, when Andrea and Michelle pitched their business on ABC’s “Shark Tank.” There, they struck a deal with famous investor/entrepreneur Lori Greiner. The Pizza Cupcake achieved internet fame with the official YouTube video of their “Shark Tank” pitch, which amassed 3.85 million views, and numerous other videos and articles about it posted all over the internet. This helped the company achieve one of Andrea and Michelle’s main goals: successfully launching into the retail sphere. The Pizza Cupcake is now sold in retail stores across the country with a recent expansion in more than 1,600 Walmart stores. “We’ve just experienced explosive growth,” Michelle said. The Pizza Cupcake now stands as a testament to entrepreneurial spirit. It is a success story all prospective entrepreneurs should keep in mind when dreaming about growing their own business. ■

[thepizzacupcake.com](http://thepizzacupcake.com)

# TIKKUN BBQ

**“I feel like** a lot of people start their own business because they hate their jobs or want to get rich,” said Eli Goldman, the founder of Tikkun BBQ. “I literally thought I might die during the pandemic.” When Covid reached New York City in the spring of 2020, Goldman witnessed the full extent of it. At the time, he lived in Astoria, near Mount Sinai Queens. He heard ambulances pass by and watched as the hospital struggled with the influx of patients. So, he sought a new hobby, one that would serve as an escape from the tragedy around him and provide joy to his community. He found his inspiration from Italy, where people were helping neighbors by lowering baskets of food from their windows or balconies for those in need. Goldman decided to do the same, though rather than give away bread, he decided to sell it and donate the earnings to charity. This marked the start of what Goldman called “Tikkun Bakery,” but it didn’t take long for him to pivot to a new cuisine.

Sitting on the same balcony where he lowered bread was a smoker: an 18-inch Weber Smokey Mountain. Seeing it, he realized that he could transition from bread to barbecue and bring the community together. “There’s something about barbecue that cuts through all the noise” Goldman said. “You can be Republican or Democrat, from here or from Indonesia or India or Africa there’s something about meat and fire that’s a universal language.” Soon, “Meat Rapunzel,” as he was called, came down from his balcony to spread this universal language via monthly pop-up BBQs around NYC. Tikkun BBQ was born.

From the beginning, Goldman wanted Tikkun BBQ to be more than just about barbecue. He had a long history in working with nonprofits and service organizations. After college, he served in AmeriCorps for four years, volunteering around the country, and upon returning to NYC, he worked in fund-raising for nonprofits. With Tikkun BBQ, he wanted to blur the line between business and nonprofit and use his cooking to help his community. The name “Tikkun BBQ” reflects that. “Tikkun”

originates from the Jewish concept of “Tikkun Olam,” which translates to “repair the world.” Goldman views Tikkun Olam as critical to his Jewish identity, and the company’s main goals are to “make exceptional BBQ,” “invite everyone to have a seat at our table,” and “help others create their own table.” Under the last tenet “you can cover so many things,” Goldman noted. “We helped pay for the cab rides of sick or elderly people to go vote

more easily; we do food collection drives; coat drives; voter registration; distributed hundreds of COVID tests; and we’ve helped generate over \$100,000 in donations to nonprofits since starting Tikkun BBQ in April 2020.”

Still small and new, but looking to expand, Tikkun BBQ partook in QEDC’s 2022 StartUP! business competition, an annual program for Queens-based entrepreneurs that awards grants to winners in four categories: food; technology; community; and sustainability. Goldman heard about StartUP! from prior winner Abou Sow, the owner of Prince Abou’s Butchery. Having found out about the competition late, Goldman pressured himself to prepare Tikkun BBQ for the application quickly. “I had to make a website. I had to get a certain type of permit. I had to get my food handlers license.” This quick preparation was worth it for Goldman and Tikkun BBQ, as they were chosen as the winner in the community category. “I cried,” Goldman said, reflecting upon the news that he had won, “for me, this is about so much more than barbecue. People saw the work we were putting into this, how this is a real thing.”

Goldman plans to use the prize money to scale up Tikkun BBQ by buying a car to tow his new smoker. He hopes to bring his pop-ups—and his message—to more remote parts of NYC and provide more barbecue for people once he gets there; Tikkun BBQ often sells out within a few hours. In doing so, Tikkun BBQ is paying it forward to the Queens community. ■

<https://www.tikkunbbq.com/>



From the  
balcony to the  
community

**“We’ve helped generate over \$100,000 in donations to nonprofits since starting Tikkun BBQ”**

# BY THE NUMBERS

**JULY 1 2021 TO JUNE 30 2022**

<b>Results</b>	
Business Starts	99
Loans/Capital	54
Jobs Created	122
Loan Amount	\$1,900,000.00
Gross Revenue	\$2,563,000.00
<b>Total Clients</b>	
	977
<b>Client Demographics</b>	
Black or African American	40%
White	39%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	2%
Asian	16%
Native American or Alaska Native	2%
Not of Hispanic Origin	71%
Hispanic Origin	29%
Male	24%
Female	76%
<b>Programs</b>	
Number of Webinars	58
Hours of Counseling Sessions	1007
Number of Clients Counseled	300



NYC Commissioner of Small Business Services visits the Entrepreneur Space

**QEDC  
CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS  
FISCAL YEAR ENDING 06/30/22**

**BALANCE SHEET  
(UNAUDITED)**

<b>ASSETS</b>	
Cash and cash equivalent	1,384,661
Receivable	888,682
Prepaid expense	2,074
Fixed asset – net	75,737
Security deposit	14,855
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	2,366,009

<b>LIABILITIES</b>	
Accounts payable	55,258
Security deposits	73,991
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	129,249

<b>NET ASSETS</b>	
Unrestricted	2,236,760

<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	2,366,009
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**STATEMENT OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE  
(UNAUDITED)**

<b>REVENUE</b>	
Government grants	1,529,323
Private grants and donations	480,303
Program income	565,367
Interest and others	20,630
Total revenue	2,595,623

<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
<b>PROGRAM ACTIVITIES</b>	
Business Services	1,679,434
Training	335,887
Neighborhood Development/ Tourism	223,924
Total Programs	2,239,245

<b>SUPPORTING SERVICES</b>	
Administrative and general	214,533
Fundraising	100,337
<b>TOTAL SUPPORTING SERVICES</b>	314,870

<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	2,554,115
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<b>TOTAL SURPLUS</b>	41,508
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QEDC gratefully acknowledges the support of the following:\*

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Community Bank Foundation; New York State Assembly & Member Vivian Cook; New York Senate & Member Leroy Comrie; NYC Department of Small Business Services; NYC Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, Queens Delegation & Members Ariola; Brooks-Powers; Caban; Gennero; Krishnan; Lee; Paladino; Schulman; Ung; Williams; Won; NYS State Empire Development Corporation; Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.; Plaxall; Ponce Bank; Resorts World New York City; Santander Bank; Senator Charles Schumer; Signature Bank; Silverstein Properties/Innovation Queens; Small Business Administration; Starbucks; TD Bank Foundation

*\*Contracts/Grants/Gifts/Services valued at more than \$1,000*

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QEDC works with many organizations to help our community and clients:

BlaQue Resource Network; Business Outreach Center; Center for the Women of New York; CHAE; Central Astoria Development Corporation; Chhaya Community Development Corporation; Consulate General of Ecuador; Emerald Isle Immigration Center, Flushing Town Hall; Fortune Society; Greater Jamaica Development Corporation/ Greater Nexus; ITAC; LaGuardia Community College; Lawyers Alliance for New York; Long Island City Partnership; Made in NYC; Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project; Queens Centers for Progress; Queens Chamber of Commerce; Queens College; Queens Public Library; Queens Rising; Queens Women’s Chamber of Commerce; Queensborough Community College, Rockaway Development & Revitalization Corporation; SCORE; Southeast Queens Chamber of Commerce; Street Vendor Project; Sunnyside Shines; TechNYC; The Fortune Society; The Horticultural Society of New York; Vaughn College of Aviation; Volunteers of Legal Service; York College

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