

**DESPINA ZIOTIS**  
**YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE MONTH**  
**PHILO4THOUGHT INITIATIVE**  
**SEPTEMBER 2018**

*As many of you know, the goal of the P4T publications is to provide positive, successful role models who will inspire the next generation of young professionals. Preliminary criteria for YPM candidates is that they are actively engaged in an entrepreneurial initiative or have made a successful career for themselves, thereby serving as strong role models to the next generation of young professionals. Candidates are typically of Hellenic origin and part of a humanitarian (educational, sociological, scientific, etc.) or environmentally--conscious field. Given the gradual expansion of our readership, we currently interview candidates who embrace a specific Hellenic philosophy best described in a word... Philotimo (φιλότιμο). The most important qualifications all our candidates share are the spirit and compassion to persevere and the heart to share their knowledge and experience with others. We are honored to share his story with you today.*

*This month's featured young professional, Despina Ziotis, has served as a dedicated high school science instructor for several years in addition to supporting various Hellenic communities while raising her lovely family. She has also played a major role in the production of the first-ever Grecian rock opera, which has gone a long way in reviving the Hellenic Legacy for the next generation.*

*The first day we met Despina smiled and presented P4T's CEO with a CD, saying "You need to listen to this." The main song on the album, "Shine" has won countless awards and has been a major inspiration to our 2016 Conference. After years of seeing this young professional in action as a vibrant educator, a passionate supporter of the arts and a loving mom it is with great honor that we share her story with you today.*

*While the primary readership is the young Hellenic professional of New York, we are very pleased that our online exposure has caused our targeted readership to shift beyond this scope! Young professionals of all communities and origins are welcome to contribute comments and questions!*

**THE JOURNEY & "AHA" MOMENT**

Despina has a Masters in Education with a specialty in Biology as well as a Masters in Educational Administration and additional training in Music (piano, flute and voice) and Drama. This combination of interests and training make her one of the favorites at school. One of the graduating seniors at High School of Art & Design says, "Even though I haven't had Ms Ziotis as my own teacher, I've known her since my first day on campus. She is always very lively and approachable. She really helped me with major questions and issues I was having with my science homework, which I'll always remember, and she knows all of us by name, too, which is a nice because it shows she cares enough to remember and follow up with us. Some people can have a student in class for years and never make any effort at all, even to say hello."

In her typical good humor, Despina concurs. "In my classroom I am very animated. I try to make the class fun and exciting. Being a teacher allows me to educate young minds and make sure that they understand whatever topic we are currently learning about."

When asked what inspired her to go into education, Despina says, "I always had a love for teaching ever since I was a young girl, so becoming a teacher professionally was destined to happen. I also loved performing whenever possible; whether it was for a piano recital, the school band or drama club. My "aha" moment came in Middle School; I had an amazing science teacher, and that just furthered my want to be a biology teacher more than

anything. There were other signs too. I was always so happy for my friends when they got an amazing grade on a test that we had studied for together.

Other paths she has considered over the years include acting and voice over work for cartoons or commercials. “I am constantly ‘performing’ in front of a live audience, so I am fulfilling my role as an actress right there. Sometimes you have to put on a little show for your students.”

## **PHILOSOPHY & MENTORS**

“My overall philosophy about work in life is, if you have something that you're very passionate about go for it and do not let anything stand in your way. You must be determined and driven. There are going to be a lot of times when the door of opportunity closes on you and you just must be willing to knock on many more. Life is not just about working a nine-to-five job. In fact, I don't think anybody really works a nine to five. My day ends when my head hits the pillow and I sleep for a few hours. In life we should enjoy the life we have and enjoy our successes. We need to go on vacations and enjoy time with our family and friends as well. I like to open a physical book to read, turn the page and let it take me away on an adventure of sorts.

“My Hellenic upbringing is very much influenced in my determination and in my career as well as my family life. Both of my parents were always with us on vacations. My father worked many hours to ensure that he could be on every family vacation that we took during the summer months that we had off from school. My mother would bring us to church every Sunday where I attended both Sunday and Greek School. I became more involved in the church as I got older by singing in the choir, teaching Sunday school and helping at the Greek festivals that we have every June.

“Going to church instilled an even deeper love for our culture and heritage. It was very important for me that whomever I married would also be Greek. I love our Hellenic culture and I pride myself in raising my two daughters in a very Hellenic community, with my husband, Vassilios Chrissochos.”

When asked who her favorite mentors have been, Despina says that hands-down her parents are at the very top of her list. “Without them I would not be where I am today.”

## **CHALLENGES**

As one might guess, as a teacher and a parent Despina faces a variety of challenges on a daily basis. “Every day there's something new to deal with; a student in distress, a parent who just doesn't know what or how to deal with their child's changes, and constant pedagogical and administrative demands.” Despina has been known to openly help students with special needs to stay on track throughout the year. She is also well known for taking initiative, having collaborated with specialist at Columbia University's Center for Genome Technology and Biomolecular Research on her own time to conduct the preparatory research to develop the Forensic Science program that is currently being implemented at her high school.

With regard to overcoming challenges, Despina advises “Take a deep breath, assess both sides of a situation and in many cases find a reasonable compromise. Having empathy for people is something that has helped me in my career. I wear many hats at work, one of them is Psychiatrist. I always sit down and listen to my students as they tell me what issues they are having. I try to give him the best possible advice to help them overcome their issue. I do the same for parents.”

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

It's so important to budget time in a way that allows you to have a harmonious balance between work and life. Family time has always been a major priority for this young professional. When asked how she manages to balance her personal and professional time, Despina says, "When I come home from work I leave work at work and spend time with my two beautiful daughters and my husband until it's time for them to go to bed. Once they are asleep I tackle all the other things on my to do list. I make time for my family and friends. Having small children does not mean your social life ends, it just means you have to make adjustments."

## PHILANTHROPY

Despina and her husband Vassilios founded an educational nonprofit initiative called the *Porphyra Foundation*. Together they produced the first-ever Grecian rock opera, entitled "Anna and Vladimir: The Love that Rocked the World," which debuted in Carnegie Hall and played off-Broadway for a substantial period, taking New York City by storm. "The opera features Princess Anna Porphyrogenita and Grand Prince Vladimir of Russia, two heroes who, from turmoil and war came together through the power of love and the Greek Orthodox Christian religion to unite their Empires for the advancement of mankind." The story was very moving and covered extensively in all the major Hellenic publications including *The National Herald*. "The rock opera is all about the coming together of Greece and Russia. It's very educational and I would highly recommend that when we have our next show that you come see it. It's a beautiful love story and very historical." For more information on "Anna and Vladimir" please visit [www.Porphyraband.com](http://www.Porphyraband.com).

"I never thought that I would be able to fulfill my two dreams of being a teacher and being a part of a production. Teaching is something I have always wanted to do, but adding my voice to our production is still so unreal to me. I enjoy every moment of getting a production ready – the late night rehearsals, costume preparation, and, on occasion, stepping in if somebody is running late to a rehearsal to sing a line or two....Bringing together this whole thing is just amazing to me. I feel very blessed and accomplished in my life and I know that my husband and I are leaving behind an amazing legacy for our daughters."

On- and off-stage, Despina has proven herself to be a real class act, as many will agree.

## WORDS OF WISDOM

The life skill that Despina values most is the ability to multitask.

Despina has many words of wisdom to impart to the young professional community!

- Never give up!
- Don't rush into anything without thinking it through very carefully. You don't want to regret any decisions you make.

**CREDITS & RECOGNITION:** Many thanks to Mike Risko Savaas and Vassillios Chrissochos of *Porphyra* for introducing us to this month's young professional. Special thanks to Menios Georgopoulos and Anne-Marie Sabbagh for the special graphics.