

# Teaching Children The Benefits Of Healthy Eating

By Kate Willard

If you've planned a party in the city in the last few decades, chances are you're familiar with Great Performances, one of New York's best known caterers. And while this venture is enough to keep any person busy for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, its founder, Liz Neumark, has also decided to transform her business into a way to give back to the community.

Neumark is the founder of The Sylvia Center, a nonprofit that teaches at-risk children—many of whom face obesity and diabetes—about food and nutrition. The foundation was named after her daughter, who passed away unexpectedly when she was young.

“Healthy food should not be a privilege,” says Neumark of her organization's mission. “It should be a right.”

Through The Sylvia Center, kids from schools like P.S. 180 in Harlem have the chance to visit Katchkie Farm in Kinderhook, New York, a 60-acre organic farm Neumark bought in 2006 which provides Great Performances with its food. On the farm, kids learn about healthy and seasonal eating by harvesting their own food, which they later have the chance to cook. “The mission is to impact the health and nutrition of at-risk children, and we do it through experiential learning,” says Neumark. “They don't realize they are learning, but they are—tasting these flavors, learning to cook.”

In Manhattan, The Sylvia Center hosts the city's only dedicated kids' kitchen run by a catering company. “As you go from our commercial kitchen into our office space, everybody passes the kids, and it's incredible because sometimes you have some pretty hectic days here, and all of a sudden you smell cooking coming out of the kids' kitchen, and you hear their voices. It keeps you balanced,” says Neumark.



Liz Neumark, Founder Of The Sylvia Center

The Sylvia Center has also established a presence in many public schools through in-class sessions that introduce basic culinary skills, the benefits of seasonal produce, and gardening projects kids can easily do at home. In addition to giving back through The Sylvia Center, Great Performances donates 5 percent of Katchkie Farm's harvest to anti-hunger programs. The company also donates leftover food from its catering events to City Harvest to distribute to the hungry.

For Neumark, the combination of her work with Great Performances and The Sylvia Center strikes the perfect balance. “Every day we get to do something good,” she says. “It's a balance between the privileged and the underprivileged and bridging that gap.” When asked what she's most proud of when it comes to her work with children, Neumark says she never stops to think about that. “I just think about tomorrow,” she says. “So I'm most excited that tomorrow we can bring this work to more families, to more schools, to more children.”

**GREAT PERFORMANCES®**