

LUNCH

Memories of a 'Spiritual' Mario Cuomo | Joanna Coles, Bob Barnett and Mel Karmazin

By Diane Clehane on January 7, 2015 5:55 PM



Hail, hail the gang's all here! Well, almost. Even the biting cold (*Helloo January!*) couldn't keep the faithful away from Michael's today. The mavens and machers who weren't wringing out the last drop of holiday cheer in St. Barths or heading to the West Coast for TCA and Sunday's Golden Globes made their way over to 55th and Fifth to kick off 2015 with this year's inaugural Wednesday power lunch. From the looks of it, the crowd of media folks ([Joanna Coles](#)), talking heads ([Robert Zimmerman](#)) and power brokers ([Bob Barnett](#)) are raring to go and already knee deep plotting their next big move. So if you're like me and you're hoping that damn Elf on a Shelf would return for just one night to take down your rapidly shedding Christmas tree, it's time to get over your holiday hangover and get going!

While we're on the subject of making things happen, I was joined today by two of Manhattan's most impressive women who never cease to amaze me with their incredible work ethic and sincere desire to improve the quality of life of all New Yorkers — in addition to boasting two of the best collections of designer accessories this side of [Anna Wintour's](#) closet. [Lisa Linden](#), president and CEO of LAK PR and [Suri Kasirer](#), president of Kasirer Consulting, are longtime friends ("I can't even remember how we met," said Suri), who both came out of the political arena where they learned invaluable lessons that have served them well in their illustrious careers. For the record, Lisa was sporting a royal blue Hermes clutch and matching dyed mink scarf to die for, and Suri was turned out with a silver Chanel quilted tote, cuff and, of course, a fabulous tweed jacket. But I digress...



Suri Kasirer, Diane Clehane and Lisa Linden

Lisa got her start as a campaign volunteer for Senator [Roy Goodman](#) ("He was my mentor") rising through the ranks from receptionist to deputy chief of staff and press secretary. Suri served as special assistant to former Governor [Mario Cuomo](#) during the last two years of his administration in the early 90s. "I learned not to watch the clock and that failure is not an option," Lisa told me. "You have to look for the win-win in every situation." Suri added that "the whole 24/7" aspect of politics was the perfect training ground for entrepreneurship. "You never want to be unavailable." In listening to Suri recount her days working closely with the late governor it was clear that he had had a huge impact on her life. "The intellectual rigor of working for the governor taught me you needed to be able to defend your position. He would constantly ask a thousand questions about something and you needed to have the answers. That is also very important with clients."

Suri told me she was still "reeling" from the governor's funeral yesterday, which she described as "incredible seeing people from all over the state," adding "[Andrew \[Cuomo\]](#) spoke so eloquently." When I asked her to share some of her memories of working for the governor she told me, "He was a very spiritual person." In her role as special assistant, she did constituency work within the state's Jewish communities ("This was at the time when Crown Heights happened and tensions were high") and often found herself talking about mysticism with her boss. "I gave him the book *The Thirteen Petalled Rose* by Rabbi [Adin Steinsaltz](#), and he loved it." The highly praised tome offered an explanation of the Jewish concept of angels. "He asked me to get copies for all his Catholic friends."

Both Lisa and Suri opened their own firms around the same time — Lisa is celebrating LAK PR's 22nd anniversary next month and has garnered a reputation for her masterful handling of the firm's client list, which boasts the city's top firms in the corporate and financial sectors as well as real estate, hospitality, educational institutions and nonprofits. Lisa is the go-to expert for many of the city's top boldface names when they are in need of crisis communications. Suri started out with [Maria Cuomo Cole's](#) HELP USA as her first client and now helps New York-based Kasirer Consulting, LLC, which specializes in government relations, public affairs and strategic consulting for an impressive roster of clients, including Fortune 500 corporations, real estate developers and nonprofit organizations. The firm has ranked No. 1 among the top lobbying firms in New York City for the past eight years and is ranked among the top five lobbying firms in New York state. Suri has been named one of the "50 Most Powerful Women in New York" by *Crain's New York Business* for several years and was recognized as a "Rising Star" by *Campaigns & Elections* magazine. She's also been honored by the New York chapter of the National Organization of Women. Perhaps the most impressive thing about her that I learned during our lunch is that she's accomplished all this as the mother of three children: an 8-year-old girl and 6-year-old twin boys. "It's always a challenge." I'll bet.

Between bites of Dover sole (Suri) and salmon (Lisa), the women sang each other's praises. "In a business of fleeting alliances, character and loyalty count and no one has stood on that bar at a higher level than Suri," said Lisa. "And

professionally she's always 10 steps ahead of everyone else." Said Suri: "We see each other as partners in crime. It's not always easy to walk into a room at a fundraiser after a really busy day of working and smile. We do a lot of things together. We support each other and we push each other."

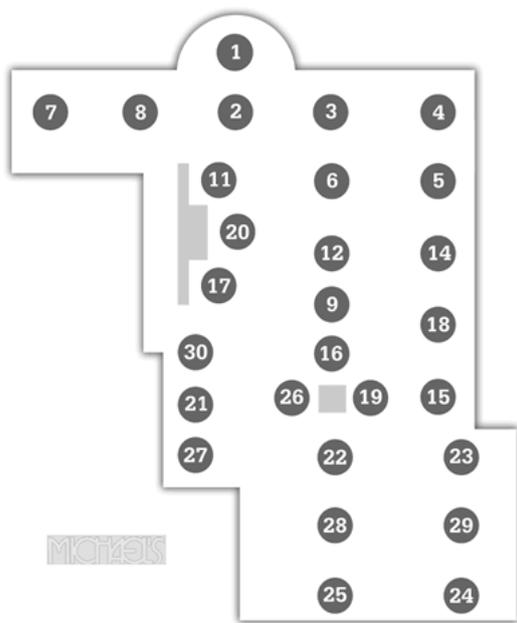
Both Upper West Siders, the ladies serve on the board of directors of The New York League of Conservation Voters and Citymeals-on-Wheels and always share a table at the annual Inner Circle dinner. Lisa will surely be front and center this spring when Suri is honored at the annual Coro Awards Gala, honoring "exemplary New Yorkers" who share the organization's commitment to "making purposeful changes to the city" through their highly sought after leadership programs and internship programs, where candidates are chosen through a highly selective application process run by the New York Leadership Center.

I don't know about you, but I need a nap just writing about these two dynamos.

Here's the rundown on today's crowd:

1. **Judy Price** and **Peter Price**, who usually lunch at different tables with their respective guests, enjoying some couple time. How nice.
2. *Politico* and marketing man **Robert Zimmerman** with **Eileen Guggenheim**
3. *Cosmo* editrix (who is pulling double duty helming *Seventeen* as well) **Joanna Coles** and **Susan Mercandetti**
4. **Jessica Reif Cohen** with former Sirius XM Radio CEO **Mel Karmazin**
5. Author (*City Parks*) **Catie Marron**
6. **Peter Kreisky**
7. **Tracey Jackson**
8. *New York Social Diary's* **David Patrick Columbia** with The Corsair's **Ron Louis Mwangaguhunga**, who just happens to be one of my all-time favorite Facebook pals.
9. **Star Jones**
11. Dr. **Mitch Rosenthal**
12. Attorney to the A-list (**Brian Williams**, **Ann Curry** among many others) **Bob Barnett**
14. **Doug Steiner** of Steiner Studios
15. **Tony Hoyt**, with a charming, well-dressed gal pal
16. Cantillon Capital Management CEO **William von Mueffling**
17. **Missy Godfrey**
18. **Lisa Linden**, **Suri Kasirer** and yours truly
20. Playwright and author (*The Need to Say No*) **Jill Brooke**
21. *Quest's* **Chris Meigher**
22. **Erik Kahn**
23. **Sharon Greengrass** (yes, of Barneys Greengrass fame)
24. **Liz Smith** (no, not *that* one) of AllianceBernstein
25. **Maggie Gallant**
26. **Christopher Niquet** of **Zac Posen**
27. **Richard Farley**
81. **Gena Smith**

Diane Clehane is a contributor to FishbowlnY. Follow her on Twitter @DianeClehane. Please send comments and corrections on this column to LUNCH at MEDIABISTRO dot COM.



mediabistro®

A Division Of Prometheus Global Media

[Home](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Advertising/Sponsorships](#) | [Careers](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Help](#)
[Courses](#) | [Browse Jobs](#) | [Freelancers](#) | [Content](#) | [Member Benefits](#) | [Reprints & Permissions](#)
[terms of use](#) | [privacy policy](#)

Copyright © 2015 Mediabistro Inc. call (212) 389-2000 or [email us](#)