

MALALA:

Books vs. Bullets

STORY & PHOTO BY CHRISTINE GIORDANO

Sometimes character and purpose are forged because of injustice, when one finds their voice after it has been snatched away.

Malala Yousafzai stepped out in front of the pool of photographers. The teenager had already been shot at point blank range by the Taliban for taking a stand for every girl's right to be educated, and there had been a price on her head for years. Security at the 92Y in New York City had inspected every camera bag for weapons, yet she still seemed to notice each click from the hundreds of photographers in the press pool. Her adolescent eyes held the stony recognition that each moment could be her last as she walked forward to face the mass of journalists. Her message, she believed, was worth risking her life.

It was before she won the Nobel Peace prize this year, and before CNN journalist

Christiane Amanpour would describe her as "the bravest girl in the world." On this day, Malala was simply doing what she felt she had been born to do.

"Martin Luther King didn't know his dream would ever come true," she said to her audience. "Equality, change, and education for every girl seems like a dream now, but in the future it will be reality."

A mere 10 months after she'd been shot in the head, she appeared before us at the Social Good Summit at the 92Y in New York City, her head shrouded in a powder pink shawl. On this occasion, her amber eyes were

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— Malala

sparkling with joy as she greeted her fellow youth and social do-gooders. The event was being webcast and her sincerity and enthusiasm were already inspiring other girls to follow her example.

"I think that I am the luckiest one," she told the standing-room-only crowd, her adolescent cheeks round as she smiled into her words. "It was such a great honor for me... You all supported me and stood up for me." One could see she was quite a poised teenager, and unusually eloquent. Death had not wanted to take her, she believed, so at 16, she was not afraid of anything.

"My future plan is that I want an education for every child (including) children in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan. They are suffering from child labor." The words, spoken in the teen's pure reedy-yet-emphatic voice with the belled accent of the region, rang powerfully inside the auditorium. "They're suffering from child trafficking, they're suffering from terrorism, and we need to stand up for them, we need to speak up for them, and we must do it now. We shall not wait for the governments to do it. We shall do it by ourselves. Now. It is our duty."

The Choice to be Brave

Malala was born into a family that didn't have money for a midwife, into a town that only celebrated the birth of sons, where "daughters are hidden away behind a curtain, their role in life simply to prepare food and give birth to children," she wrote in her book, *I Am Malala*. But her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, who ran an all girls' school, believed this girl was going to be different. He decided "not to clip her wings." He named her after a regional heroine, Malalai of Maiwand, whose poetic words "turned worlds around" according to the poet Rahmat Shah Sayel.

Malala was studying to be a doctor when the Taliban came and declared that girls were no longer allowed to attend school. They began murdering her townsfolk and publicly beating anyone who disobeyed their edicts. In a *New York Times* video interview, at 11 years old, Malala buried her face into her hands and wept for her future that seemed to be disintegrating within the folds of violence and fear. And she was terrified that her father, president of the Global Peace Council, would be killed for his activism and running the all-girl school. His friends in the peace movement were being shot on the street. Schools were being blown up, and beheadings were so common in her once-picturesque Swat Valley town center, that it was now called "slaughter square." If she survived, without an education, in her culture, she would be married at 13, and spend the rest of her life as a mother – which didn't align with her aspirations.

The increasing threats from the Taliban caused young Malala to believe she had two choices: to speak out and be killed, or remain silent and await death from the murderous extremists. And so, she gathered her courage and began giving media interviews and rallying for peace, while still attending school. She began blogging

anonymously for the BBC to let the world know what was happening. Her efforts won her country's first peace prize and her voice grew stronger, but her nightmares grew more violent. In her dreams, the Taliban were following her, stalking her. At night, as her family slept, Malala would pray a protection chapter of the Quran and check the locks on the windows and doors of her home. Even her teachers had nightmares about her being harmed. And then, the nightmares came true.

Two very young men with shaking hands boarded her school bus with rifles. Malala, then 15, was gossiping with her school friends about an exam. "Who is Malala?" they asked. She didn't hear them, but the frightened eyes of her schoolmates gave her away. Seconds later, they fired three shots at her head, at point blank range. Malala collapsed and was carried away unconscious on a gurney, her clothes soaked with blood. No one knew if she would live or die. "The whole world prayed, lit candles," she would later tell the U.N. General Assembly. "It did not matter what religion they were. They all prayed for me."

A Miracle Injury

As candles glowed for two days, Malala's mother prayed nonstop and her father rarely left her bedside as Malala fought for her life. Skilled doctors tried to relieve the swelling on her brain and saved her life by removing part of her skull, but during the aftercare, in a country where one in seven children get hepatitis mainly from dirty needles, she became infected and septic. Her blood wasn't clotting, and her kidneys were failing. Meanwhile, the hospital was on lockdown so the Taliban couldn't break in. When the ruling family of the United Arab Emirates sent over a private jet with an on-board hospital to get her to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, England, doctors ferried the dying girl out of Pakistan. Dr. Fiona Reynolds worked rigorously through the entire flight to keep her alive, later commenting that if Malala had died, she would've had the death of "Pakistan's Mother Theresa" on her hands.

Miraculously, only one bullet had hit Malala – and most of her skull deflected it away from her brain, although skull particles had still pierced the brain

membrane. (The other two bullets struck two of her classmates but they were not mortally wounded.) The bullet traveled under her skin, severing some of her facial nerves and shattering her ear, then burrowed down her neck and shoulder but missed her spinal cord. After emergency surgeries, she awoke and, with an intubating tube down her throat, asked through a spelling board what country she was in, and where her father was. Unaware that the world had surged to her aid, she was worried her father wouldn't be able to pay for the medical bill.

In the months that followed, Malala recovered in England and discovered that the world wanted to hear from the brave girl who had risked her life for the sake of education. And despite the violence, a strange thing was happening: other girls were beginning to speak out.

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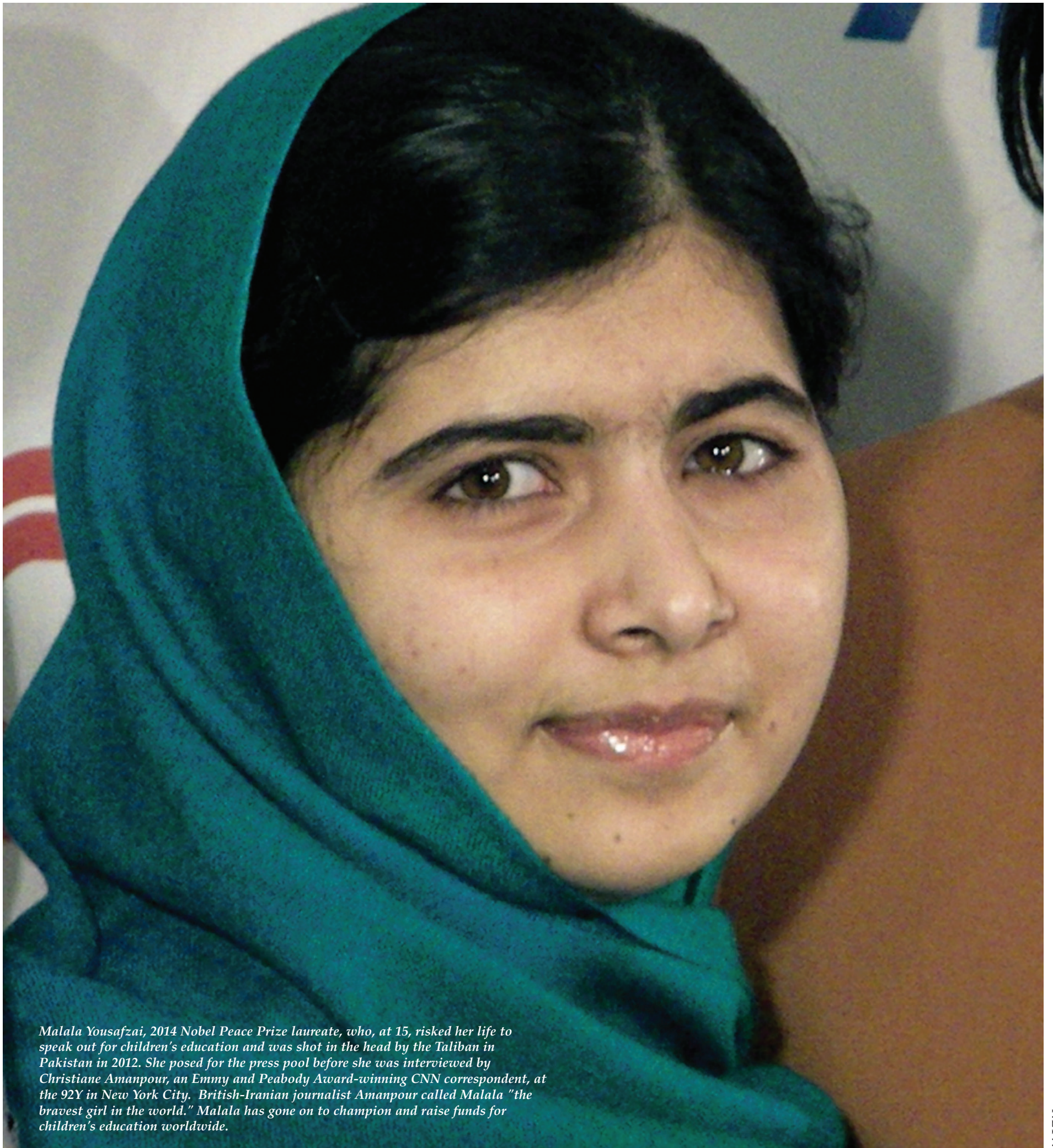
The bullet hadn't silenced her ambitions. She had once wanted to be a doctor, now she wanted to become a "politician, a good politician" to heal her country.

"Nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died and strength, power and courage were born," she said.

The United Nations named her birthday, July 12, "Malala Day," and in 2013, she appeared before the General Assembly, draped in the white scarf of Benazir Bhutto, the first woman leader of a Muslim nation in modern history, who had served two terms as prime minister before her assassination in 2007. Bhutto's son has said his mother lives on within Malala and that he would have *her* as prime minister.

She began her speech as she always does, by praising God, and thanking those who have helped her, and then asked, "My brothers and sisters, do remember one thing." Malala was addressing the assembly that had just given her a standing ovation, her injuries creating a slight lisp and subtle mouth tilt, but not affecting her clarity of speech or serenity of composure. Her parents watched, wiping their tears, and her conservative religious mother allowed herself to be photographed. "Malala Day is not my day. Today is the day of every woman, every boy and every

"Malala Day is not my day. Today is the day of every woman, every boy and every girl who has raised their voice for their rights."



Malala Yousafzai, 2014 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who, at 15, risked her life to speak out for children's education and was shot in the head by the Taliban in Pakistan in 2012. She posed for the press pool before she was interviewed by Christiane Amanpour, an Emmy and Peabody Award-winning CNN correspondent, at the 92Y in New York City. British-Iranian journalist Amanpour called Malala "the bravest girl in the world." Malala has gone on to champion and raise funds for children's education worldwide.

girl who has raised their voice for their rights," she said. "Thousands have been killed and shot by the terrorists. I am just one of them."

Even if there was a gun in her hand and she faced the Talib who shot her, she said she wouldn't shoot because that would make her the same as the Talib, she believed, and she came from "a legacy of change" from the prophet Mohammad, Jesus Christ, through the examples of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Mother Theresa and her parents. "Islam is a religion of peace," she said, and the terrorists are "misusing Islam" for their own means.

"We realize the importance of light when we see darkness, the importance of our voice when there is silence." In the same way, she saw the importance of pens and books when she saw guns, she said. She was on a mission to speak for the right of education for every child, and for the 57 million school aged children worldwide who are not getting an education. (Currently, no law bars children in Pakistan from attending school, but 50-percent of the nation is in poverty, which

keeps children from school and fuels terrorism, said Tarique Niazi, Ph.D., associate sociology professor, University of Wisconsin who was born in Pakistan.)

This year, while in safe exile in England and a student at Edgbaston High School for Girls, she established the Malala Fund, visited children in Syrian camps and published books for children and adults. Drones have been bombing areas of Pakistan, making it possible for the Pakistani military to drive the Taliban back after they had killed 50,000 civilians since 9/11, said Dr. Niazi, but Malala made headlines again when she told President Barack Obama that she worried that the drone attacks hurt innocent civilians and created anti-western philosophies. (President Obama advised her to stay away from politics or her hair would turn grey like his, according to a *New York Times* interview.)

On her 2014 birthday and her summer vacation, Malala, now 17, flew to Nigeria to implore the release of the more than 200 Nigerian schoolgirls who were

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kidnapped by the extremist Islamist group Boko Haram, and told them to stop misusing Islam, a religion of peace. Standing with girls who escaped captivity, she videotaped her speech, and posted it to her malalafund.org website. At the end of her speech, she grasped the hands of the girls and raised them, together, high over her head. The crowd began to sing to the melody of the song "Give Peace a Chance", "All we are saying, is bring back our girls." Believing education, not guns is the key to empowering a country's future, she gave \$200,000 from the Malala Fund to the organization's The Center for Girls Education and Girl Child Concerns, to help Nigerian children gain access to quality education.

"Instead of spending money on wars, why not spend it on education? A country becomes powerful when its people, its future generation, are educated," she said.

She won the World's Children's Prize in Stockholm last month, and donated the entire \$50,000 to rebuild a United Nations school in the Gaza Strip damaged during this summer's war between Israel and Hamas.

Said Samantha Powers, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, "In striving to blot out Malala's words, (the Taliban) amplified her message far beyond Swat valley, calling attention to the justice of her cause in every corner of every continent."

This year, Malala and anti-child-trafficking Indian activist Kailash Satyarthi were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, making her the youngest and first Pakistani ever to achieve the award. "I still don't think I deserve it," she said, but would take it as "an encouragement." In combining the two recipients, the award crossed the prickly Indo-Paki border, as well as the margins of Hindu/Islam, so, said Malala, "It gives a message of love... of respect, and that we should all fight for the rights of every human being." She said she and her fellow recipient will work together for a child's rights to education.

An anti-Malala campaign in her country made headlines, as the conservative minority felt she had become too liberal. The country's leadership, however, is usually center-left or center-right, and they are proud of "daughter Theresa," said Dr. Niazi.

"Pakistan is a tough place to be a child. One out of two people live in poverty," he said. Like Bhutto, Malala intends to get an Oxford education, but Bhutto also spent much of her life in exile and in prison. "Malala's name means grief-stricken. How true it is, she was built out of tragedy," said Dr. Niazi.

Malala may actually have more power if she doesn't take the sometimes assassinated role of prime minister, like the human rights activist Asma Jehangir, who was offered the position of prime minister by both parties – a very rare agreement – but turned it down in order to continue her work, said Niazi.

Some wonder what influence Malala can have on her country while she is in exile, yet Malala's reach seems to be inspiring a new kind of change, and social media may create a new pathway, as seen with her hashtag #strongerthan, which brings attention to girl heroes around the globe who are fighting things from ebola to domestic violence. (See community.malala.org)

She accepted the Nobel Peace prize on behalf of them all, saying, "This award is for all those children whose voices need to be heard. They have the right to live a happy life. This award is especially for them, it gives them courage." ■

Stony Brook University College of Engineering and Applied Sciences Inaugural Golf Outing

PHOTOS COURTESY
STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

Stony Brook University College of Engineering and Applied Sciences recently hosted its first golf outing at the Meadow Brook Club, Jericho. The day included brunch, a shotgun start, and an enhanced reception awards ceremony after the golf outing.

The 2014 honorees were Dr. Yacov Shamash, Vice President, Economic Development and Dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Stony Brook University and Robert Catell, Chairman of the Board, Advanced Energy Center and Chairman, New York State Smart Grid Consortium. ■



Dr. Yacov Shamash (honoree) Vice President, Economic Development Dean, College of Engineering and Applied Sciences Stony Brook University, Nick Vlachos, Bob Catell, (honoree) Chairman of the Board, Advanced Energy Center, Chairman, NYS Smart Grid Consortium, and Senator Ken LaValle



David Hershberg, President STS Global Inc., Michael Russell, Senior VP - Investments, The Russell Wealth Management Group, UBS Financial Services, Inc., George Gatta, Former Suffolk Deputy County Executive & retired Executive Vice President, Suffolk Community College, and Bill Wahlig, Executive Director, Long Island Forum for Technology (LIFT)

Jamie Moore, President, ADDAPT, Don Musgnug, CPA, Charlie MacLeod, President, SMM Advertising, and Ted Teng, Professor, Department of Technology and Society, Stony Brook University



Bank of America Supports the Miller Business Center



Pictured 1-r: Elizabeth Malafi, coordinator, Miller Business Resource Center; Mario Ruggiero, senior vice president, Bank of America; and Sophia Serlis-McPhillips, director, Middle Country Public Library

Bank of America has provided a generous sponsorship of \$7500 for the 14th annual Women's EXPO and other entrepreneurial activities of the Miller Business Resource Center. By sponsoring the EXPO since its beginning, Bank of America has supported the library's efforts to provide an educational and welcoming venue for local women artisans and entrepreneurs.

Thank You, Bank of America!

Nominate a Woman of Recognition

The Town of Brookhaven Division of Women's Services is sponsoring the 29th Annual Women's Recognition with a special celebration to be held during Women's History Month, March 2015.

Nomination forms, which can be obtained by calling Sharon Boyd at 631-451-6146 are due by January 23, 2015.

Visit brookhaven.org and click on "In the Spotlight" for more information. ■