

New CASA director brings personal touch

Local mother leading group as it nears loss of federal funding

BY MAX ZAHN

For Jennifer DeSena, the new executive director of the Manhasset Community Coalition Against Substance Abuse, or CASA, the risk of juvenile binge drinking is not abstract.

Her sons, age 13 and 15, are at a stage in life when many of their peers experiment with alcohol.

"As parents we try so hard to do everything right for our kids," she said. "This job seemed to be a great way for me as a mother and as a community member to speak up about helping our kids find healthy alternatives and make healthy choices."

DeSena, an attorney, joined CASA in mid-November. She also serves as a board member of the Manhasset Women's Coalition Against Breast Cancer and as president of the Women's Club of the North Strathmore Civic Association.

"The board [of CASA] was

looking for somebody who had job."

At that time, in 2000, she a lot of connections in the community," she said.

CASA's mission is to reduce the underage use of drugs and alcohol in Manhasset.

DeSena was born in Massapequa, where she lived until heading off to Boston College. She focused on English and economics, though she "always had law school in mind" because her father was an attorney.

Soon after graduation, she sought a law degree at St. John's University.

"I did not know what kind of law I wanted to do," she said. "I ended up taking a job doing civil litigation."

After a few years, she took a job in New York City with the enforcement division of the Securities and Exchange Commission, where she worked from 1998 to 2001.

"I was very close to being a prosecutor, every lawyer's dream," she said. "It was a fun

job."

At that time, in 2000, she and her husband moved to Manhasset.

"I wanted to come back to Long Island because I knew I was having a baby," she said. "I had my first son and I made a decision to take a few years off," she said.

For more than a decade, she said, she devoted herself to raising her kids and volunteering at local organizations.

"I really was very busy in the community. I'm thrilled I can continue to work in the community because over the past year I was preparing to go back into a litigation position in New York City," she said.

DeSena joins CASA at a somewhat precarious moment for the organization, since its \$125,000 per year federal Drug Free Communities grant funding will run out in September 2018.

The organization cannot re-new the grant, which supplies



Jennifer DeSena, the new executive director at the Manhasset Community Coalition Against Substance Abuse, or CASA.

the majority of its budget. It will seek funds from a variety of alternatives, including the Manhasset school district.

"In some ways it's a bigger challenge than I realized," she said. "But that makes it interesting."

She said her sons are "happy for me that I was able to find work that's not taking me away from home."

"I can continue with other commitments, including to them," she added.

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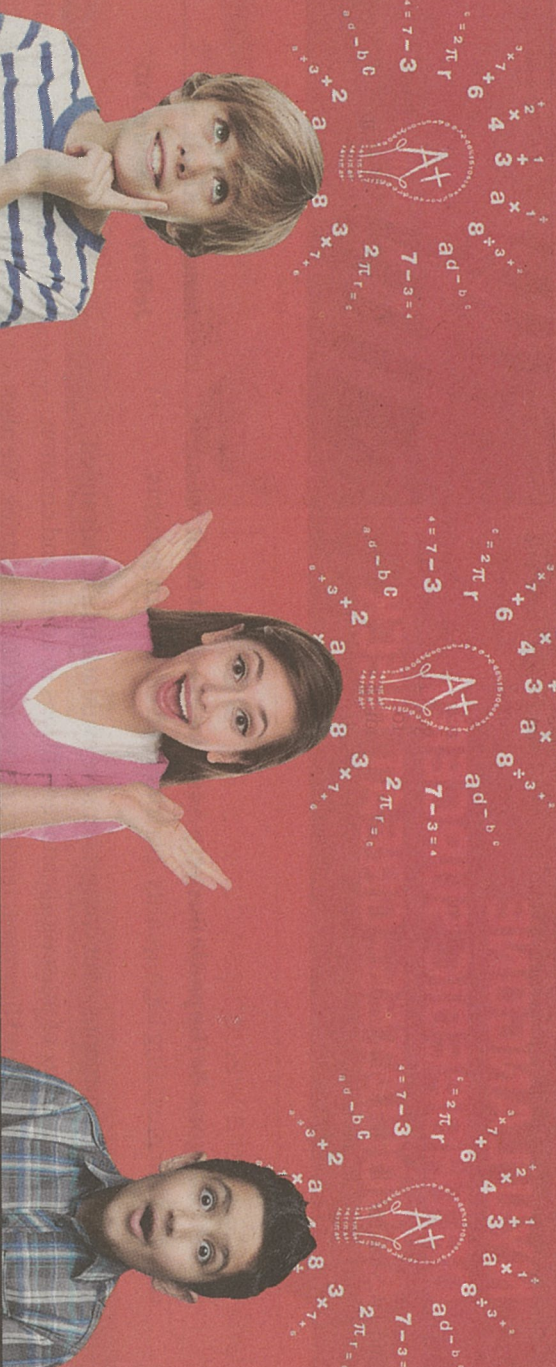
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