July 21, 2016

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of the New York Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, we would like to congratulate each of you, our inaugural 15 Under 35 honorees, on your accomplishments and recognition as an emerging leader of the public relations profession.

Though you represent a diverse cross-section of industries and professional backgrounds – corporations, agencies and academia – you share many characteristics. Your nominators describe you as fearless ... passionate ... innovative ... strategic ... inspirational ... compassionate ... driven ... creative ... and invaluable.

Your recognition as a leader among your communications peers is especially meaningful given that you live and work at the very epicenter of the media universe. You are influencing the daily operations and long term future of the public relations practice.

Congratulations.

Bill Doescher
President, PRSA-NY
President, Doescher Group Ltd.

Olga González
President-Elect, PRSA-NY
CEO & Founder, Pietra PR

Smile for the camera and post to social media with our event hashtags:

#15toFollow #PR #PRPros
11:30 AM  ARRIVAL AND NETWORKING  

luncheon orders taken by wait staff

12:10 PM  WELCOME REMARKS + CONGRATULATORY TOAST  

Bill Doescher, President, PRSA-NY  
President, Doescher Group Ltd.

Olga González, President-Elect, PRSA-NY  
CEO & Founder, Pietra PR

soup or salad service

12:30 PM  KEYNOTE PRESENTATION  

Jeff Merritt, Director of Innovation  
Mayor's Office of Tech + Innovation  

Introduction by Sharon Fenster, Fenster Communications, Inc.

entrée service

1:00 PM  PRESENTATION OF AWARDS  

Dorothy York, NAPS  
Rob Bratskier, 360 PR  
Sandra Fathi, Affect

dessert service

1:45 PM  EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION  

Olga González

keynote speaker

JEFF MERRITT  
DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION  
MAYOR’S OFFICE OF TECH + INNOVATION  
CITY OF NEW YORK  

Jeff S. Merritt is an expert in the design and implementation of innovative civic engagement and good government programs with more than 15 years of on-the-ground leadership in the US and abroad. Jeff helped establish the Mayor’s Office of Tech and Innovation where he currently serves as Director of Innovation for the City of New York.
CESSIE CERRATO
DIRECTOR, PUBLIC RELATIONS
PALACE RESORTS

Cessie Cerrato oversees and directs public relations efforts for Palace Resorts’ eight oceanfront properties located throughout Mexico and the Caribbean. On a daily basis, Cessie strategizes with the company’s leadership team as well as the sales, marketing and eCommerce departments to ensure all groups are aligned with messaging; she also liaises with each of the brand’s local property representatives to maximize opportunities for publicity and exposure. With an extensive travel and hospitality background and a deep appreciation for the public relations industry, Cessie is an invaluable asset to the Palace Resorts team.

CHRISTA CONTE
VICE PRESIDENT
HOTWIRE PR

Christa Conte oversees strategy for the Hotwire PR New York City team’s largest accounts across digital commerce, marketing and financial services. She specializes in general tech and advertising/media PR for challenger companies – from start-up/emerging stage to Fortune 500. A self-proclaimed foodie, Christa will try anything and everything New York (and her travels) afford her. She’s also an adrenaline junkie who loves to cycle, play soccer, snowboard and compete in mud runs and triathlons. Christa has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Relations from Hofstra University.

KATIE CREASER
VICE PRESIDENT
AFFECT

Katie Creaser specializes in B2B technology and provides counsel to Affect’s clients that are looking to bring PR and social media into their communications program as part of a thoughtful, holistic strategy. During her 10-year tenure at the agency, Katie has managed programs that have earned accolades from PRSA, Hermes, the SABRE awards and BtoB Magazine, among others. She is a sought-after speaker for conferences and events and her expert commentary has appeared in publications such as Entrepreneur, Forbes, Huffington Post, PR News, PR Daily and TechRadar.
ADAM DAVIS
VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS
IMAX CORPORATION

Adam Davis joined IMAX in 2011 and has risen through the organization to orchestrate the company’s global communications strategy and manage its consumer and international press activities. Most recently, he oversaw the launch of the company’s new laser projection technology as well as IMAX’s media campaigns around films such as *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Interstellar*. Previously, Adam was Director, Corporate Communications and Investor Relations at KIT digital (now Piksel) and worked at PR firm Gavin Anderson. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication, Public Relations & Advertising from Messiah College and has studied at New York University.

TORI FERNANDES
DIRECTOR, GLOBAL MEDIA RELATIONS & ISSUES MANAGEMENT
NIELSEN

Tori Fernandes manages and executes global crisis management and proactive reputation management campaigns for Nielsen’s key areas of business including television, radio, consumer products and digital. She provides guidance and counsel to Nielsen’s media relations teams in 106 markets and manages the company’s external media relations strategies for all global surveys; multicultural communications; corporate social responsibility; and Nielsen Innovate, the company’s venture capitalist arm. Tori also serves as communications liaison to the company’s investor relations team. Previously, Fernandes held several communications posts within Viacom’s Nickelodeon and VH1. She is a long-time volunteer with St. Mary’s Hospital for Children and the New York City Food Bank.

ARIANA FINLAYSON
SENIOR DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIST
MMC

Ariana Finlayson currently leads social strategy for MMC client Procter & Gamble’s COVERGIRL, where she oversees programming, tactics, and voice reaching the brand’s 5 million+ followers and fans. Her expertise is rooted in editorial writing, with a focus on fashion, beauty and pop culture. Previously, Ariana worked on the staffs at Hearst Magazines Digital Media (RealBeauty.com) and Wenner Media (UsMagazine.com). She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Print Journalism from Hofstra University and is now an adjunct professor at Newhouse NYC for Syracuse University.
RIDA BINT FOZI
SENIOR ACCOUNT SUPERVISOR
THE TASC GROUP

Rida Bint Fozi is an award-winning communications specialist with a background in English literature, social justice and nonprofit management. She has spearheaded national and international media campaigns, local grassroots efforts, creative advertising, gala events, film screenings and arts festivals for clients including the Trayvon Martin Foundation, United Way of New York City, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, the David Lynch Foundation, and the Islamic Circle of North America. Rida’s love of design and photography and keen eye for detail inform her ability to think creatively and offer a fresh and unique approach to the ever-evolving public relations industry.

BETTINA GARIBALDI
VICE PRESIDENT/DIRECTOR
KETCHUM INC.

Bettina Garibaldi has been supporting top clients, leading teams, and participating in sophisticated integrated marketing communications processes for more than a decade. Within the brand marketing team at Ketchum and throughout her career, Bettina has developed global guidance decks, worked with interdisciplinary agency partners and leaders, managed A-list talent for global campaigns, presented award winning ideas, and formulated effective strategies with supporting scalable tactics for programs to be executed nationally and internationally. Garibaldi holds a Bachelors of Business Administration from the Zicklin School of Business (Baruch/CUNY) and a Masters degree from New York University.

KELLIE JELENCOVICH
SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
MSLGROUP

Kellie Jelencovich specializes in media relations, creative plan development, and account management for MSLGROUP clients including Emirates Airline, Marriott, and Nutella; she has leveraged her strong relationships with top media outlets to become a go-to media guru and brand knowledge expert. Since arriving in New York in 2007, Kellie has studied, interned and worked with several organizations to provide strategy and media relations expertise for clients including many leading consumer brands. She is an active member of PRSA-NY and currently serves as Executive Committee Secretary.
Soogyung Cho Jordan is responsible for worldwide media relations planning and strategy, executive-level communications, message development and oversight of public relations agencies for S&P Dow Jones Indices, a division of S&P Global, and home to the S&P 500® and Dow Jones Industrial Average®; previously, she was responsible for media programs in S&P DJI’s America’s region. Soogyung has a strong background in financial communications from earlier positions with Experian, Avaya Corporation, and Intel Corporation. She has an MBA in Strategic Marketing from Arizona State University and a Bachelor of Science in Finance and Business Management from the University of Arizona.

Lauren Clifford Knudsen is as much a business leader as a PR professional, having been a vital part of growing J Public Relations from four to nearly 50 employees, four global offices, 165 clients, over six million dollars in annual business, and Small Agency of the Year recognition by PR News (2015). An in-demand travel and lifestyle expert, she is deeply rooted in the culture of luxury travel PR and is hospitality trend tracking. Her skills have benefited high-profile clients including Gurneys Montauk Resort & Seawater Spa, the award-winning Ivy Hotel in Baltimore, and many others.

Joanna Leis is a senior member of the CSR & Social Impact team at Finn Partners where her expertise in media relations, social media strategy, event planning and thought leader positioning elevates awareness of her clients, which include Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Girls Lounge, NO MORE, Green Festival, The Victor Pinchuk Foundation, Barnard College, the Arison Foundation and others in the B2C and B2B spaces. In addition to her client work, Joanna supports the agency’s marketing and PR efforts; she also serves as a leader of the alumni board for the New York University School of Professional Studies-Division of Programs in Business.
JOHN PUSKAR
VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ABC CAMPAIGN
FRONTIER COMMUNICATIONS

John Puskar is an innovative, high-energy, and data-driven marketing, communications, and digital leader. His experience spans Capitol Hill leadership, the country’s most competitive political campaigns, his own startup, and Fortune 500 corporations. He currently leads the America’s Best Communities Campaign, an innovative $10 million effort led by Frontier, The Weather Channel, CoBank and DISH, to revitalize small town America. John is pursuing an MBA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Kenan-Flagler Business School and completed his undergraduate degree in political science at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

JUSTIN SAIA
SENIOR DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS,
TRANSACTIONS, CRISIS & RESTRUCTURING
FTI CONSULTING

Justin P. Saia provides communications counsel to FTI Consulting clients around critical issues impacting their enterprise value and reputation, including mergers and acquisitions, crises, capital raisings, litigation, restructuring, and bankruptcy. Previously, Justin spent nearly a decade as an advisor and spokesperson on a range of topics for multinational corporations, advocacy groups, and elected officials. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from Auburn University, an MBA from Syracuse University, and will complete a graduate degree in strategy and innovation at the University of Oxford at the end of this year. Justin also serves as a faculty member at the Martin J. Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University.

SHAWNA GALLAGHER VEGA, APR
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
XAVIER HIGH SCHOOL

Shawna Gallagher Vega is an accredited public relations professional who blends comprehensive management experience with a journalism background, leveraging both to provide strategic counsel to organizations. A former teacher, Shawna has worked in education communications since 2009. In her current role, Shawna directs all strategic communications and media relations efforts at Manhattan’s Xavier High School; previously, she was director of communications for The Cathedral School of St. John the Divine. She has bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Boston College and earned her APR in April 2013. She received the PRSA Palm Beach Chapter’s “Rising Young Professional Award” in 2012.
John Puskar is an innovative, high-energy, and data-driven marketing, communications, and digital leader. His experience spans Capitol Hill leadership, the country’s most competitive political campaigns, his own startup, and Fortune 500 corporations. He currently leads the America’s Best Communities Campaign, an innovative $10 million effort led by Frontier, The Weather Channel, CoBank and DISH, to revitalize small town America. John is pursuing an MBA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Kenan-Flagler Business School and completed his undergraduate degree in political science at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Justin P. Saia provides communications counsel to FTI Consulting clients around critical issues impacting their enterprise value and reputation, including mergers and acquisitions, crises, capital raisings, litigation, restructuring, and bankruptcy. Previously, Justin spent nearly a decade as an advisor and spokesperson on a range of topics for multinational corporations, advocacy groups, and elected officials. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from Auburn University, an MBA from Syracuse University, and will complete a graduate degree in strategy and innovation at the University of Oxford at the end of this year. Justin also serves as a faculty member at the Martin J. Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University.

Shawna Gallagher Vega is an accredited public relations professional who blends comprehensive management experience with a journalism background, leveraging both to provide strategic counsel to organizations. A former teacher, Shawna has worked in education communications since 2009. In her current role, Shawna directs all strategic communications and media relations efforts at Manhattan’s Xavier High School; previously, she was director of communications for The Cathedral School of St. John the Divine. She has bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Boston College and earned her APR in April 2013. She received the PRSA Palm Beach Chapter’s “Rising Young Professional Award” in 2012.

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WELCOME TO
prsa & prsa-ny

Each of the 15 Under 35 Award recipients will receive a one-year membership in PRSA and PRSA-NY provided through the generous support of our Crystal Sponsor, NAPS.

ABOUT PRSA
Chartered in 1947, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is the largest and foremost organization of public relations pros in the world. Its more than 22,000 professional members are joined by more than 10,000 university and college students who participate in the related Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA).

PRSA provides professional development and networking opportunities, sets standards of excellence, and upholds principles of ethics for its members. The organization also advocates for greater understanding and adoption of public relations services, and acts as one of the industry’s leading voices on pivotal business and professional issues.

ABOUT PRSA-NY
Organized in 1947, the New York Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA-NY) was responsible for helping to found its parent organization. Today, with more than 600 active members working in business and industry, counseling firms, government, associations, hospitals, schools, professional services firms and nonprofit organizations, the chapter is the third largest local section in the country. Its broad range of services and educational programs have made PRSA-NY the industry go-to organization for knowledge and networking for communications professionals throughout the metro area.