

Livanos Family

Silver Spoon *Food Arts* presents the March 2012 SILVER SPOON AWARD for sterling performance to the Livanos family. Since 1957, when Greek seaman **John Livanos** went to work washing dishes at a Manhattan diner, until today, when the **Livanos Restaurant Group's** seven restaurants gross \$31 million a year, theirs has been an American success story based on hard work, smart choices, and family solidarity.

Their odyssey began when John Livanos arrived in New York City from Greece. Although he came from a family of commercial fishermen, 18 months at sea had convinced him that his future was on land, and he went to work at an uncle's diner. Soon he was buying his own diners, first in Queens and then on Long Island and in Brooklyn. The move to more upscale dining came in 1985, with Livanos' restaurant in White Plains, which later became the thriving **City Limits Diner**. A bigger move came in 1992, with the creation of **Oceana**, an elegant seafood boîte in Midtown that earned three stars from the *New York Times*. (It has since relocated to a larger space in the theater district.)

Today, Livanos Restaurant Group also owns **Molyvos**—a rustic Greek taverna just relaunched with a head-to-toe renovation—and **Abboccato**, an Italian restaurant. Both are near Carnegie Hall and Broadway theaters. Outside the city are **Burger DeLuxe** in Wayne, New Jersey, another City Limits Diner in Stamford, Connecticut, and the family's newest creation, **Moderne Barn**, which opened in 2010 in Armonk, New York.

Although John Livanos remains active, the company is run today by his children **Nick**, **Bill**, and **Corina**. All live near one another in Westchester County north of Manhattan. Nick, who has degrees in management and from The Culinary Institute of America, takes care of the Manhattan restaurants and says that if he had a title, it would be CFO. Bill, who also has a business background, runs the suburban venues and handles wines and spirits. Corina, who was fresh out of college when Oceana opened, joined "just to help out" and never left, now monitoring reservations and keeping track of customers' preferences.

What made them all go into the business? "I think we sensed my dad's passion from the start," says Nick. "He made it seem so exciting. He came from a family of fishermen and had this craziness about how fresh the product had to be. To this day, he has relationships with fishermen at the east end of Long Island."

In a business that demands such a sacrifice of time and energy, multigenerational dynasties like that of the Livanoses are becoming rare. But they still exist, Nick points out. Just in Manhattan there are the **Bastianiches**, the **Maccionis**, and **Tony and Marisa May**. "The clientele gets a big kick out of it," he says. "Everyone loves it when the owner comes over and says hello, and we have plenty of Livanoses to say hello." —IRENE SAX

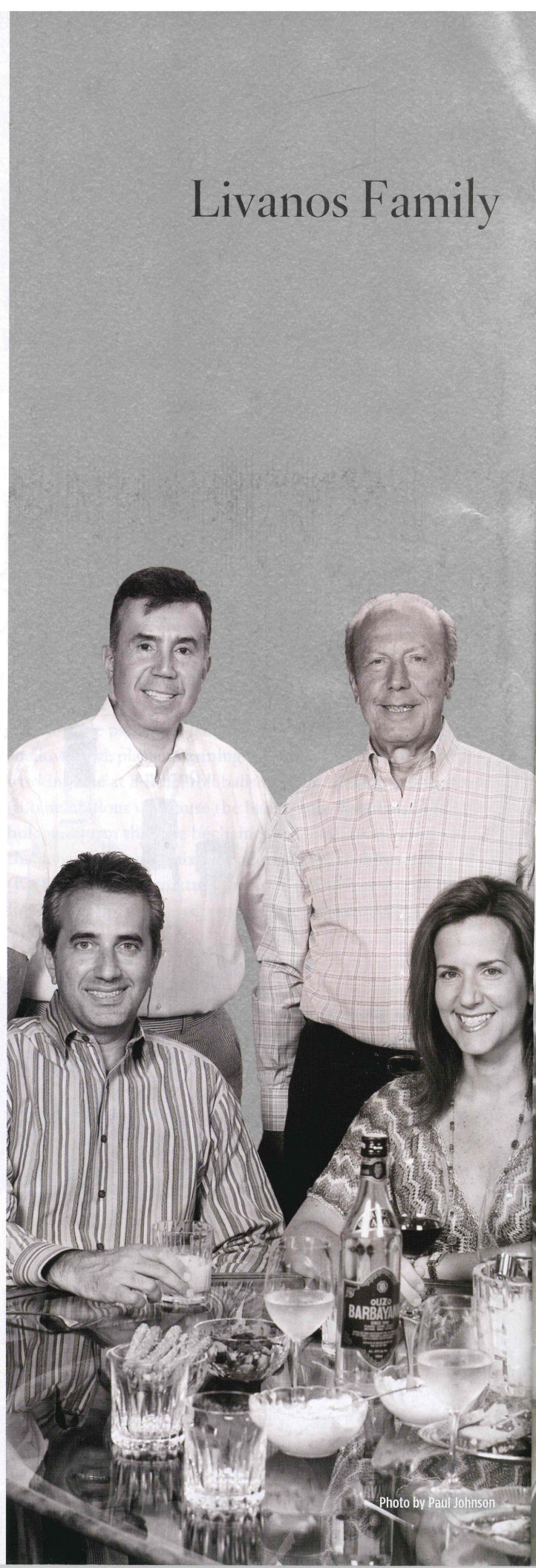


Photo by Paul Johnson