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## **Generation Next: It takes a Village to be successful, says Krysten DeGiglio**

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Growing up, Krysten DeGiglio was admittedly not a huge fan of tomatoes, but oh, how the times have changed now that the 30-year-old Holmdel, NJ, resident works as a regional sales manager for Village Farms — the oldest greenhouse grower in the United States, specializing in exclusive varieties of tomatoes, as well as cucumbers and peppers.

“I pop a Cherry No. 9 tomato like candy!” DeGiglio laughed. “The Heavenly Villagio Marzano is also one of my favorites. Although it’s great to snack on, I absolutely love to cook with it — and it is so versatile. If I’m trying to impress someone in the kitchen, it’s always my staple ingredient.”



Krysten DeGiglio

A graduate of Fairfield University in Connecticut, DeGiglio earned her bachelor's and master's of business administration degrees in accounting. While in college, DeGiglio studied abroad in Florence, Italy, for one semester.

"This experience sparked my interest to learn about different cultures and travel," she said.

After graduation, DeGiglio worked for Ernst & Young for four-and-a-half years, and then did a short stint with a pharmaceutical company before discovering her true passion for the produce industry.

"I was invited to attend the PMA Fresh Summit show in 2013," DeGiglio told *The Produce News*. "It was the first time I was really exposed to the produce industry and I fell in love with it. Since then, I thought this is where my passion lies, this would make for a fulfilling career."

But there wasn't an immediate "in" for DeGiglio, despite the fact that her father, Michael DeGiglio, is co-founder and chief executive officer at Village Farms.

"Truly being a public company, there are no family ties here," DeGiglio noted.

So she waited patiently, and in August of 2015, DeGiglio got a call from her father about an opening in the Village Farms sales department.

"There was a need to hire a Northeast sales manager," she recalled. "Village Farms entered into an exclusive distribution agreement with Great Northern Hydroponics, a greenhouse grower with 70 acres of production capacity in Leamington, Ontario. This provided an opportunity to extend the company's entire product line into the Northeast to new and existing customers, and gave Village Farms incentive to hire a millennial with a go-getter mentality."

And just like that, DeGiglio knew she was the right person for the role. She interviewed with Bret Wiley, senior vice president of sales for the company, and a couple months later, DeGiglio was working her dream job.

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“I will always remember what Bret told me before I joined the company,” she said. “He informed me that produce is one of the most challenging industries to work in and that I was going to need tough skin. Looking back over the last two years, I would have to say he was right.”

But those challenges haven’t come without their rewards.

“The most rewarding part for me is working for a company that I’m proud to represent. Village Farms is good for people and the planet,” she said. “I feel fortunate to be part of a team of experienced professionals. Many of my colleagues have worked in produce their entire careers. The knowledge they share is not something you can learn from a book — it’s invaluable.”

One of her greatest mentors, she noted, is her father, who without his help and guidance “this wouldn’t be possible.”

“I’ve never met someone who works so hard,” DeGiglio said. “He never gives up, he never stops, and he always follows through. Personally, I feel extremely fortunate to work for the company at the same time as my father. I get to observe what a great leader, friend, confidant and CEO he is to all at Village Farms.”

And being a part of that Village Farms family is something DeGiglio certainly does not take for granted either.

“Even though a lot of us work remotely, when we come together it truly feels like we’re a family, and that’s really unique,” she said. “It makes me want to keep working harder and harder.”

As far as obstacles she faces in her role as a sales manager, DeGiglio said those mostly revolve around fluctuating supply and demand, which can be difficult at times, but working with her team to identify and solve problems that arise is an essential part of the job.

“My position relies on all the other facets of this business, from production to transportation to marketing to sales. It’s a very integrated network, which is what I love so much about it,” she noted.

That sense of teamwork and camaraderie among her coworkers and clients is something DeGiglio plans to continue honing in on in the New Year.

“My goal is to take my relationships to the next level,” she said. “I want to become more of a consumer-focused specialist and help to integrate sales and marketing internally and externally, which in return will escalate the partnerships that we have.”

After all, it does take a Village.

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