



Staten Island Advance

Casting agent Vinnie Potestivo is recruiting 'real' reality TV stars from Staten Island

Published: Thursday, April 21, 2011

By Ben Johnson

STATEN ISLAND, NY — Vinnie Potestivo is not interested in the next “Jersey Shore” trainwreck, but he does want a little Staten Island drama.

This week, the “Millionaire Matchmaker” casting director finalized plans for a new reality series on OWN, a.k.a. the new Oprah Winfrey Network. Plus, he’s already accepting applicants for a “career makeover” show that aims to help the unemployed get back on track.

Both projects are the continuation of a particular niche the Tottenville High grad is trying to inhabit: Respectable reality television.

Potestivo is enlisting the help of legendary business headhunter Stephen Viscusi, who will whip a group of those unemployed for over a year to use new tools and break back into the job market. Viscusi helped Potestivo form his own company when he left MTV in 2008, after the young casting star worked on everything from “TRL” to “The Ashlee Simpson Show.”

The show for OWN, a full series as yet untitled, will feature women and couples who are looking to improve their own lives and relationships through the use of dance.

“Our focus is on casting women and couples from the New York area who have something in their life that they can turn to dance for to help them through,” says Potestivo, 33. “Whether it’s surprising friends at the upcoming homecoming or a wedding anniversary or reunion of some sort, we want to help them with a special moment of their life that they want to acknowledge and make memorable.”

Filmed at the Broadway Dance Center this summer, the show will bring everybody from novice toe-tappers to serious dancers to the small screen, and Potestivo wants Islanders, because as a former resident himself, he — along with anyone who has seen “Mob Wives” and “Jersey Shore” — knows Staten can bring some interesting characters. He’ll be looking for them, too, as Vinnie Potestivo Entertainment does live casting in Manhattan.

“They have to be willing to make that commute to Manhattan for the show,” says the reality casting director, “And having made that commute myself, I know it’s not easy. But hopefully we’ll find some people with great stories on Staten Island.”

Considering recent reality television featuring Islanders, one might be hesitant to sign up; the camera doesn't exactly love the borough unless you consider disgust a form of affection.

Interviewed recently on ABC's "Nightline," Potestivo said that many in casting look for people with "the fire in their eyes" who believe they "deserve" to be on TV. But the former MTV master caster is on a different sort of reality TV mission.

"These are real services we're trying to give to people and connect the dots," he says. "This isn't something hokey; we're not trying to do shows about crazy people who want to act out on TV. We want real people with real stories, and I know Staten Island has that."