

BY JODI LEE REIFER

THE BIG 30

You might not recognize them yet — but these S.I. pop culture purveyors are worth keeping an eye on

Scoring success before you hit triple decades is so five minutes ago thanks to Paris, Nicole and anyone from "Laguna Beach."

But staying power is another story.

Think it sounds like something someone, somewhere — anywhere but here — could do?

To that, we say, "Hello?!" Ever heard of Christina Aguilera? The 26-year-old four-time Grammy winner spent her first years in Grasmere. You probably knew that. Maybe you even remember that David Johansen, frontman of the seminal '70s glam-rock band the New York Dolls, and '60s folk legend Joan Baez were born on Staten Island and made it big before 30.

But did you know a 26-year-old Stapleton singer/songwriter's new track just aired on ABC's megahit "Grey's Anatomy"? Or that the Chicago Bears can thank Tompkinsville for a 29-year-old who's proven himself one of the top defensive ends in the business? Or that a 23-year-old from St. George is now a globe-trotting Victoria's Secret supermodel?

To give props where props are due, and to inspire the under 30s out there pondering their futures as 2007 draws near, we've compiled a list of 30 promising musicians, actors, athletes and assorted artists with Island roots who are entertaining the public at large.

Some of them have legit hooks out there. Others are still dreaming, but determined. All of them are under 30.

And they're living proof that there's more to our current pop culture crop than the enduring laughingstock that is MTV's "I'm a Staten Island Girl."



EXECUTIVE CHEF:
Sean Quinn, 25, New Dorp

Quinn leads the line at Chadwicks in Bay Ridge. Since graduating from New England Culinary Institute five years ago, he's completed kitchen tours in Manhattan's corporate catering scene, at Vida Restaurant in Stapleton, Richmond County Country Club and ever-so-briefly at short-lived Grotto Steakhouse, formerly of Grant City. Quinn's credo: Simple flavors make quality ingredients stand well on their own. He opines that heavy sauces have no place on a plate and says, "If you're going to eat a piece of meat, you want to taste the meat."



MUSEUM DIRECTOR:
Emily Gear, 28, West Brighton

Gear was just 24 when she grabbed the reins of the Garibaldi-Mesucci Museum, the Italian culture treasure chest in Rosebank. The museum had only one employee (herself) and one permanent exhibit. Four years later, the executive director/curator has increased the institution's budget by 70 percent, bringing it up to \$200,000, adding festivals, more school programs and more language classes. She made that happen by getting the museum its own 501(c)(3) federal tax exemption status. "It sounds boring, but it means a lot to an organization," she says. "It means our pathways to funding are much broader." Also an accomplished painter, Gear brought home a medal from the Florence Biennale of International Art in 2005.

STAND-UP GUY:
Elijah Bullock, 24, West Brighton

You may have caught his recent act on MTV's "Wild 'N Out" or his appearances on "BET Comic View" and HBO's "Def Comedy Jam." Twice a month he co-hosts — with co-founder JP Justice — the "Grown Folk Comedy" series on the island. "Things you get in Manhattan, we're trying to bring to Staten Island for a cheaper price," says Bullock, who works the circuit at Caroline's, Stand-Up New York and the Laugh Factory. "Grown Folk" drops on the last Saturday of the month at the Cup in Stapleton and on the first Saturday of the month at Dominick's Panini King in Dongan Hills.



NETWORK EXECUTIVE:
Vinnie Potestivo, 29, Tottenville

After stints at PBS and the Sundance Channel, this head of talent development at MTV Networks has a major hand in shaping the way all of America sees Staten Island. So far, he's really reinforced some negative stereotypes. But we're not holding a grudge — we're just hoping this Wagner College grad uses his powers for good in the future. When he's not hiring reality show contestants and VJs at MTV (which raked up \$28.6 million in revenue last year alone), Potestivo is a highly regarded consultant in the TV development industry.



TOP MODEL:
Selita Ebanks, 23, St. George

Yes, angels really do strut among us. Tyra Banks herself passed the torch — and her Victoria's Secret Angel wings — to Ebanks on an episode of the "Tyra Banks Show" about a year ago. Discovered by scouts at age 17 while on a trip to Great Adventure in Jackson, N.J., the 5-foot-8-inch Ebanks owes her exotic beauty to a combination of Caymanian, Jamaican, Irish, Indian and African ancestry. Today, the jet-setting Curtis High School grad maintains homes in Manhattan, New Jersey, Georgia and Florida.

