

A Creator

An Interview with John A. Catsimatidis, Founder, Red Apple Group



The Catsimatidis family, John, Margo, Andrea and John Jr. stand before the soon-to-be-completed Ocean Drive luxury complex on the oceanfront in Coney Island.

EDITORS' NOTE John Catsimatidis was born on the Greek Island of Nisyros in 1948 and 6 months later his parents emigrated to New York City in search of a better life. They settled on 135th Street in Harlem and his father found work as a busboy and his mother was a stay-at-home mom. He is a true son of New York; he was educated in both the parochial and public-school systems earning his high school diploma from Brooklyn Tech. Catsimatidis enrolled in New York University to study electrical engineering, going to school during the day and working in a small grocery store on nights and weekends to help his parents pay the bills. During his senior year, with just 8 credits remaining, he dropped out of NYU to work in the grocery business full-time. By his 24th birthday, he was already a success with 10 Red Apple Supermarkets scattered along Broadway on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Now, four decades later, Red Apple Group has evolved into a diversified corporation that has holdings in the energy, aviation, retail and real estate sectors with over 8,000 employees, approximately 2,000 of which are located in New York City. Catsimatidis is a firm believer in giving back to the community and has been a strong supporter of the Police Athletic League for nearly 30 years. He serves on the Board of Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, the Hellenic Times Scholarship Fund, and over the years has served in a variety of volunteer positions in the Greek Orthodox Church.



John A. Catsimatidis

its terminals in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and Calverton, Long Island. United Energy Plus Terminals is headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and is a wholesale and commercial distillate gasoline supplier currently operating in 25 terminals throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia. Red Apple Real Estate owns, manages, and develops properties throughout the United States with a focus in New York City. It is committed to creating a residential experience that features luxury living options and amenities, with convenient neighborhood retail, to meet the demands of today's residents. Red Apple Real Estate projects such as The Andrea, The Giovanni, The Margo, and 86 Fleet Place are bringing new homes and new jobs to New Yorkers. Red Apple Group owns Gristedes Supermarkets, the largest grocery chain in New York City. Gristedes has been feeding New Yorkers for over 100 years and offers the freshest meat, produce, dairy products, baked goods, frozen foods, gourmet foods, and non-food items.

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John Catsimatidis' 86 Fleet Eagle development

COMPANY BRIEF Red Apple Group (ragny.com) is a conglomerate that owns and operates assets in the energy, real estate, finance, insurance, and supermarket industries. The family of energy companies within Red Apple Group forms one of the leading refining, mid-stream, and downstream integrated companies in the Northeast. Through its subsidiary, United Refining Company, it operates a 70,000 barrel per day oil refinery and over 400 gas stations and convenience stores under the brand names Kwik Fill, Country Fair, Keystone, and Red Apple. United Metro Energy is the largest supplier of home and business heating oil in New York City. It supplies and delivers biobeat, biodiesel, heating oil, ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel, natural gas, and gasoline throughout the New York Metropolitan Area and Long Island from

Will you highlight Red Apple Group's businesses?

Red Apple Group is in different sectors. It is well-known for its supermarket business but this only represents a small percentage of our sales. Roughly 50 percent of our business is in the oil and energy business and the other 50 percent is in real estate. We are also entering the media space as well as investments and my son and my daughter manage our investment portfolio.

What interested you to become involved in politics and to run for public office in New York City?

I thought there was an opportunity to make an impact and help the city. People have been urging me to run again but I haven't decided. It feels good to be urged, but remember, I am 7 years older than last time.

Will you discuss your philanthropic work and the areas you support?

I enjoy people, and I decided many years ago to be active in different charities. I am active in 15 to 20 charities, and my main focus is with the Police Athletic League.

I am also very involved in supporting school and education in challenged communities in New York. When I speak to kids, I say, "Look at me. I made it. If you work hard, you can make it too."

With all the success that you have achieved, how important has it been that you never forgot where you came from?

It is very important, because otherwise you become an arrogant SOB. I learned from Bill Clinton who, when he was doing a fundraiser or hosting a party, always went into the kitchen and said hello to the waiters and the busboys and the cooks. He valued people no matter what their role or responsibility. I thought that was great and I never forgot that my father started as a lighthouse keeper in Greece, and worked as a busboy in America. My father also worked as a waiter in an Italian restaurant in Astoria on weekends, because he spoke Italian.

Are you able to enjoy the process and celebrate the wins or are you always looking at what's next?

That is a part of my problem. I am a creator. I'm always looking to create something new. I try to teach that to my kids. This is why we are looking to create a new media empire. There is still so much to do that it is hard to step back and reflect, but it has been a great ride. ●