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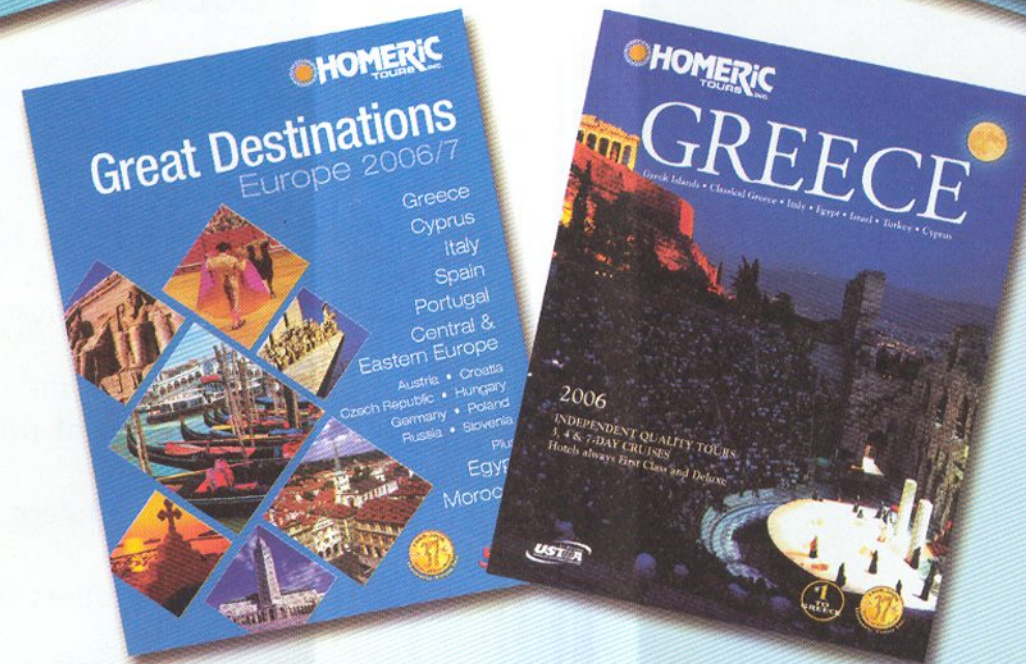
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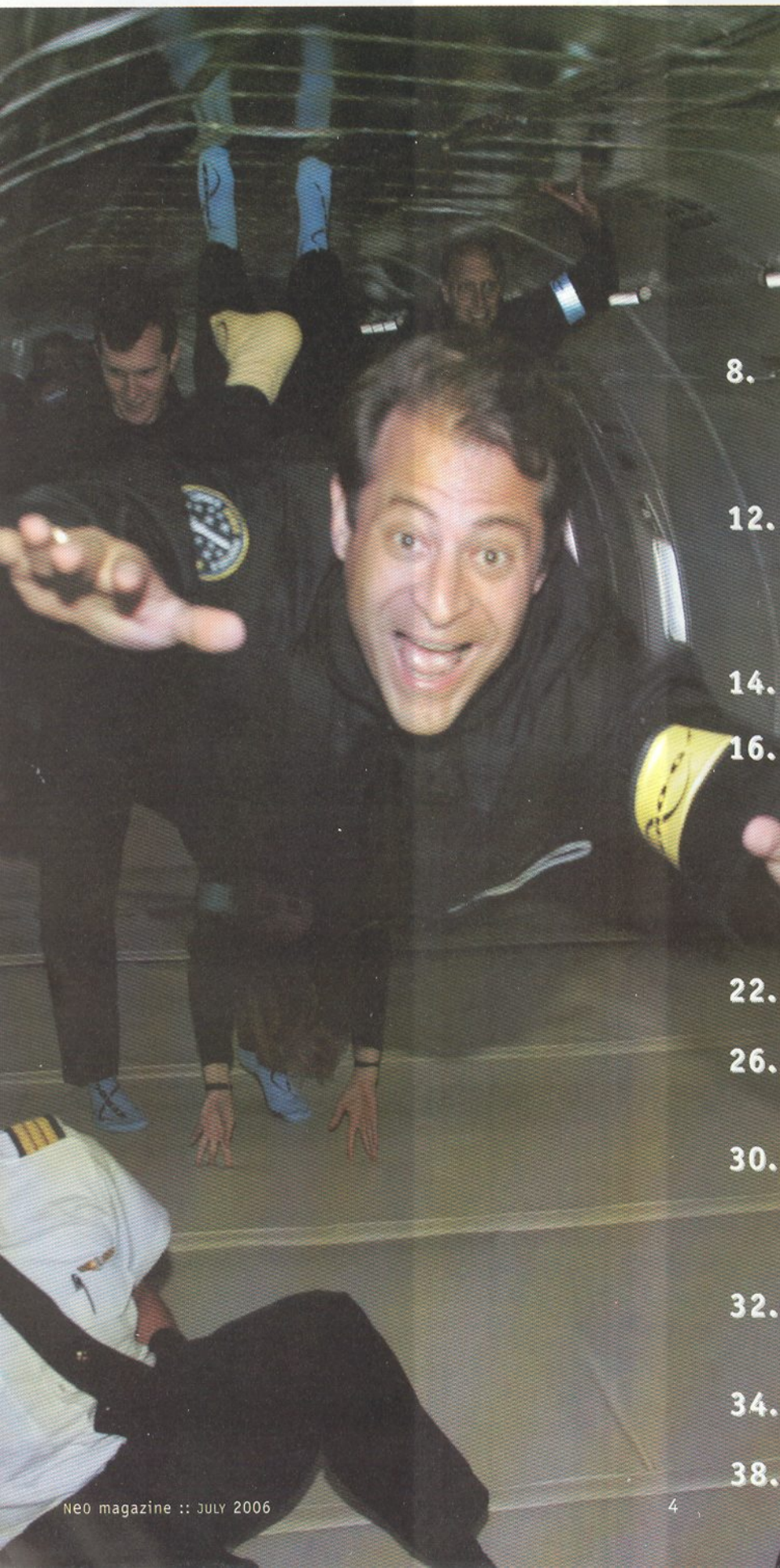
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NEO

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Dreaming of the stars

:: I was just a kid in 1969 and visiting Greece when the astronauts landed on the moon. And I remember sitting in the house of a neighbor named Maraki in the village of my parents in Kourounia, Chios where *Thia* Mariyoula had just served me a feast of baked okra, eggplant, and artichokes and she was puzzled why I wasn't eating (it was, uncannily, every food I hated most in the world at the time) and the conversation was all about the men who had just landed on the moon.

:: "Imagine them walking up there?" said the *horiani* as they watched me staring at *Thia* Mariyoula's food untouched (and *Thia* Mariyoula staring at me in confusion) and they also stared at the moon in the sky through the lattice of grapevines on Maraki's terrace. "Imagine them leaving their footprints up there?" they said of the astronauts. "What kind of people must they be? What kind of place must that be?"

:: The wonder went on for years and decades—"If we can land on the moon, we can do anything"—which very quickly soured into—"If they can land on the moon, why can't they invent a better can opener?" The heady '60s in which everything was possible and we could go anywhere, even to the stars, quickly fizzled into the space misadventures of the '70s and '80s and a world lost and guarded. And we've hunkered down into that mode ever since: thinking only of ourselves and our comfort and survival on a planet battling for life in a universe that might be teeming with life, if not endless adventure.

:: Peter Diamandis featured on our cover this issue might be a dreamer, but he's also a realist. He believes our world is limited and finite, and the universe is not. And he believes in what he calls the "economic engine" of capitalism and the inherent sense of wonder in all of us to get us to places that we can only imagine and might transform our lives and our "world." We suppress this sense of wonder as we get older and even our vacations to exotic places become pre-packaged tours with reliable tour guides speaking English.

:: But as Hamlet said, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." And we can always dream, can't we? -- which always made us so special in this world and our world so special when we were kids. (On the other hand, *Thia* Mariyoula, please, forgive me, I still have nightmares about your feast of baked okra, eggplant and artichokes.)

Dimitri C. Michalakakis

NEO ::magazine

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Photographers:
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Vassos Protopapas
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How green is my Valley

Phil Angelides and the governor's race in California

It was after midnight when the returns showed Phil Angelides beating Steve Westly (who had spent \$35 million of his own money) to win the Democratic nomination in the California governor's race. It was a squeaker (a three-point difference) and perhaps a harbinger of the general election that will see a born-again Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger bucking George Bush on border patrols, making nice with the teacher's union and burnishing his green credentials by riding a green bus and putting his trademark Hummer in storage.

"Together, we're going to fight to build the California of our dreams," Angelides told his supporters in Sacramento the night of his victory. "I'm grateful for all of the support you've shown me ... I won't let you down."

He said Westly was "extraordinarily gracious" in his concession call, which came only fifteen minutes after Angelides was declared the winner, and "I look forward to working with him, and have asked him to accompany me as we fight to build a better future for California." Angelides also said, "I believe we can give hardworking families a chance to climb the ladder of success. I believe we can give our kids the best education in the world. I believe it is time for a governor that California can count on to stand up for hardworking people."

Though Angelides was considered the better campaigner in the race and had the backing of the party, Westly had given him an unexpected scare because some political observers are saying California Democrats are more moderate and even conservative than the party thinks and Westly had appealed to that base. Apparently, Schwarzenegger thinks the same thing and he's taken to campaigning on a bus to reach those voters and also appealing to them with more moderate stands on the environment and education.

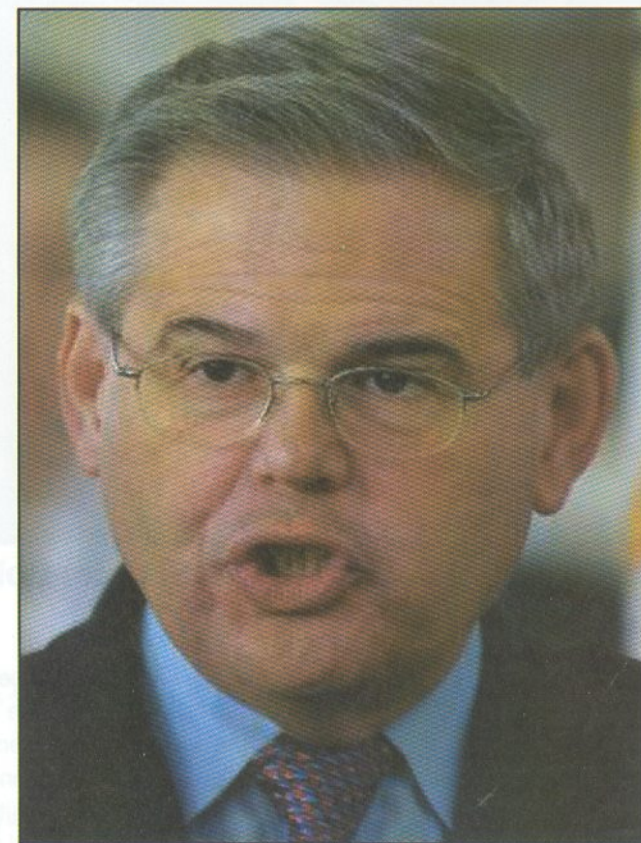
But Angelides is fighting back. A week after his victory he told a group of Fresno schoolchildren that "I want to make sure we have all the money we need to get the best teachers and the smallest class size." He said he would roll back the tax breaks for big corporations "and ask millionaires, people making over a half million dollars a year, to give up some tax breaks they've got from George Bush." (Schwarzenegger visited a school in Sacramento to tout his \$100 million budget to expand pre-K programs at low-performing schools.)

And Angelides is also hitting Schwarzenegger hard on environmental issues (which polls show nearly 90% of Californians use to judge a candidate) and reminding voters of his longstanding support for major environmental legislation like the California Clean Air Campaign, a ballot measure that would impose a tax on oil companies operating in California and divert the money—an estimated \$4 billion—to finance alternative-energy development. Schwarzenegger opposes it. "I'm against new taxes. Period," he says. Which makes Angelides charge that the governor is "blinded by his Republican ideology from making the right decision. It's going to take a lot more than a green bus to improve his environmental credentials."

The race is now just about even. And for the foreseeable future the governor says his Hummer will stay locked up in the garage, while the Angelides family touts the three hybrids that it drives.

The indispensable man in the Senate: Bob Menendez

He's not Greek, but Greeks say they never had a stronger supporter during his previous tenure in the House of Representatives than Robert Menendez of New Jersey or in his current position serving out Jon Corzine's term in the Senate.



"Paul Sarbanes said the 2006 elections are elections that will bring major changes in the U.S. Congress and if Greeks choose just one race to focus on it is the Menendez race in New Jersey," says Tasos Zambas of the Greek Americans of New Jersey for Menendez committee, which is holding a fundraiser for Menendez on July 7. "Sarbanes said Menendez has done more than most Greeks and Greek Americans to help Cyprus: he knows the issues, he's not Greek so he can't be accused of partisanship by the Turks, and he's very talented. He was the third ranking Democrat in the House, and from 1992 when he was elected to Congress, he's concerned himself with Cyprus."

Zambas and Menendez were Union City neighbors (Menendez's wife had taught Zambas in high school) when one day Menendez asked Zambas how things were going in Cyprus (Zambas was a refugee) and Zambas was blunt.

"I told him, oh, come on, you politicians are all the same. You talk and nobody does anything. And he said, what do you want me to do for you? I said I want you to take me to my house. From 1974 until now, 1995, I've gone every year to Cyprus and the Turks still won't allow me to see my house, even with an American passport. And he turns to me and says, you tell me

when you want to go and I will take you."

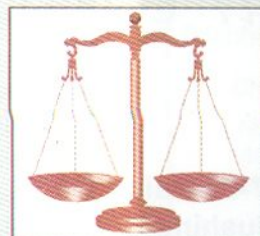
Menendez was in his second term in the House then and as Zambas remembers it the congressman promptly called the Turks and told them, "I have constituents that would like to visit their homes and I inform you from now that in August I will go to Cyprus with them and you can't stop me. If I have to I will make it a diplomatic incident at the Green Line and I will bring my constituents to see their houses." Menendez joined members of the Cyprus Federation on the trip and when they got to the infamous Green Line separating the Turkish from the Greek sector it took Zambas five hours for Zambas to get to his house only half an hour away,



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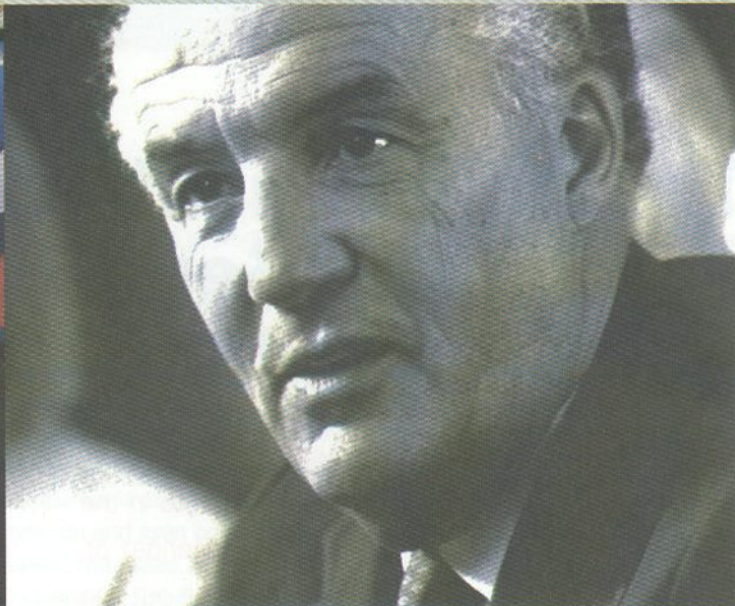
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The indispensable man in the Senate: Bob Menendez



but he got to see it for the first time in thirty years. "I might have been the first refugee to visit his house again and knock on his own door for the Turks to let him in," he recalls. "And we opened the way for others, because when Menendez came back he complained about all the delays and the red tape and the Turks then allowed more American Cypriots to visit."

Since then, Menendez has visited Cyprus and Greece several times (including with his children—"His daughter recently graduated Harvard and she's gone four times to Cyprus, and also his son," says Zambas. "This is how you instill in them an interest in the issues and how you build

relationships and show people that you care and get them to support you.") Most recently Menendez joined Olympia Snowe of Maine to introduce a bill in the Senate titled the American-Owned Property In Occupied Cyprus Claims Act (Senate bill S. 3520) which would make it possible for U.S. citizens who own property in the Turkish-occupied sector of Cyprus to seek financial compensation in American courts from the occupying Turks or the Turkish government.

"That would be unbelievable," says Zambas. "It would change everything."

The bill would give the President the right to initiate a claims program and the Secretary of State the opportunity to negotiate directly with Turkey over compensation, and also allow U.S. citizens to take their case to U.S. district courts. "AHI (American Hellenic Institute) congratulates Senator Olympia Snowe and Senator Robert Menendez for introducing this important legislation," said AHI President Gene Rossides. "We now have identical bills in the House and Senate."

Zambas says Menendez also single-handedly helped pass a House resolution last year urging Turkey to respect the rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarch and had this language included in a State Department authorization bill. "Menendez passed it on his own," he says. "He researched all the details on his own, then appealed to the churches to help. We have over 400 churches, he said, why don't you get every church to call its representative to vote for this resolution? You'll make my job easier. This bill, if it passes both houses of Congress, will become law."

The son of Cuban immigrants, Menendez has won easily in most of his previous races (he was appointed to his Senate seat last November by Jon Corzine, but won election as the crusading mayor of Union City and to the state assembly and senate before joining Congress) but he faces a tough fight in his Senate bid against Tom Kean Jr. "He'll need \$20 million to win the Senate and his opponent has good name recognition," says Zambas. "When you have a campaign that will cost \$20 million you need a lot of support."

New Jersey Greek Americans (about 100,000 in the state) are rallying to the Menendez campaign and the committee welcomes all to join the cause. "We're trying to reach out to as many people as possible," says Zambas. "We don't exclude anybody. Anybody who wants to help can join. It's not about me, though the Menendez family will be my friends for life. The point is this man can help us and has helped us, now how can we help him?"

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On the occasion of the upcoming 38th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress this month in Nashville, Tennessee, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios spoke with **NEO**.

NEO: What are your expectations for the Congress?

ARCHBISHOP: The Congress is a tradition for our church here in America and as always this type of meeting serves basically two purposes: First, for the people of our communities all over the country to be together and get a sense of togetherness. Second, to deal with the current issues on which we would like to have the participation of all the people.

NEO: What is the religious climate for the Orthodox faith in America?

ARCHBISHOP: If you compare America and Europe, you can immediately see a big difference. The limit of the lowest participation in America is approximately 32 percent. The maximum is 67. Sixty-seven is more in the south. In the north, they have the smallest participation of around 30-40 percent. However, 30-40, and if you go to 67, is far, far above the church participation of the average European, which is even below the ten percent. So in America you have a very interesting and encouraging phenomenon.

NEO: Any concern that Greek schools are not that "Greek" any longer?

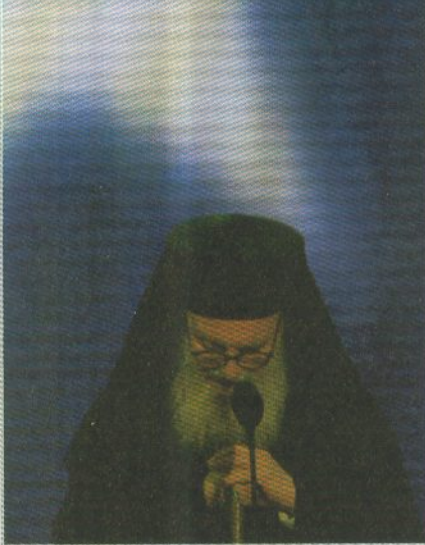
ARCHBISHOP: The amount of the Greek language and Greek knowledge might be a bit limited as we progress in time because of the change of generations. However, the programs that we use in the schools are programs that continue to be very much oriented towards learning the Greek language and Greek culture. We have today in our *omogenia* parochial schools in which a very small number of the children are of Greek origin. There are schools in which out of 120 students you have only four children that belong to Greek Orthodox families. The rest are children from the neighborhood. But this is the interesting thing to know, the program, the curriculum, is fully Greek as if it were a full Greek Orthodox school of a full Greek Orthodox parish. This is characteristic of the tenacity and the strong desire to maintain as much as we can the Greek tradition both in terms of language and in terms of culture.

NEO: Has the experiment of using English in the mass been satisfactory?

ARCHBISHOP: Well, it is a matter of necessity that when you have a community of fourth generation members and quite a number of mixed marriages you need a bit more of the English. So we try to do this without damaging, drastically, the Greek part. But I notice that sometimes even non-Greeks prefer the liturgy in Greek.

NEO: Is the new generation stepping up for the church?

ARCHBISHOP: It happens in varying degrees in various ages. For instance, the people in the 22-35 age bracket, being young professionals and trying to establish their careers, are much more involved in their professional lives and most of them are still not married. When you go over this 35-year-old age limit, you do have an increased participation and very often a personal commitment.



A talk with Archbishop Demetrios

NEO: How does the church get teens to participate?

ARCHBISHOP: One activity that has been successful is missionary work, though by missionary I don't mean to evangelize, I mean to do something in terms of a mission inside, or even more, outside of America. It's a standard thing during the summer that young people go to Africa to assist there in building churches, and the Orthodox Christian Mission Center under SCOPA has quite a number of young people involved in these activities in various countries outside of America. This has been a very popular thing for young people.

NEO: How does the church stay relevant?

ARCHBISHOP: Human beings are human beings from the beginning of creation until now and face the same problems of eternity and death and at some point they must face their faith. What is the purpose of life? What is the meaning of death? This is a matter of faith and this is where the church gets involved. It is a combination of both the need of the people and the mission of the church for people to connect and

discover their faith.

NEO: How does the church cope with an increasing number of mixed marriage?

ARCHBISHOP: The issue of mixed marriages becomes more and more an opportunity. It's a reality, it happens. And as we say many times, it's a two-sided street. It's not only mixed for the Orthodox partner, but for the other side, as well—be it Roman Catholic, Protestant, or whatever. Mixed marriages is an issue for all faiths who have their members in a mixed marriage. And it's an opportunity to offer to the non Orthodox partner a real, clear, loving and genuine opportunity to know the Orthodox religion.

NEO: What is the status of St. Nicholas Church at Ground Zero?

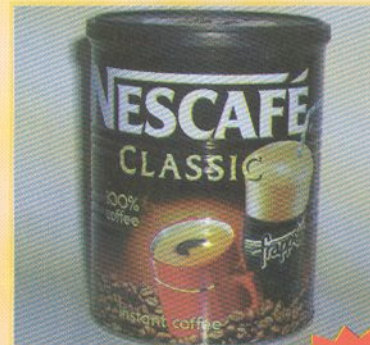
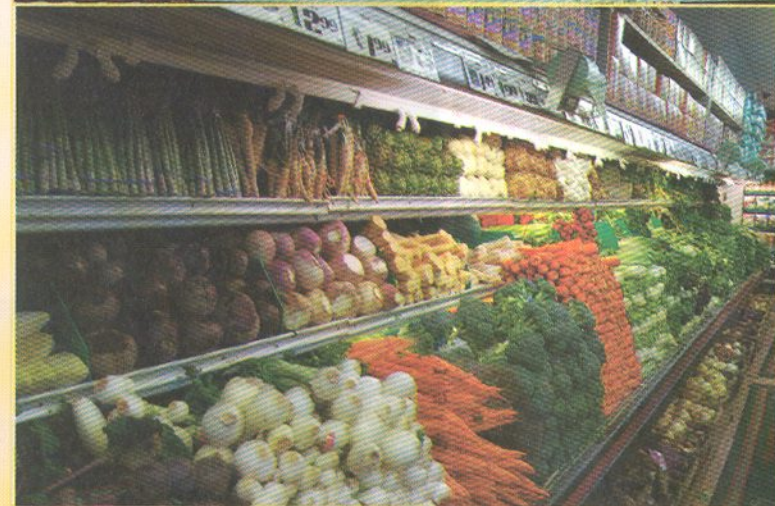
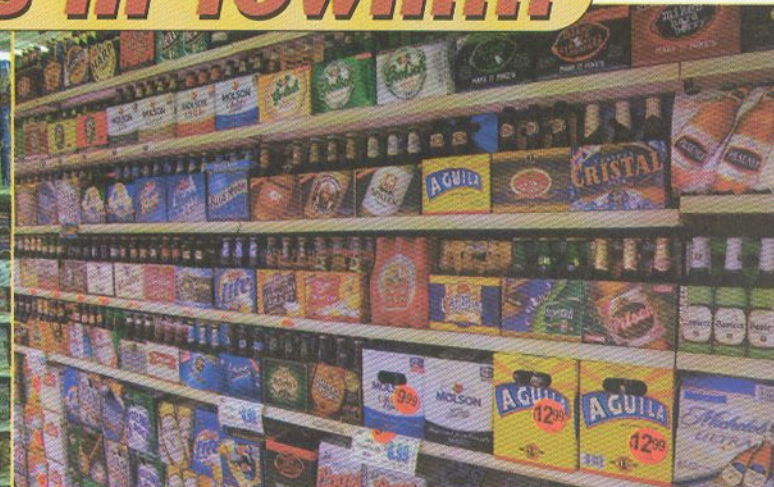
ARCHBISHOP: We have so far the absolute commitment on the part of the city, state and others of having the space and the space will be more than the original area owned by us. Because they have realized this will not be a small church for a small community as it was before the catastrophe, but a place that will be a place of rest and a haven for all the people who will visit the site. The church now will also be directly on Liberty Street. However, because of the extensive underground work that needs to be done, it will take some time for this to be completed and it might take two or three years to get to the point where we can start building.

NEO: What gives you the greatest satisfaction in your position?

ARCHBISHOP: The sense that we deal with people who exhibit a tremendous eagerness to do as much as possible and the best possible for the church and any good effort. I have been astonished at the degree of sacrifice, financial and otherwise. It's very easy for someone who has plenty of money to write a check—here's my check do what you are doing and have a good time. That's one thing, and we appreciate that. It's another thing to have someone who says, well, I'm here; I'm here from morning till night, on the level of the parish, on the level of the metropolis. You have lawyers that offer their services for free. I say no, the church will pay, this is your professional time and it's valuable. But I encounter that every day: wonderful human beings who create in me a feeling of peace and joy and thankfulness to God for these people.



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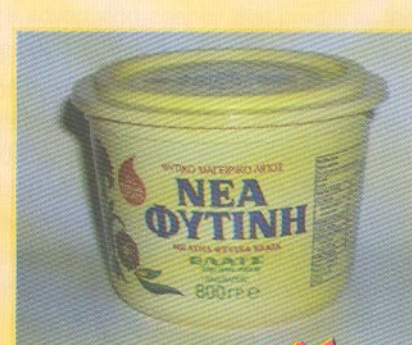
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Margo Catsimatidis dances her way to Broadway and wins the boss' heart

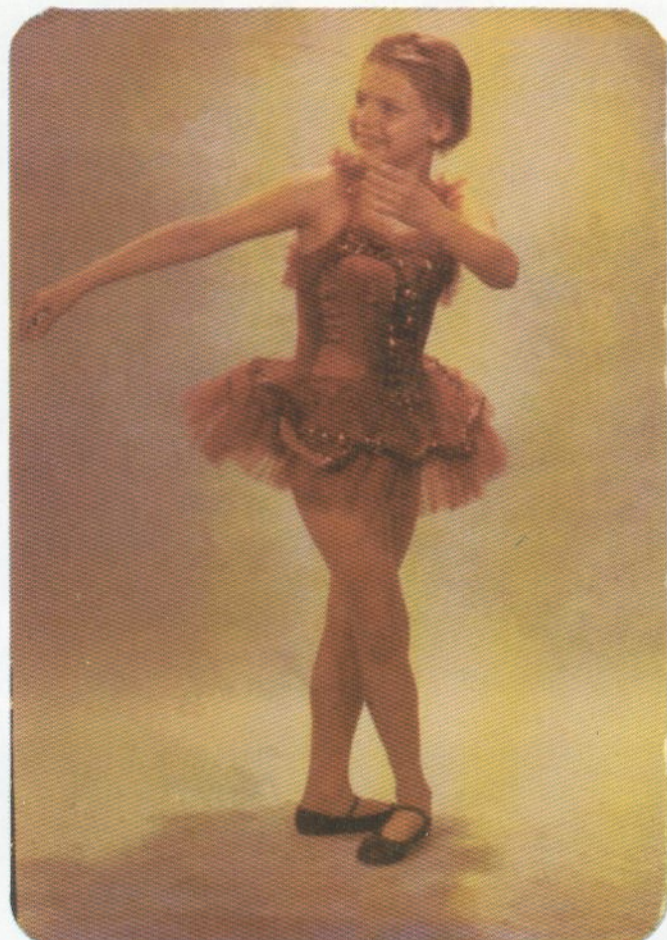


by Dimitri C. Michalakos

Margo Catsimatidis is a businesswoman and the head of MCV Advertising Associates in New York. She's also a philanthropist who together with her husband John has thrown her energy into benefiting everything from the Columbus Avenue Festival (One year they had Skitch Henderson performing on Columbus Avenue with his 40-piece orchestra), to the Tolstoy Foundation of West Nyack (she's of Russian ancestry), to the Hellenic Times Scholarship Fund which every year grants thousands of dollars in scholarships to kids. And she's a hostess whose platinum locks dominate New York society and whose regular dinner guests include Bill and Hillary Clinton and the proverbial list of "presidents and kings."

Yet she came to New York from Indianapolis with just \$100 in her pocket, she really wanted to be a ballet dancer (she danced with the Bolshoi as a teenager), she even wanted to be a nun, and she calls herself shy. "I have always been a behind-the-scenes kind of person," she admits in her confiding baritone. "I rarely do speaking engagements. When I danced, I only had to express myself with my movements, not speak them."

But if her husband runs for mayor of New York in 2009 as planned, she will become First Lady and more prominent still ("John says to the chil-



dren he wants one of them to be president of the United States someday") and it will be the culmination of an epic journey from the hardscrabble south side of Indianapolis to millionaire's row on Fifth Avenue and possibly the mayor's mansion and a Broadway fable come to life.

"When you come from a poor town and a poor family you work extra hard to escape," she says of her life back in Indianapolis. Her grandfather was a field marshal in Tsarist Russia who met his wife during a royal ball. They had to flee the country and came to America, where Margo's father abandoned the family when she was still young. "My family had to struggle to make ends meet," she says. "My mother had to raise four children as a single parent."

Margo was the youngest of four (until her mother remarried when Margo was 12) and when she was told at 10 she needed special braces to support her legs and feet she took up dancing instead to strengthen them. "And I found that I was pretty good," she says. Good enough to get on television and good enough to audition for the Bolshoi Ballet when it came through Indianapolis. "It was an amazing experience," she says. "It was my first professional job and I made \$10...I began speaking Russian to one of the dancers before going onstage and a KGB agent came between us."

But she had always dreamed of going to New York (fueled by watching *Ed Sullivan*, among other shows, on the family's one black-and-white



TV in the living room), and at 17, after graduating Harry E. Woods High School she told her parents her ambition (her stepfather Lee Vondersaar — "an amazing man" she calls him — helped design a gear for the pioneer satellite Telstar). "My parents were upset," she remembers, "they wanted me to go to college on a scholarship. But I said if I don't go now I will never leave Indy."

So she took \$100 and drove down with friends to New York. "And when I arrived, I felt that I had finally come alive," she still marvels. "I felt the world around me. I felt ready to explore it as if I had been just born." She lived with friends on 81st Street between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues and in two days she got the lead in an Off-Broadway play called "Keep Your Shirt On, Buster." She also did temp work as a Kelly Girl to pay her rent ("I could type 80 words a minute") until in a few years she got to audition for the Zurich Ballet and they offered her a job as a soloist.

But even Broadway fables have their heartache. "I was 15 and in rehearsal in Indianapolis when I did a big jump and came down and I knew I had done something bad to my knee," she recounts. She came back to dance in two weeks, but the injury nagged her, and when her dream job

with the Zurich company opened up she had to make a decision. "I knew that my knee and my life as a dancer would not survive very long," she decided. She gave up dance and then she heard "about this guy that had just opened a store around the corner from where I lived. They told me he was looking for a secretary."

The Broadway fable resumes. John Catsimatidis proved "tough, but fair" as a boss, she loved business, she loved him and his "genius" for business, and at a HANAC dinner at the Plaza Hotel she was called to the stage where John was waiting at the microphone. "I have been walking around for the past few weeks with this in my pocket," he announced. He pulled out an engagement ring and started to put it on her finger. "Well?" she said. "Well what?" he said. "Well?" she prompted him again. "Will you marry me?" he finally popped the question.

Costa Hayden snapped the moment, Archbishop Iakovos presided at their wedding in 1988 and they went to Disneyworld on their honeymoon. "Neither of us had ever been there and we thought it would be fun," she says. And it's been fun sharing in his business ventures ever since ("I have never seen anyone do so many things and be brilliant at all of them; John has a sixth sense about things, he loves to save companies—he's a builder"). Officially, she heads the advertising agency that produces the ads for the company's divisions, including Gristedes Foods and United Refining, as well as John's previous venture with Capitol Airlines. And she is self-taught. "I needed a creative outlet," she says. "I had a lot of ideas, had never used a computer, but I decided that this was something I would like to learn. So I bought a computer and stayed in the office all hours of the night to learn how to produce ads."

A large part of her advertising work is for charity, and as co-publisher of *The Hellenic Times*, a large part of her time every fall is dedicated to chairing with her husband and Nick Katsoris the paper's star-studded scholarship fund gala in New York.

"I try to keep busy," she says. "If I can make a difference in a positive way then that is good. It isn't something you think about, you just do it. I also look forward to the summers, when I can spend time with my family. Even I need a break sometimes." The family (including Andrea and John Jr.) usually summers on John's native island of Nyssiros and at the Hamptons.

And she did go back to Indianapolis for her 20-year class reunion. "Out of 350 graduating classmates, I was the only one to leave Indianapolis," she says. "Don't get me wrong, it was a nice place. But not for me."



PETER DIAMANDIS: A man on a mission —to the stars

by Dimitri C. Michalakis



He always
had stars
in his eyes.

"Since I was about eight or nine years old my mission on this planet has been to try and get people off the planet," admits Peter Diamandis from his corporate offices in California (he fields several companies) on his zealot's mission to see private space flight and exploration become routine. "I was in my fifth grade," he recalls, "and we were discussing the planets. I didn't understand why, but I knew in that moment that my 'mission' in life would be the exploration and development of space. From that day on, everything I did or dreamed about had a flavor of space. When I won the 5th grade 'Dental Poster contest' it was a drawing of an Apollo launch vehicle blasting off with the slogan 'Going away? Brush three times a day!'"

In the years since, the 45-year-old serial "astropreneur" founded the Students for the Exploration & Development of Space while still a student at MIT which now has chapters around the world, the International Space University for the study of space with a permanent campus in Strasbourg, France and ancillary campuses around the world, a myriad of companies including the Zero Gravity Corp. which offers private weight-

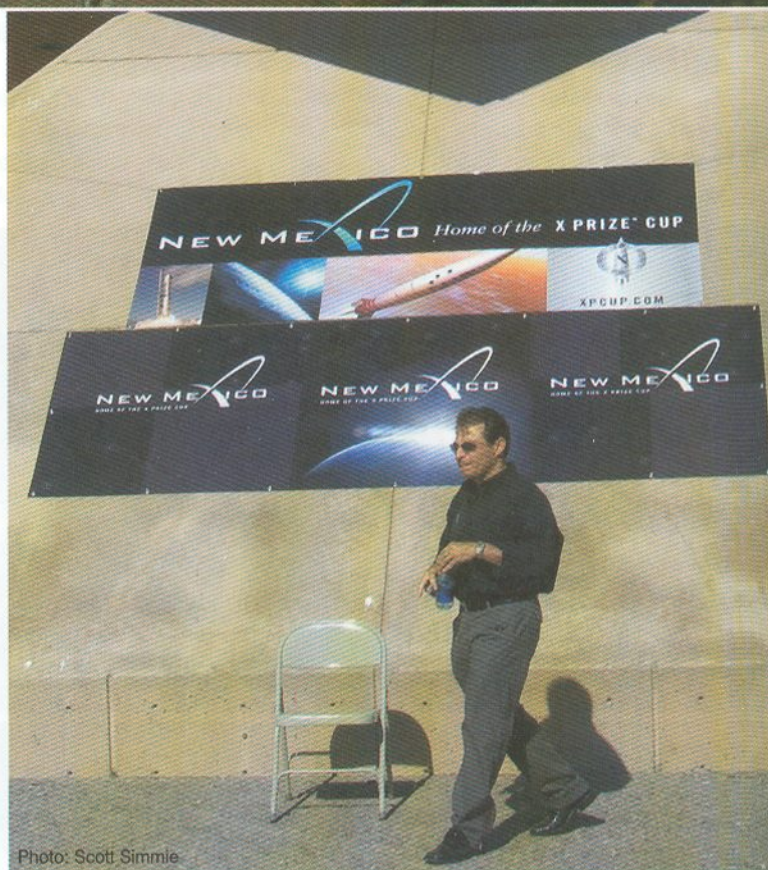
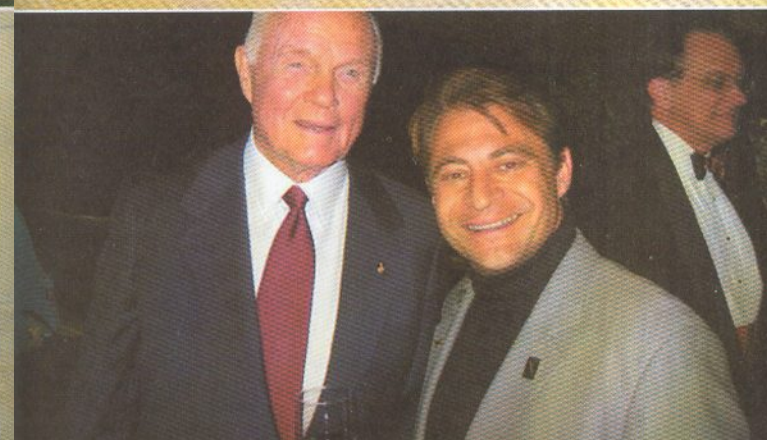


Photo: Scott Simmie

less space flights, Space Adventures, which brokers flights on the Russian Soyuz spacecraft, and his crowning achievement: the X Prize won in 2004 that spurred competition from around the world to privately build and fly a spacecraft that could make two suborbital flights with passengers for a record prize of \$10 million (an effort which Diamandis spent more than a decade trying "to get off the ground").



"What I felt was a great deal of relief," he remembers of his X Prize triumph in the Mojave desert. "So many folks had invested in me and there had been such a sense of disbelief that this could actually happen that when it did happen and it happened safely, I felt elated and relieved. It was very exciting." And it proved his point that what he calls the "two

strong economic engines" of tourism and entertainment could power a race to the stars. "It was an amazing experience watching these teams compete and focus on this \$10 million prize," he says. "And at the end the teams probably spent \$100 million to win a \$10 million prize."

And he's ridden the rocket of momentum ever since. The X Prize Foundation now has heavyweights like Larry Page of Google and Elon Musk of PayPal on its board and a string of new prizes and challenges. An annual event called the X Prize Cup will be held every October in Los Cruces, New Mexico with over \$3 million in prizes for a competitive launch of 30 rockets. "It's meant to be the America's Cup or the NASCAR of space," says Diamandis.

There will also be a genomics X Prize for rapid gene sequencing which he says could provide a copy of their gene sequence to anybody who needs it "and could bring the cost of health care down by a factor of ten or a factor of a hundred." Finally, there will be an automotive X Prize to foster research on a vehicle that could get more than 100 miles to the gallon and also reduce emissions.

On the entertainment side, he has founded a Rocket Racing League to build what he calls "a brand new generation of rocket-powered airplanes, the first of which will be unveiled this October at the X Prize Cup and these planes will try to create the NASCAR of space, where you basically have these rocket-powered vehicles racing right in front of you on a three dimensional race course."

His success has prompted others to join the private space race, including British airline mogul turned astropreneur Richard Branson, who recently founded Virgin Galactic which by 2007 hopes to rocket paying customers into space, as well. "My mission was to try and bring about this industry," says Diamandis of the rivalry. "It's not a competition; it's the fulfillment of a dream. I'm trying to build this industry with lots of different companies providing these capabilities. I'm looking to create the airline industry, not one airline."



Besides, he has other goals and larger ambitions. "I've set as my personal goal to be among the first private explorers on the moon and I think that's something that doable in the next ten to fifteen years, by 2020," he states. "And everything that we hold of real value on this planet, everything that we fight wars over—energy, metals, minerals, real estate—is in near infinite quantities in space. The earth is a crumb in a supermarket filled with resources and the first trillionaire will be made in space. The ability for humanity to maintain its growth requires us to expand beyond the earth into space."

As to the risks of blasting off, he says, "My answer is that as the child of immigrants, I am exceptionally happy that people took the risks hundreds of years ago to cross the Atlantic and open up this new world. Should we think of going back five hundred years and telling these people, oh, don't take the risk, somebody's going to die? No, we're thankful they did. And in the same fashion why should we stop people now from taking risks when they're on the verge of the greatest exploration humanity has ever done? I am a risk taker. I am willing to risk my life to go to the moon or out to the stars, that's what I believe in."

"I understood his passion," his mother Tula has said. "It was just hard for me to embrace it." And his father Harry, who came from Lesbos and made himself a physician, had expected his son to follow him in the profession. "I grew up with their expectations that I was going to be a doctor," admits Diamandis, who was born in the Bronx, New York and went to high school in Great Neck, Long Island. "But in my heart, my passion and my desire was to be an astronaut, to be a space explorer."

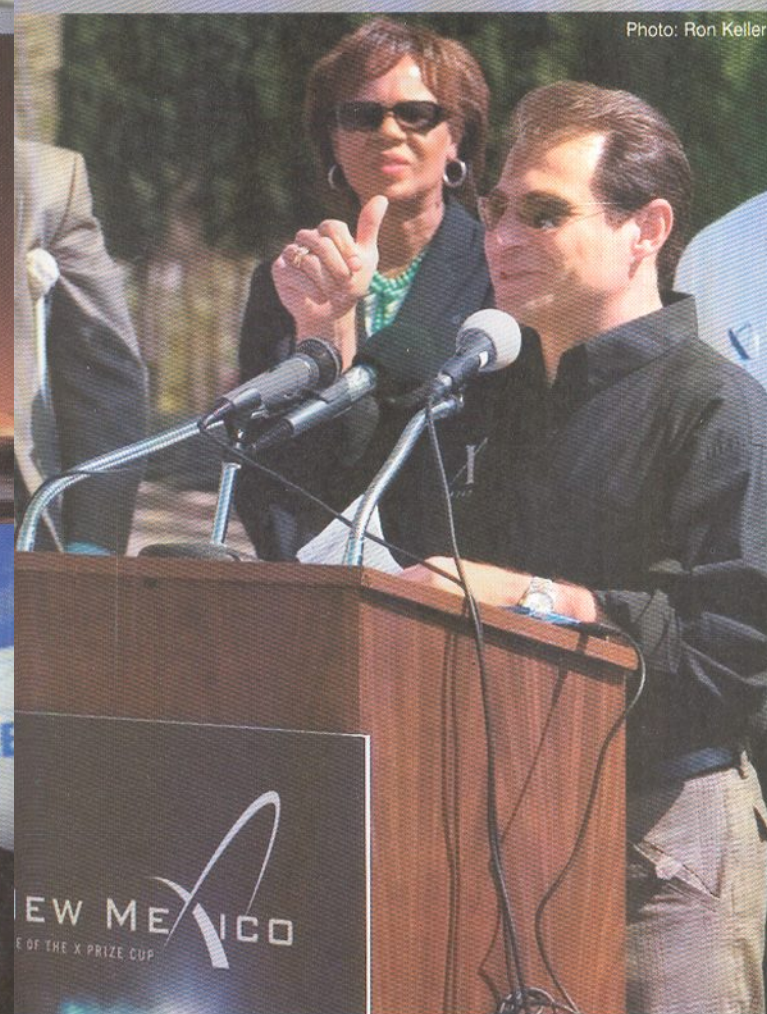
It was the late '60s, Apollo was going to the moon and Diamandis was enthralled. "It was the closest thing to a religious calling," he says. "It became my purpose, my mission." He built rockets and spaceships and at 11

started giving lectures to the family on space. "One particular evening I made a little theater for my parents, grandparents and sister, sat them down and told them about exploring space," he remembers. "After the lecture, my dad gave me \$5. I realized then that there was money to be made in space!"

He went to MIT to study molecular genetics as a prelude to medical school ("I rationalized going to medical school as a way for me to become an astronaut") and there launched his student space organization and space university. He also got to meet the NASA astronauts. "And I realized that being an astronaut really meant being a government employee and it meant going into space when they told you to go, and that over the course of your career if you were lucky you might go once or twice, and it was very mismatched with my mission of space travel, which was much more like a scuba diver or a mountain climber or any kind of explorer that you get a chance to do what you want to do when you want to do it," he recalls. "So I decided that I wanted to do this privately."

He took a leave from Harvard medical school to get a masters in Earth Space engineering from MIT, "because I decided by then I wasn't really going to practice medicine," he says. "I wanted to be able to start my own companies and build my own rockets." (He did go back to Harvard to get his MD and make his parents happy.) Meanwhile he got his International Space University off the ground. "And it's now the world's largest graduate institution for the study of space," says Diamandis proudly. "We have graduates from over 90 countries around the world, and 2000 graduates by now. People come there who are engineers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, historians, architects, policy makers all with a passion for space and they meet and study space from all the different disciplines with the understanding that opening a space frontier will really take a multicultural and multidisciplinary approach and that's my goal."

Photo: Ron Keller



In 1993 he also launched a company called International Microspace that won a \$100 million government contract for a launch vehicle system (which the Clinton administration later axed in budget cuts), and with former Space Shuttle astronaut Byron Lichtenberg he started the Zero Gravity Corp. for weightless flight which only two years ago finally won FAA approval and launched its first flights. "I renew my faith in this by recognizing it's hard and by realizing that it's my mission in life and it's something that will take a long time to do," says Diamandis of the endless delays and deferred hopes.

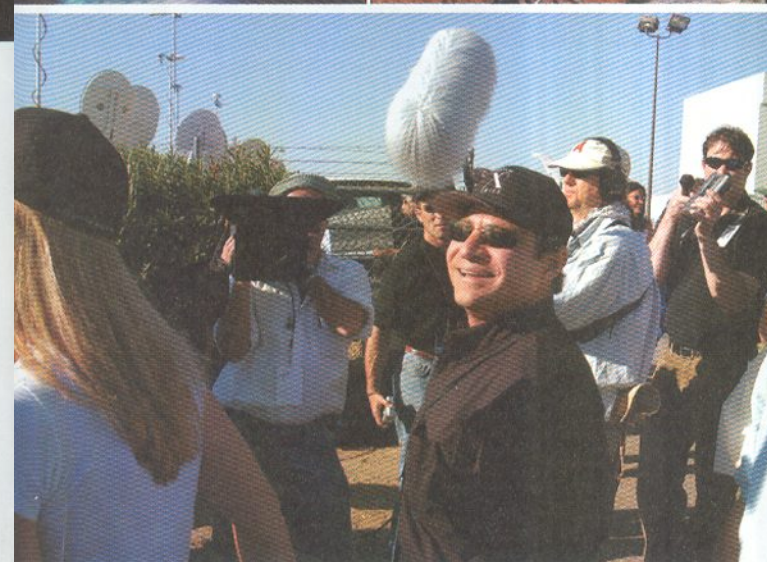
Which is what beset his crusade for the X Prize that he started shortly after reading a book about Charles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic and the \$25,000 prize that fueled the race. "As I was reading I realized that the \$25,000 put up by Raymond Orteig really instigated nine different teams to spend \$400,000 to win a \$25,000 prize. It was a very efficient way to cause this breakthrough in aviation. And I ended up seeing that as a model to bring about a new generation of private spaceships that would allow the rest of us to travel into space. It was the missing link for me."

He launched the X Prize in 1994, raised some money, then pitched his message to anybody who would listen. "The sales pitch then was that the space frontier was critical for humanity, that the cost of going into space had been going up for the last four years and the only way to bring the cost down and bring the reliability up was to move it out of the government world and into the private world," he ticks off his selling points. Then someone suggested using St. Louis as the launch of his venture, since it had given inspiration to Lindbergh's plane and saw the building there of the Mercury and Gemini space capsules. "So I announced it under the arch of St. Louis," he says. "I had twenty astronauts there, I had the head of NASA, the head of the FAA, the Lindbergh family. I had incrementally worked on building the credibility of the concept and bringing the very best people together."

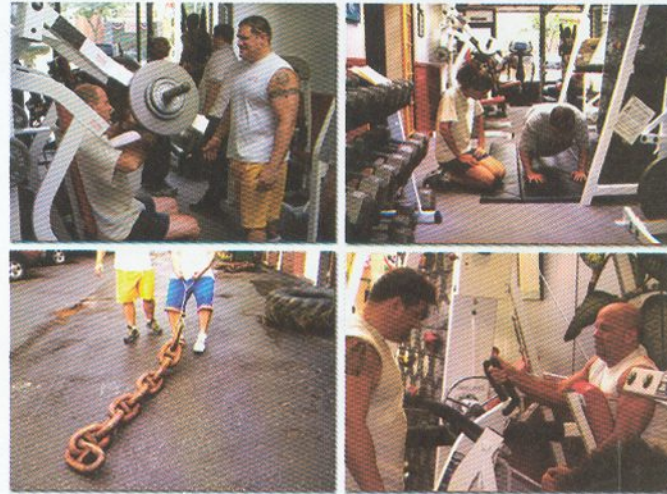
And in 2004 in the Mojave desert, a craft designed by Burt Rutan and financed by Microsoft billionaire Paul Allen won the X Prize out of 26 teams from seven countries registered to compete, including Israel, Rumania, Argentina, Great Britain, Canada, the U.S. and Russia. Which proved Diamandis' point that private financing could work better and faster than government funding, and the ability to go into space by individuals existed now, not in the future.

"Two weeks ago I took a trip where I took off from California, I flew from California to New York, I was there for a meeting and I flew from New York to DC, I was there for a meeting and went from DC to Florida, from Florida to Chicago, from Chicago back to LA, and I did that in just 48 hours," says Diamandis. "And I thought as I was sitting in my airplane seat looking out the window, about how much I had covered and what it would have taken to do that a hundred years ago. It would have taken me probably a couple of years to cover what I covered in 48 hours, if I didn't die along the way. So the fact that people think about space as being difficult right now is only because they haven't looked at what our ability as humans is to overcome our own self-imposed limitations."

On his self-appointed mission to the stars, Peter Diamandis admits to none.



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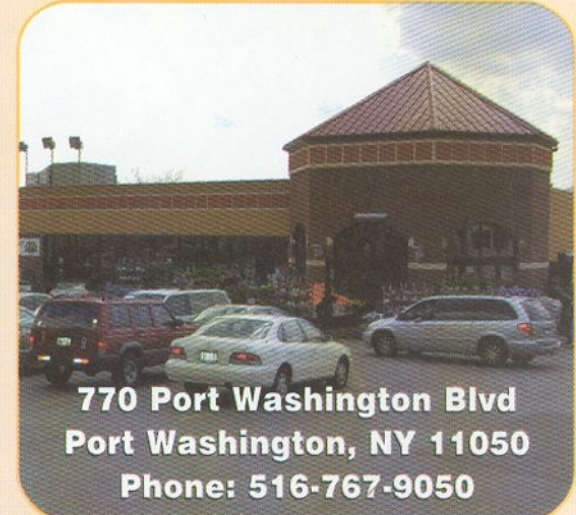
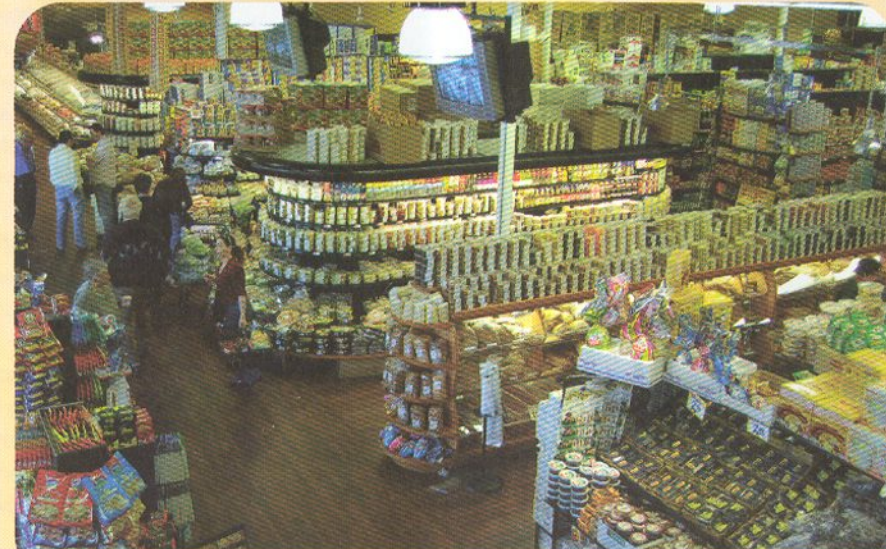
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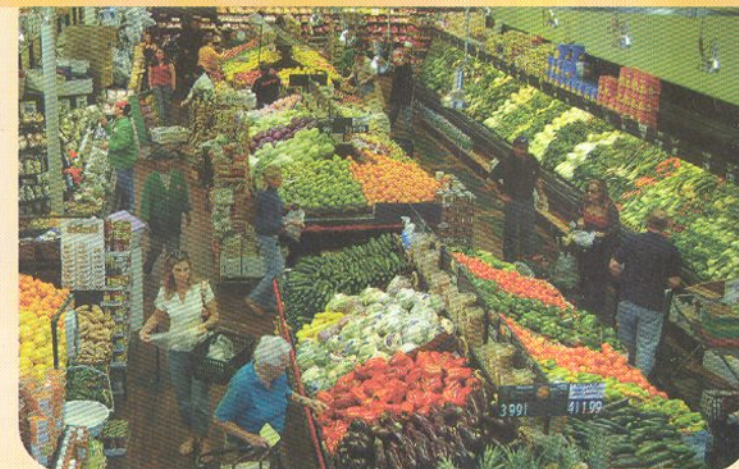
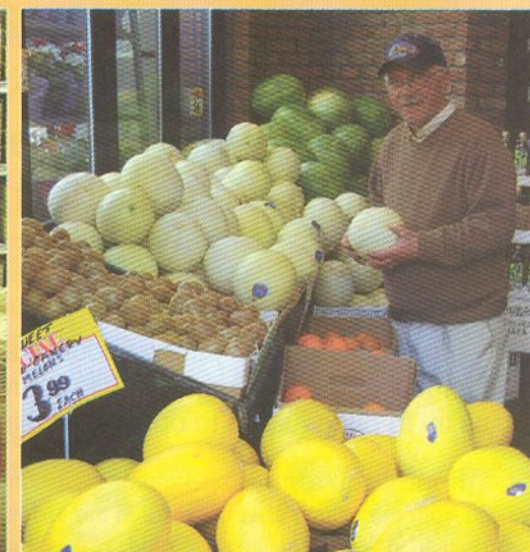
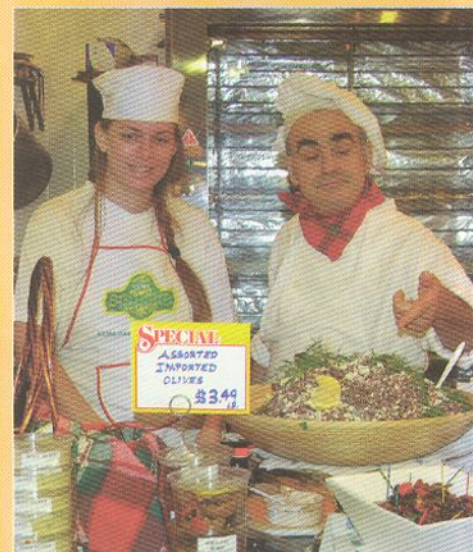
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The saga of the Assyrian Greeks and their claims to oil-rich portions of Iraq



Assyrian Greeks were driven away from Mosul in Iraq nearly 100 years ago and many settled in Greece.

Now they are considering a class action lawsuit to seek compensation.

by Demetrios Rhompotis

Seventy Greek Assyrian families could claim compensation for lost property in northern Iraq, as reconstruction plans try to bring justice to oppressed minority groups.

Thousands of Assyrians, also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs, were driven from the oil-rich area of Mosul in the 1910s. For decades, those who settled in Greece hesitated to press claims, fearing reprisals against their compatriots in Iraq. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein now brings new hope to the cause.

"Our people lived there for thousands of years and they threw them out violently," says Steve Sorros, whose grandparents were expelled from the Mosul district. "Of course, we do not wish to return there... but [we] have every right to be compensated. And our property was where the oil is."

Sorros, who emigrated to New York in 1976, believes the interests of oil companies overrode human concerns. He hopes Greek Assyrians will pursue a class action lawsuit, as Holocaust victims did against Swiss and German financial institutions, winning \$20 billion.

The case has potential, according to lawyers like Nick Karambelas of the Washington-based law firm Sfikas & Karambelas. "There might be a strong legal base for compensations," he says. Karambelas has experience in such matters, representing families that lost property in the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

Assyrians are still classed as foreigners in Greece, which may help

the case, he adds. Six thousand emigrated from Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. Only around 1,000 are naturalised citizens. The rest have no papers. Karambelas says this refugee status means they did not give up rights to their land.

Another Greek American lawyer at one of New York's largest consulting firms - who asked to remain anonymous - was even more optimistic. He estimates descendants of the expelled Assyrians could demand 20 percent of the profits since oil started to be exploited on their properties - an amount that could reach billions of dollars.

Greek authorities are largely oblivious to the brewing controversy. Last November, the Athens News asked Adamandios Vasilakis, Greece's permanent representative to the UN, if the government was aware of the situation - and willing to push it into the global spotlight. Vasilakis said he had no idea and promised to find out. Nothing has happened since. The Greek foreign ministry has not commented on the situation, despite repeated requests.

The time is ripe for political settlement for Assyrians in Iraq and abroad. They dare not hope for an autonomous state like the Kurds. Cultural freedom is all they ask, according to Kyriakos Batsaras, president of Union of Assyrians in Greece. "Whatever the Muslims get, this is what we also want, nothing more, nothing less," he stresses.

Yet the Assyrians may be excluded from the final settlement in northern Iraq, sources there claim. Instead of being recognised as a minority group, they are being dismissed as Orthodox Christian Arabs. "For a people with 7,000 years of history, it's ridiculous to call us that," Batsaras says.

Greek Assyrian odyssey

Today 4.5 million still consider themselves Assyrians. Their empire once stretched across northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, Turkey and Iran. Nineveh - the ancient capital near Mosul - may have been the world's first city. The kingdom crumbled in 612 BC, scattering the people into small pockets around the Middle East. They embraced Christianity in the 1st century AD and still speak Aramaic, one of Jesus Christ's languages.

Over the centuries, the Assyrians have been persecuted for their ethnicity and their religion. They enjoyed some autonomy under Ottoman rule in the early 20th century, because it was difficult for Imperial forces to subdue their militia. This delicate balance ended when the Ottoman Empire massacred Christians - Assyrians and Armenians alike - in 1915. Winston Churchill described it as "whole districts blotted out in one destructive holocaust".

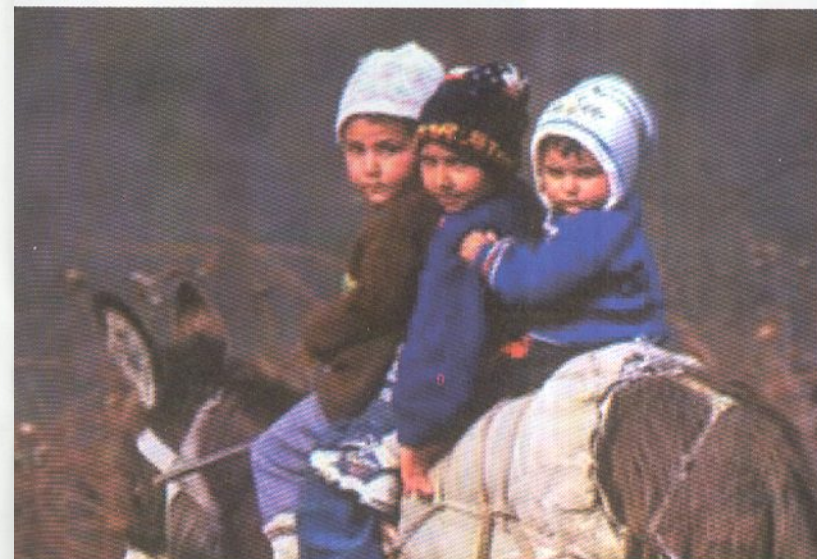
Sorros believes oil-hungry foreigners prompted the attack. "They used the Muslims to expel the more educated Christians. After they threw them out, they drilled the oil. Our forefathers did not receive any form of compensation."

The late Nissan Yaou - president of the Union of Assyrians in Greece for many years - supported this theory. His written testimony attests: "Oil was running into the river and people used it to burn wood that had not yet dried." Locals called the stream "Kriya" (black), because it brimmed with the crude liquid. During the winter snowfall, the oil turned to asphalt, which had to be scraped off to cultivate the land.

Yaou documented the expelled Assyrians' flight. They initially sought refuge in Iran, then Christian Russia, followed by the Black Sea port Novorossisk. They decided to return home in 1922, as the Mosul district was under British rule.

Yet English authorities in Constantinople stopped their ship, claiming an epidemic had struck their area. The Assyrians were lumped in with the people fleeing the Asian Minor disaster - and re-routed to Greece. They landed at Makronessos, which later became a notorious prison island.

Conditions were rough there. The refugees would draw water and wash from a big hole, encouraging the spread of disease. Around 10-15



people died each day, among them Yaou's stepmother. They were moved several times to Keratsini, a monastery in Poros and the military barracks of Kalamata, where an estimated 4,000 people perished. Locals warned them not to drink the contaminated water, but no one understood Greek, Yaou explained. At the end of 1923, the Assyrians finally settled in the



Athens suburb of Aegaleo, building a church in the memory of Saint Andrew.

Further troubles back home

Assyrians who remained in the Middle East suffered as well. They fought for the Allies in World War I, but were left without ammunition and support just before the conflict's end. They fled to Baghdad, losing one-third of their population to attack, disease and hardships.

Britain, France and Russia promised to help establish an Assyrian homeland in the Mosul district, but this never came to pass. During the formation of the modern Iraqi nation in 1933, civilians were massacred and 60 villages destroyed. Batsaras says that English authorities moved 80,000 Arabs into the abandoned area, harshly oppressing any remaining Assyrian resistance.

Iraqi forces razed another 200 towns in the 60s and 70s, as well as scores of ancient churches. Saddam Hussein's "Arabisation policy" forced more people from their homes in the mid-80s. After the Gulf War, 250,000 Assyrian refugees joined fleeing Kurds. Batsaras stresses: "When you hear about ships full of Iraqi refugees, their majority are Assyrians."

Search for justice

Both Sorros and Batsaras hope all Assyrians eventually could return to a safe and tolerant homeland. In the meantime, those in Greece will pursue compensation for lost lands and revenue. At least 70 families are eligible.

Sorros plans to push the case through powerful Assyrian organisations in the US, whose leaders met with the President George W Bush and his administration in March 2003. "For 70 years big conglomerates drill oil from my grandfather's backyard," he says. "At least something should be given to us."

Amanda Castleman contributed to this report.

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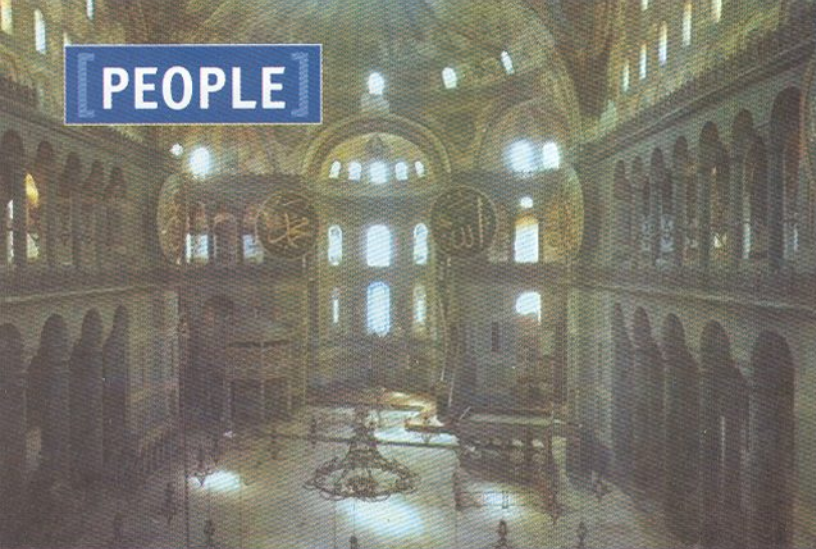
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Chris Spirou launches effort to "free Agia Sophia"

The Free Agia Sophia Council of America spearheaded by former New Hampshire Democratic party president and gubernatorial candidate Chris Spirou is launching what it calls an international "movement committed to restoring the great church of Agia Sophia located in Istanbul (Constantinople) Turkey, as a functioning church of the Orthodox Christian Faith and to reestablishing Agia Sophia as the Holy House of Prayer for all Christians of the world and the Central Basilica (seat) of Orthodoxy that it was before the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks."

At a press conference in New York, Spirou said, "At the time of its capture, Agia Sophia, the 'Great Church,' as it was known, was the largest, most revered and most majestic Christian Church in the world. It was called the 'Mother Church' of Christianity and served as the symbol and central Basilica of the Orthodox Christian Faith."

"Nothing like it has been built before or after Agia Sophia. Today, the government of Turkey operates Agia Sophia as a so called 'museum' named Ayasofya Müzesi, hosting local and international trade shows, music festivals and fashion shows. Talk about sacrilege. Talk about defacing of a holy site. Talk about disrespect for a church of God. Talk about abuse of holy spaces and holy figures."

He said, "The Free Agia Sophia Council of America is committed to pursuing every peaceful, diplomatic, political and legal avenue available in the European and International arenas to attain our stated objectives." The Council's lead attorney is the noted international human rights lawyer Steven Schneebaum, who is based in Washington, D.C.

Saint Sophia was built during the 6th century by the Byzantine emperor Justinian.

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The event will feature a documentary in English by AKTINA TV (WNYE-Ch. 25) about the history of Cyprus from ancient times to date, a cultural program with poems about the Turkish invasion written by the late Lucy Maroulleti including readings from her book "The Echo Of My Footsteps", Musical program with Giakos Kontemeniotis and Yiorgos Koliass and a Photo Exhibition titled "Beyond The Division"

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Aphrodite's Sweets under new management

Aphrodite's Sweets, a Greek and international pastry shop, is now under new management and promises to be this year's revelation in Whitestone. With Jordan Karalazarides in command, this already well-established *zacharoplasteio* offers new temptations for your palate, such as Apple Cheese Pie and Oreo Mousse Cake, which can seriously tempt even the most committed dieter. Supplier to Peter Lugar Restaurant, among others, Aphrodite's Sweets hopes to be your purveyor as well when the situation calls for one (or more than one) dessert that will crown an inspiring dinner or an aspiring coffee meeting.

(Aphrodite's Sweets, 20-07 Francis Louis Blvd. Whitestone, NY, Phone 718 224-1774)



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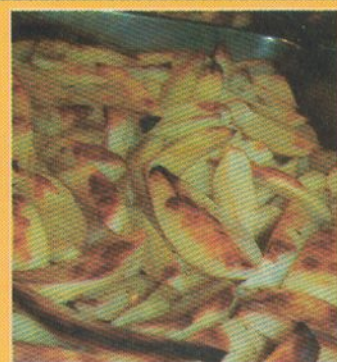


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Coney Island's Wonder Wheel

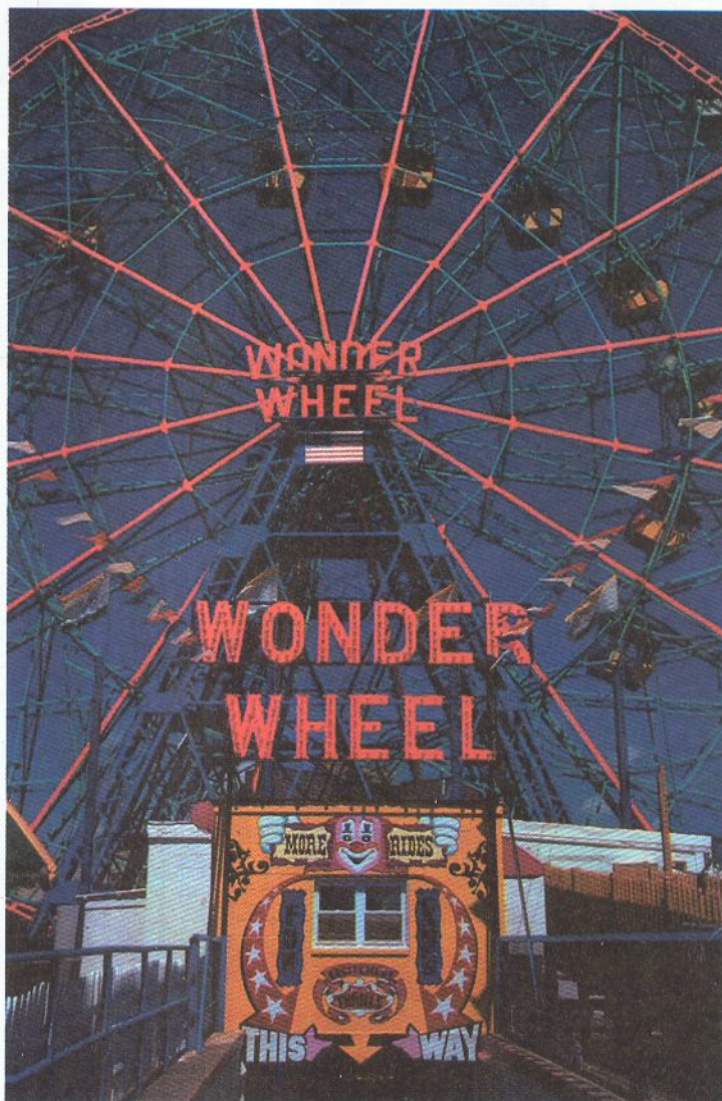
by Katrina Mitzeliotis

"My father was a character," says Dennis Vourderis, co-owner of Deno's Wonder Wheel Amusement Park in Coney Island, which he and his brother Stavros inherited from their father, Deno, the seaman from Aigion, Greece, who jumped ship in Baltimore in 1939 and in 1980 became the proud owner of Coney Island's oldest ride. "He had a lot of guts," says his son. "He didn't have a formal education, but he had a lot of guts. He once told me, if I had the brains that you have, I wouldn't be where I am today, because you think things out too much. You just have to go with it."

Which is exactly what Denos Vourderis did all his life. Born the seventh of 23 children, he jumped ship in America when he was only 18 and when he saw a line one day in the street he decided to join it. "He thought it was a bread line or something," says Dennis. It turned out to be a line to enlist in the U.S. Army, but Deno joined anyway and served four years as a chef, cooking for German and Italian prisoners in New Jersey and winning medals and his citizenship. Then after the war, he rented hot dog carts and sold franks to the workers who were constructing the Tappan Zee Bridge and the students of Columbia University and City College. "I went to the best schools," he once said. "If I could read, I'd be richer than Rockefeller."

It was while selling hot dogs that he wooed his future wife, Voula, with a typically gutsy move. She was selling hot dogs with her father across the street and one day to impress her he asked her to deposit his money in the bank for him. "And he would go to the bank, withdraw the money, add it to the next day's receipts, and give it to my mother," his son still recalls with a chuckle. "Hey, do me a favor, he would say to her. I was a little too busy to go to the bank. Take this to the bank for me again. And she would say to him, wow, you're making a lot more money than we are." He also took her on weekend outings to Coney Island, where one day he got down on one knee in front of the Wonder Wheel. "You'll see, one day we're gonna own that big wheel," he told her. "Sure, sure," she said.

The biggest and proudest wheel in Coney Island was the Wonder



Wheel, built as a Ferris wheel with sliding cars that could hold 144 people, towering 150 feet, and with a diameter of 140 feet. (It became an official New York City landmark in 1989.) But it was out of reach for Deno, until the late '60s when he sold the hot dog cart he had bought with \$4,000 borrowed from his daughter's wedding gifts and took over the Anchor Bar restaurant in Coney Island. Then, in return for fixing the kiddie rides, he got rent-free space to run Deno's Snack Bar in Ward's Kiddie Park, until the owner told him that he wanted to retire. "Look Deno," he said, "you got a wonderful family. They're all supportive of you, they're all helping you. You guys would be great for the park. I want you to take over." So in 1981, Deno Vourderis bought the kiddie rides he had been fixing and in two years he paid off the \$250,000 cost of the Wonder Wheel and later bought the land.

"My father would work day in, day out, opening to closing, seven days a week," says Dennis. "He enjoyed watching the children have fun, and he enjoyed hard work, and the fruits of his hard work: watching his children grow and having the opportunities he didn't have." Dennis worked the snack bar in the summer with his mother and brother

and his sister Aristeia (there is also sister Helen), and he worked with his father on the rides. "He was tough, oh, God," he says. "He was a tough cookie. The workers respected him and they knew when he was around and they had to be on their toes."

But his son says his father was also a soft touch in other ways. "I think because he caught so many breaks in his life and got so many opportunities, he realized, you know what? I want to help some people that didn't have the opportunities I had. So he would give back to this community, whether by doing promotions on the beach or in the park, sponsoring fireworks, sponsoring shows, bringing in handicapped groups, or bringing in children." During Desert Storm, he invited the families of soldiers to the park for free. And he would open up the park on Sundays to the kids from Coney Island's Salt-n-Sea church and mission.

Vourderis died at 74 in 1994 but the family has kept the Wonder Wheel turning ever since. "He enjoyed giving back and this is the road that he's put us on," says his son. "I miss him."



LAFAYETTE GRILL & BAR: A downtown Manhattan institution

The Bakakos family (George, Dino and Billy) opened the Lafayette Grill & Bar in 1996 and besides serving traditional Mediterranean fare for lunch and dinner and special events, the brothers soon made the downtown landmark (formerly Peggy Doyle's, a popular Irish pub) a cultural institution, as well. It now offers a performance space, art gallery and special occasion venue all in one. It hosts a monthly art show, live jazz, Middle Eastern, Latin and Arabic musicians, tango dance nights, plus book signings, government retirement parties, professional networking events and, of course, belly dancing on Friday nights.

The art gallery has seen a changing monthly exhibition since 1996. Visual artists exhibit their work on the 14 ft. white walls and exposed brick walls of the long and wide restaurant. Artwork normally changes mid-month and artists frequently host gallery openings at the restaurant to commence the new showing. Past exhibitions at Lafayette's gallery have included well-known and celebrated artists Dennis Oppenheimer and Chuck Connolly. (Artists should contact Dino Bakakos for information.)

On Friday nights, from 10 to 2:30, the restaurant features live music with a Middle East mélange of songs, instruments, and influences from the Greek, Israeli, Armenian, Arabic, Turkish, Balkan cultures. Friday nights also features belly dancers from around the world, with additional belly dancing held on the 2nd Tuesday and the 2nd Wednesday of every month.

Saturday nights at the restaurant are for tango. The dining area of The Lafayette Grill & Bar becomes a dance floor for traditional Argentinean tango. It's the only Milonga south of Canal Street. A class for beginners is included in admission: \$10 cover-free parking available—from 7:30-8:00 p.m. From 8:30-9:30, individual Tango Workshops are \$15. And Milonga dancing for all levels is from 9:30- 2:00 am.

The restaurant has been used as a location in over twenty films and is a popular scene location for television shows such as "Law and Order" and "Court TV." And rumor has it that Puff Daddy once threw a large birthday bash at the restaurant earlier in his career—but the management keeps all details confidential.

Lafayette Grill & Bar,

54-56 Franklin Street (three blocks from West Broadway and next to the Court House), (212) 732-4449 (or 5600); www.lafgrill.com.

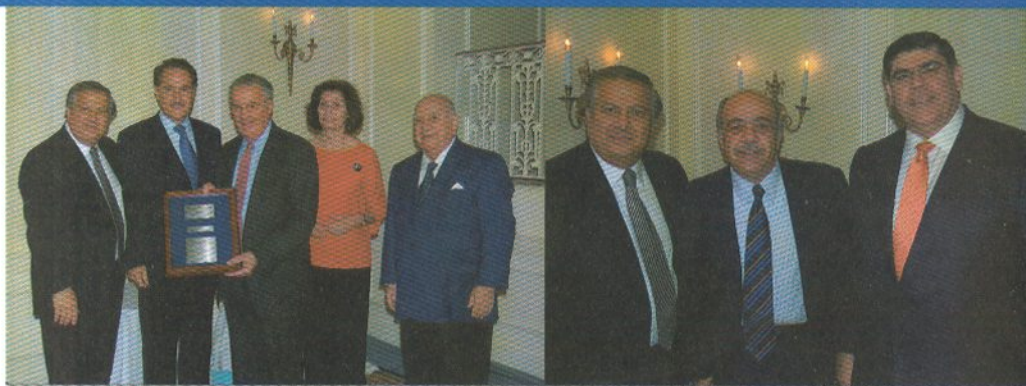


US GOVERNMENT SAYS, YES, CYPRUS IS ONE COUNTRY!

For the first time in the two years since the vote on the Annan Plan, a comprehensive statement by the U.S. Administration on the Cyprus issue was presented during the 17th Annual Cyprus Conference in Washington, D.C. June 7-9, 2006 where a total of 31 key U.S. Senators and Members of Congress and the high-level Administration officials in charge of matters relating to Cyprus participated. Over 100 Hellenic leaders from across the U.S. and around the world lobbied these key policy-makers.

To address the perception of creeping recognition and retribution by the Administration, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried delivered remarks that were very positively received. Community leaders are looking for examples of Administration follow-up to this positive statement. Assistant Secretary Fried stressed that, "none of our policies are aimed at or imply 'creeping recognition' of any other political entity. Cyprus is one country. We have, and will have, only one Embassy, one Ambassador...And let me stress to you unequivocally: We do not and will not recognize any government other than the Republic of Cyprus on the island of Cyprus. We are clear about this." He said that the American policy on Cyprus, "has been, is now, and shall remain clear and consistent" in supporting "a settlement establishing a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation which will reunify Cyprus and its two communities into one country." Regarding Turkey's European Union accession, Fried stressed that Turkey must fulfill its obligations to extend its Customs Union agreement with the EU to the Republic of Cyprus by opening its ports to Cypriot-registered ships and planes, saying, "Let me be clear: This is an obligation that Turkey has freely undertaken with the EU, and which it must fulfill if Ankara is to keep its EU accession process on track."

The following morning, for over one hour, conference participants held an in-depth discussion with State Department Director for Southern European Affairs, Doug Silliman. This session offered leaders an opportunity to express in great detail their concerns and frustrations with settlement efforts and to have an open dialogue with those in the Administration who handle this issue on an hourly basis for



Philip Christopher, Andy Manatos, Senator Paul Sarbanes and wife Christina, Andrew Athens.

Three main Greek Cypriot American leaders, Philip Christopher, Andy Comodromos and Peter Papanicolaou.



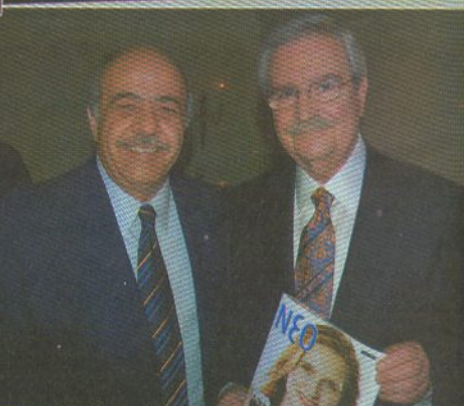
SAE President Andrew Athens, Greek Embassy Cultural Counselor Zoe Kosmidou and former US and Greece national soccer team Coach Alketas Panagoulas.



The two ambassadors, Euripides Evriviades of Cyprus and Alexandros Mallias of Greece.



Activists and entrepreneurs Nick Mouyaris and Harry Lapas.



Andy Comodromos with SAE of America President Christos Tomaras.

the U.S. government.

In addition, author, journalist and literary critic Christopher Hitchens discussed the Cyprus issue with participants for 45 minutes. He is a columnist at Vanity Fair, The Nation and Slate and an occasional contributor to many other publications.

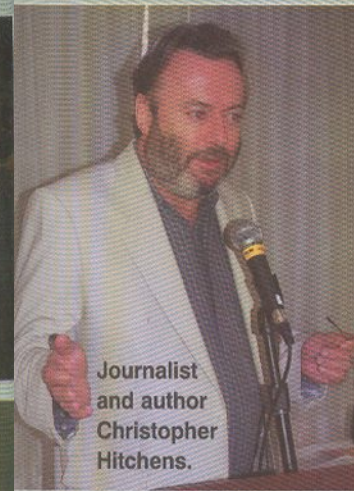
A number of the most influential Members of Congress and Senators met with conference participants to hear their concerns and express support for their efforts. Among them were the leading candidate for the next Chairman of the Committee, and current Chair of the Committee's Middle East and Central Asia Subcommittee, Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL); the Ranking Democrat on the Human Rights Subcommittee, Congressman Donald Payne (D-NJ); the Ranking Democrat on the International Ter-

rorism and Nonproliferation Subcommittee, Congressman Brad Sherman (D-CA); the Ranking Democrat of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee (and Vice Chair of the Democratic Task Force on Homeland Security) Congressman Eliot Engel (D-NY); Europe Subcommittee members, Representatives Engel (D-NY), Shelley Berkley (D-NV), and Thaddeus McCotter (R-MI); as well as Committee members, Congressmen Russ Carnahan (D-MO) and Joe Crowley (D-NY) (who is also a member of the House Democratic Leadership).

In addition, participants met with: the current House Democratic Leader, who would become the next Speaker of the House of Representatives if the Democrats win a majority of the seats in the House in November (as some are predicting), Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-CA); several



Greek American leaders with Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried.



Journalist and author Christopher Hitchens.



Greek Embassy Press Counselor Achilles Paparsenos.



Left to right, Nicholas Theros (Theros & Theros), Nicholas Maduros (Quinn Gillespie), John Sitalides (Trilogy Advisors), Amy Norton (Trilogy Advisors), Leah Bitounis (Woodrow Wilson Center).

members of the influential House Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, including Congressmen Mark Kirk (R-IL), Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL), and Steve Rothman (D-NJ); the Co-Chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues, Congressman Mike Bilirakis (R-FL) and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY); House Appropriations Committee members, Congressmen Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and Maurice Hinchey (D-NY); House Armed Services Committee member, Congressman Jim Langevin (D-RI); House Select Intelligence Committee member, Congressman Rush Holt (D-NJ); as well as several members of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues, including Congressmen Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Dennis Kucinich (D-OH), Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and Anthony Weiner (D-NY).

Participants also held an in-depth strategy session with the leader of Hellenic efforts in the U.S. Senate, Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) – who is the Ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's International Economic Policy Subcommittee and Ranking Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee. Other key Senators who discussed the future of Cyprus with participants included: from the crucial Senate Foreign Operations Ap-

propriations Subcommittee, Senators Tim Johnson (D-SD), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), and Richard Durbin (D-IL) (who is also #2 in the Senate Democratic Leadership); Senate Armed Services Committee member, Senator Jack Reed (D-RI); Senate Homeland Security member, Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ); and Senate Budget Committee Members, Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI). Senators Durbin and Johnson were also honored.

Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MD), who will be retiring from the U.S. Congress at the end of this year after 36 years of leadership for positive American actions toward Cyprus, Greece and Orthodox issues, was the 2006 recipient of the Livanos Award.

Congressman Michael Bilirakis (R-FL), who will also be retiring from the U.S. Congress at the end of this year, after 24 years of leadership in the House on these issues, including founding the Hellenic Caucus, was the 2006 recipient of the Paraskevaides Award.

The 2006 Frizis Award was presented to the Ranking Democrat on the House International Relations Committee, Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA). If the Democrats win a majority of the seats in the House in November, Congressman Lantos would become Chairman of this key committee. In addition, the establishment of the Marialena Conalis-Kontou Award was announced. This award will be presented to an individual in the Government of Greece who, like Marialena Conalis-Kontou, has contributed significantly behind-the-scenes, to bilateral relations between Greece and the U.S. The first recipient was Achilles Paparsenos, the Greek Embassy's Press Counselor. Leteris Kontos and Christianna Kontou, the husband and daughter of Marialena, attended this ceremony and were presented with an award that read, "In memory of Marialena Conalis-Kontou for her significant contributions to Greece-U.S. Relations and in commemoration of the establishment of the Conalis-Kontou Award."

The heads of many of the top Hellenic organizations in the U.S., and around the world, came to Washington, D.C. for this important strategy and lobbying session. They included Philip Christopher, president International Coordinating Committee – Justice for Cyprus (PSEKA), Andrew A. Athens, world president World Council of Hellenes (SAE) national chairman UHAC, Andrew E. Manatos, president National Coordinated Effort of Hellenes (CEH), Panicos Papanicolaou, supreme president Cyprus Federation of America, Nikos Mougias, executive vice president Pancyprian Association of America, Savas Tsivicos, alternate president PSEKA, Andreas Comodromos president Cyprus-U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Tassos Zambas, first vice president Cyprus Federation of America, Chris Tomaras, president of North and South America World Council of Hellenes (SAE), Steve Mantas, past supreme president AHEPA, Nina Peropoulos, past supreme president Pan-Macedonian Association USA, James Kontolios, supreme president The Chios Societies of the USA and Canada, Thelma Pieri, president Pancyprian Association of Florida, Sakis Onisiphorou, president Pancyprian Association of Texas, Ioannis Loizidis, vice president Cypriot Student Association of America (EFOKA), Nikos Theodosiou, chairman Committee of the Relatives of the Missing Persons of Cyprus, Andreas Assiotis, Free Unitary Karpas Refugee Association, Vangelis Doulis, chairman, Albanian Parliament's Human Rights Commission and representatives of the National Federation of Cypriots in the UK.

The Cyprus and Greek government officials who also participated in this important effort included Gregory Niotis, member of the Greek Parliament (PASOK) and First Vice-Chairman of the Inter-parliamentary Committee for Hellenes Abroad, Stavros Kalafatis, member of the Greek Parliament (New Democracy) and member of the Inter-parliamentary Committee for Hellenes Abroad, Marios Ieronymides, director Cyprus Foreign Ministry's Department of Overseas Cypriots, Alexandros Mallias, ambassador of Greece to the United States and Euripides Evriviades, ambassador of Cyprus to the United States.

Baltimore's Greek Town hosts AHEPA

Capital District 3 of the Order of AHEPA recently held its 75th Annual Convention in the heart of Baltimore's Greek Town, with scores of delegates and other Greek Americans participating from places such as North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. Mr. Nicholas Trintis was this year's convention chairman and among the honorees of the AHEPA achievement awards. "It's a phenomenal turnout," said Steve Mavronis, president of the hosting Lord Baltimore Chapter 364 and warden of the District 3, in an interview with *NEO*. "In a convention, although we resolve business, we also bring ideas that have worked in other areas and we try to learn from each other... We assemble some of the finest minds in the region and the Hellenic-American world in general."

"I'm very happy at the way it's turned out. Much better than what people thought," said Cherry Dingas, Grand Lodge Zone 1 governor, Daughters of Penelope (the women's sphere of AHEPA), a lodge which represents a huge geographical area from Pennsylvania to Louisiana. "Growth and expansion," were the main points in this convention according to Ms. Dingas.

"We've got to get more young ones in and just try to figure out how to do it. This is an ongoing thing, year after year."

AHEPA Supreme President Gus James told *NEO*, "It's a wonderful convention and it's an opportunity really for all the AHEPANS in the district and the representatives primarily to get together, talk about various issues, exchange ideas, exchange successes, discuss things that should be done bet-

From left, Nick Gretakis, Nicholas Trintis (Convention Chairman), Dean Economou, Nick Harrison and Nick Punsunlan. They were honored with achievement awards for their contribution to AHEPA.



Family photo of the District 3 delegates.



Family photo of the Daughters of Penelope delegates.



New officials, from left, Nick Punsunlan, Nick Vemakis, Nick Gretakis, Dean Economou, Paul Angelson, Supreme President Gus James and Nick Harrison.

On the podium Cathy Agnor, new District 3 governor of Daughters of Penelope. With her in the picture, Jackie Anas and Pete Nicholas, master of ceremonies.



Virginia Delegate Sharon Daniels (right) with her daughter Sandra.



From left, Mark Kalty, Steve Mavronis, Georgia Vavas, Irene Michalas and Pete Nicholas.



From left are Georgia Vavvas, Lee & George Demetrides, Dolores & Lou Hajimihalis.

ter or things that don't go as well as everyone likes. This one was extremely successful with a large delegation." He said besides the business side of the conventions, "It's a family event, so we are hoping to get 3,000- 4,000 people (at the national convention) in Hollywood, Florida... That's how we grew our membership... Remind everyone and reenergize everybody about our mission: which is to primarily promote and preserve Hellenism and its ideals." He did remind every-

one that AHEPA is in many countries (officially in USA, Canada, Australia, Greece, Cyprus) and that delegates attend the conventions from all these regions of the world, making them truly a global event. Regarding the Cyprus issue, Mr. James, who had just returned from an official visit to the island and is also of Cypriot extraction, said that it still remains "on the forefront of the Order of AHEPA." He wasn't optimistic, however, about an imminent solution because "there

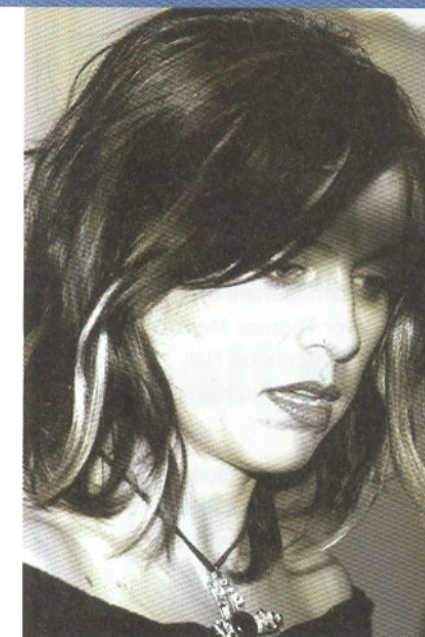
is so much disruption within Turkey itself that I'm not sure the mediators are going to want to touch that issue until it stabilizes and they are sure what reaction they are going to get when they come in with some kind of proposal."

The proposals drawn at the convention will be submitted to the National Convention (this year to be held in Hollywood, Florida, from July 24-30th) for approval and will become part of the Order's constitution.

Athina Krikeli and Ellopia TV win industry Telly awards

Ellopia TV USA and Athina Krikeli have received two "Silver Telly" awards for the documentaries "NY The bleeding City" and "Athens 2004." Back to the Birthplace" with a score of 9.0 or higher from the judges at the 27th annual Telly awards, which honor outstanding local, regional and cable television commercials and programs, as well as film and video productions. "We feel very honored, if you think that recipients of the last years 'Silver Telly' were companies like HBO, The New York Network, Universal Studios Network, Walt Disney Studios; it means a lot to our team," said Krikeli, executive producer of Ellopia Media Group Ltd. "We are trying hard, we are working even harder to become better everyday following our theme: A step ahead, a world beyond."

The Telly Awards annually showcases the best work of the most respected advertising agencies, production companies, television stations, cable operators and corporate video department in the world. It is widely known and highly respected national and international competition and receives over 12,000 entries annually from all 50 states and many foreign countries.



AXELA hires Andrew G. Kaffes



Andrew Kaffes

Axela Government Relations, LLC, a full service strategic alliance government affairs firm, has hired Andrew G. Kaffes as its Senior Advisor for Legislative and Public Affairs, announced Axela

CEO George A. Sifakis.

"We are pleased to have Andrew join our firm," said Sifakis. "He brings a wealth of public affairs, public relations, and government relations experience that will be an asset to our clients."

One of those clients is the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA). Kaffes worked for over ten years for AHEPA; six of them as the organization's public affairs director. "I look forward to creating further awareness about

AHEPA, its issues, and its programs that help strengthen our society and benefit the American Hellenic community," said Kaffes, who worked with AHEPA family members and colleagues to help grow the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues. In addition, he produced two legislative scorecards for AHEPA. "Also, I look forward to helping Axela grow and assisting our clients with meeting their legislative goals and objectives."

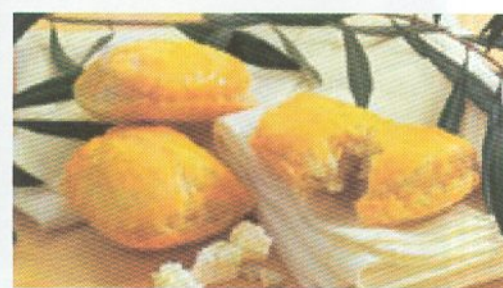
Axela Government Relations was founded by George Sifakis in 2004 and represents corporations and non-profits. Kaffes graduated this July with a Master's of Arts in Political Management from George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management. He is a 1994 cum laude graduate of Syracuse University, earning a Bachelor's of Science in Public Relations from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

He is a member of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the American League of Lobbyists (ALL).



George Sifakis

Optima Foods at the NRA



Nearly 75,000 professionals from 100 countries attended, and President George W. Bush spoke, at the National Restaurant Association Show in Chicago, among them Optima Foods of Deer Park, NY, which introduced a new ready-to-bake phyllo dough pie. "The response we received not only from the guests but other exhibitors as well has been overwhelming and it proves that our product can strongly stand out in the American market," said Ioannis Sotiriou, marketing manager at Optima Foods. Optima Foods is an importer and food distributor, serving the U.S. market with fine Greek products. From its 45,000 square feet warehouse in Deer Park, the company supplies a national network of restaurants, delis, groceries, bakeries, and wholesalers with a wide variety of foods from Greece and the Mediterranean.

Sotiriou invited all to the Fancy Food Show scheduled for New York on July 9-11 at the Jacob Javits Center.

The Greek Program of Boston

⌘ This year *The Greek Program*, co-hosted by Eleni Vidalis and Alex Geourntas, celebrates its 10th anniversary on public access television in the city of Boston, and on June 22 a big party was thrown in Charlestown to mark the occasion, featuring among its other distinguished guests, Mayor Thomas Menino himself! Curtis Henderson, general manager of the Boston Neighborhood Network, was there as well, along with Dennis Paul and Frances Levas, who were members of the Organizing Committee for the event.

⌘ *The Greek Program* is a 60-minute bilingual, cultural and informational TV magazine targeting the Greek community and the residents of Boston, Watertown, parts of Brookline, Chelmsford, Lynn, Swampscott and Salem as a whole. It has been instrumental in increasing awareness about elections, showcasing young Hellenes, city services, interviewing interesting guests, hosting candidate forums for the Boston City Council and for various statewide offices and of course, Greek music segments.

⌘ Eleni and Alex, who have long been active in our community, have volunteered their time and efforts these last ten years to provide a service that was lacking in the "omogeneia" of Boston, and

at the same time empowered residents with information. *The Greek Program* airs "live" on Mondays from 8:30 to 9:30 PM, Boston Neighborhood Network, BNNLive, on Channel 9 in the city of Boston and a section of Brookline. It also airs in Chelmsford on Saturdays, Channel 8 at 6 PM; in Watertown on Tuesdays at 3 PM, Wednesdays and Saturdays at 10 PM on Channel 9; and in Lynn, Swampscott and Salem on Tuesdays at 6 PM.

⌘ Topics have included property tax assessments, citizenship process, homeownership opportunities, valet parking regulations, educational opportunities, voter registration, city, state and federal election information, international terrorism, the Greek tax code, Athens Olympics, Macedonia and AHEPA activities in Greater Boston. In 2000, *The Greek Program* initiated a successful letter writing campaign urging former Governor Paul Cellucci to cancel a trade mission to Turkey. It also hosted "Candidates Forums" in October 2003 & 2005 featuring the at-large candidates for the Boston City Council.

In early 2006, *The Greek Program* hosted several segments with Fotis Stamos, Wine Manager at MEZE Estiatorio in Charlestown, about Greek wines and the unique history of winemaking in Greece along with taste tests and local availability. Fotis also showcased several Greek dishes prepared by MEZE and he responded to viewer's questions via telephone "live" on the program.

⌘ Eleni and Alex expressed their gratitude to the community for its multifaceted support and they pledged to continue their service for years to come. To contact them directly for additional information the number is 617-828-7212.

DEMETRIOS RHOMPOTIS



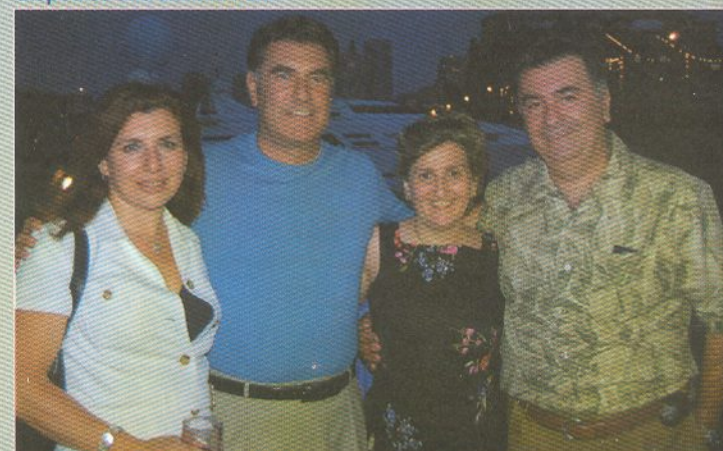
(Left to Right) John Ramos, Demetrios Mattheos, Nikos Dalamangas, Vasilios Kafkas, President of the Federation of Hellenic American Societies of New England, Gabriel Vidalis (behind Kafkas), Vaso Galbadis, Ted Demetriadis of Grecian Echoes Radio, Despina Dimitropoulos and Tina Papadopoulos.



Alex Geourntas, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, Eleni and Gabriel Vidalis and Tina Papadopoulos.



Mayor Thomas Menino, Alexandra and Marina Stavrou from Argentina (full of smiles because their national soccer team was still at the World Cup then) and Nick Kakleas. In the background are George Stamopoulos and Dennis Paul.



Anna Minos, Harry Botsivales, Francis Levas, Thanasi Haberis

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Growing Up Greek In America

Basile

Eat your *horta*!!!

It was the summer of 1972. The HOT sun was beating on me, sweat was rolling off my face, my only relief from the sun was the shade that I got while walking behind my 300-pound *Thea* Despina. I remember my summers so vividly. It was the time my mother and *yiayia* would get so excited when they'd hear of a new construction site-- which meant a huge mound of dirt filled with dandelion greens somewhere near a highway. How I hated those damned dandelion greens. My mother would drive at a speed of 70 miles per hour--evidently to make sure no one beat her to the precious dandelions. When *yiayia* would spot those godforsaken weeds, my mother would swerve onto the shoulder of the highway, cutting off traffic and creating near-- misses of trucks and cars, and then slam on the brakes of her Cadillac. As both my mother and *yiayia* waited for the dust to settle from this Mario Andretti-like maneuver, I would peel myself up from the floor of the back seat, checking to make sure that my neck wasn't broken and that my legs were still functional. It was then that I'd thank God I didn't die for a plastic bag of dandelion greens.

Don't tell me your family didn't do the same thing! Just because you weren't there doesn't mean they didn't pick dandelion greens. Here are some telltale signs that your family hunted dandelions: 1) Skid marks on a local highway overlooking any type of new construction. 2) A plastic *Wonder Bread* bag wrapped around a sharp knife, found either under the driver's seat or in the trunk of your parents' vehicle. 3) Your mother's muddy shoes. 4) Your *yiayia*'s muddy black shoes. And finally, 5) An overabundance of dandelion greens at every meal during the summer, including breakfast, lunch and dinner. Do any of these signs sound familiar? Consider yourself lucky if you never witnessed this dandelion gluttony that my family embraced! I am pretty sure that every time my mother or my *yiayia* would pick dandelion greens, I was always with them. Just my luck! I remember waiting in that hot stuffy car, pounding on the window, pleading with them to "please hurry" or asking them, "why can't we be like normal people and get our greens in the frozen food section of the grocery, or in a can like Popeye!" Could you imagine the hell Popeye would have gone through if he had stop in the middle of every fight to pick dandelion greens just to get enough energy to save his beloved girlfriend Olive Oil? Well, come to think about it, if you have a girlfriend named Olive Oil, maybe *you* should pick dandelion greens. What a great way to win the hand of the one you love! Just pick the flower that compliments her name!

What I remember most of the dandelion hunt was the gusto and the determination that both my mother and *yiayia* put into picking those greens! They would begin slowly, making their way to the top of the mound of packed dirt, gently clipping the tips of these wild weeds, and then with all the care in the world they'd place their spoils into a plastic bag and continue their quest as if they were climbing Mt. Everest. The only thing that was missing was perhaps the placing of the Greek national flag on top of Mount Dandelion and then a photo of these two women who single-hand-

edly conquered this piece of earth. The look on their faces would have shown the **pride** of having picked all the dandelion greens they possibly could and the **pain** of having sacrificed their beloved Basile by leaving him in the car to die of heat exhaustion! Where the hell was the **National Geographic** when you needed them to take pictures of this journey! "The Bridges of Madison County" issue of the **National Geographic** had NOTHING on my mother and *yiayia* picking dandelion greens. That issue could have been called, "The Jolly Green Giant Can Kiss Their Ass"! I would've subscribed to that educational magazine in a flash.

Now it was time to go home and prepare the spoils of their personal war, a pile of cooked, fresh greens served up with other Greek delicacies, such as fish-head soup and stewed okra! What the hell kind of diet was this for a child of twelve? Come to think about it, with the diet that we Greeks partake in, I'm pretty sure we invented the reality-based TV show **Fear Factor**. I know that there are many Greeks who own fast food restaurants, and now I know why. It's to erase the memory of what we had to eat as Greek-American kids! I remember not wanting to eat any of the food that was harvested and prepared that day. I also remember my mother and *yiayia* not caring about what I wanted! They would force me to eat the food, like it or not! To this day, I can still taste the stewed okra (*bam-yes*) that was shoved into my mouth. Tears rolling down my okra-filled cheeks, refusing to swallow at any cost! Thank God my father, who sympathized with my distaste for slimy okra, allowed me to spit it out. He'd then look at me with his hazel eyes, as if to say, "I understand your pain..." Then he'd force me to eat the fish-head soup and drink the juice of the dandelion greens! As I sat there at the dinner table, in shock over what I just had consumed, my only thought was, is it possible to commit suicide with a soup spoon?

As a father, I laugh when I hear my daughters tell me that they can't wait for the summer. They ask me, "Daddy, how did you spend your summers as a child?" I just smile and tell them that I had a lot of fun! You know, to this day, every time I drive past a new construction site with a mound of dirt I think of my summers with my mother and *yiayia*. I know it sounds strange, and some of you may even want to report me to the Child Welfare Services, but I hope my children can go through the same type of torture and hell that I had to go through! This way, I can tell them that it's about family, memories and laughter--it's about, "**Growing up Greek in America!**"

Basile is the creator and innovator of the comedy series "Growing Up Greek In America" videos, DVD's and CD's. He has over 60 worldwide television credits including: HBO, Showtime, Comedy Central and Antenna Satellite, just to name a few. His stories run on syndicated Greek News papers and websites throughout the world. To see more of Basile and his work go to WWW.OPABASILE.com



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