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Events
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National:
- [Heritage Greece Weekend and Classic - Las Vegas](#)
  October 6 - 9

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**NHS Spotlight: The Greeks**

Tony Saris is a Board Member and Treasurer of NHS. He resides in Los Angeles with his wife, Betty (Vasiliki), and their daughter Jeanette. Tony's father was born in Rethymnon, Crete and mothers' parents were from the Sparta region. Tony was instrumental in spearheading the concept of *The Greek Guide to Greatness* tirelessly working to further NHS's mission.

**What sparked the idea for *The Greek Guide to Greatness***?

"Seeing firsthand the challenges of implementing our Mission to promote and preserve Hellenism, I researched Greek immigration to America, the influence of Greek culture, and how Americans primarily experience Greek culture. I concluded that the best means to reach the largest audience about our Hellenistic culture was through film.

Five years ago, at a NHS conference, I heard a presentation about ancient Greece. After the conference, the speaker suggested I read the Federalist Papers and pay keen attention to the influence ancient Greece had on our founding fathers. I did read them and thought, wouldn't it be a great idea if NHS could create a documentary or other media on communicating the message of Hellenistic Values influence on American culture and what were the roots of that ancient Greek influence. If we could communicate to the largest audience we can then educate and create query to ask the question if there is anything we can learn from our Founding fathers of America's Founding fathers, the Ancient Greeks: 'Get engaged before its too late'."

**How was National Geographic involved?**

"We approached National Geographic about their interest in producing *The Athenians and the Americans Democracy of Founding Fathers*. National Geographic already had started to develop a documentary with a similar concept and instead Nat Geo offered to create a digital series of ten, 3-5 minute vignettes of the ancient Greek Athenians and Hellenism's influence on America. Thus, *The Greek Guide to Greatness* sprung out of my original idea of the Athenians influence on America...."
NHS Spotlight (Continued)

“We expanded the categories to include, democracy, freedom of speech, un-elections, economy, science, philosophy, social media, entertainment, athletics, and religion. The strategic goal is the same, which is how did Hellenism influence America in these areas and is there more we can learn from our Hellenes. Sophocles - ‘The ideal condition would be, I admit, that men should be right by instinct; but since we are likely to go astray, the reasonable thing is to learn from those who can teach.’ Aristotle - ‘All men by nature desire Knowledge.’”

How do you maintain balance in life?

“Growing up Greek American, we were taught at a young age if you get involved with something you need to give your very best to excel. Education and learning were emphasized in most Greek American families, as our parents and grandparents struggled mightily when arriving to America and they wanted their kids to have more opportunity. They knew that education was going to be the vehicle to afford more opportunities. Our ancestry upon arrival to the USA, believed the streets were lined with gold. They found life was much harder than they dreamed of, but learned quickly, that hard work paid off in America. Greeks are inherently independent thinkers and entrepreneurs. The Greek Americans today are in the top percent per capita of successful businessman and women.

We learned from our parents and grandparents that if you stick with your career path and work hard, dividends would follow in the Land of Opportunity. Aeschylus - ‘His resolve is not to seem, but to be, the best’.

Plato - ‘The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life.’

To balance it all you have to be happy at what you are doing. We are gregarious people and enjoy sharing, socializing and integrating with our communities. As I grew older, I had my American friends and then my Hellenic friends with whom I share a rich culture. I realized that my American friends loved and envied our culture and that we had something very special and should be thankful we were blessed being Greek American.

There was a sense of Philotimo. Aristotle - ‘Without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods’.”

What advice would you give someone just starting out in their professional career?

“LISTEN Attentively, gather knowledge, seek wisdom, and enjoy what you are doing. Master your trade. Seek a path of just and righteousness, and good deeds will be rewarded. Have some fun along the way. Herodotus - ‘If a person insisted on always being serious, and never allowed himself a bit of fun and relaxation, they would go mad or become unstable without knowing it.’”

Tony Saris - Member and Treasure of NHS

For more information visit PBS.
Theofanis V. Economidis, a founding member of the National Hellenic Society, is the 2016 recipient of the Nicholas J Bouras Award for Extraordinary Archon Stewardship. This is an award presented annually by the Order of Saint Andrew to an individual who has demonstrated extraordinary and incomparable stewardship to the Order, enabling Archons to vigorously pursue securing religious freedom for the Mother Church of Constantinople. Archon George Safiol, Award Committee chairman, said, "Archon Economidis has exemplified tremendous stewardship of time, talent and resources in support of the Mother Church of Constantinople, the Orthodox Christian Church throughout the United States, and to the mission of the Order of Saint Andrew in which all Christians should be granted religious freedom rights. Our committee deemed it appropriate to recognize his efforts and name him as the recipient of this prestigious Award in recognition of the extraordinary service exemplified by National Vice Commander Bouras."

George M. Marcus, a founding member and current Chairman of the National Hellenic Society, was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree at the 74th Commencement at Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. He was honored for his deeply committed philanthropy and support of Hellenic causes and as embodying “the highest ideals of American society and the Orthodox Christian faith.” At the commencement, Mr. Marcus provided words of inspiration to the 55 graduates receiving degrees at the ceremony, “Open your mind. It’s all right in front of your nose every single day.”

Thank you to you both for your valuable contributions and continued service!

The NHS and Manatos & Manatos, the leading government relations and advocacy firm, have collaborated to develop the NHS Heritage America Program — an experiential odyssey connecting Greek American college students to their Hellenic roots, heritage and culture within the context and resources Washington, DC has to offer. Selected candidates met with a “who’s-who” of Greek-American decision makers, business leaders and other important contacts who have reached the pinnacle of their careers and will serve as future mentors and career guides for Heritage America alumni. Students learned about the lasting impact of their heritage and forbears as evident in government, everyday life, and Washington, DC’s rich and symbolic architectural landscape. The Heritage America alumni have joined the talented peers from the NHS’ Heritage Greece Program and are afforded a host of benefits, networking opportunities and friendships that will last a lifetime. The success of the launch of the Heritage America Program in Washington, DC has other NHS Chapters eager to duplicate Heritage America in their local cities.
Project Updates:

To volunteer or suggest a new project please click here.

- **Google Grant**: Nicole Vournazos & Nick Gumas have secured $10,000 per month in free advertising with Google.
- **Website Redesign**: Thalia Dimopoulos & Paul Markakis have made many improvements to the Heritage Greece tab of the website.
- **HG Alumni Directory**: HG Alumni if you haven’t provided Maddie Hailer with updated contact info please click to email her.
- **Oral History**: We have secured recording equipment. Those interested in conducting interviews please indicate so here.

NHS Corner

Heritage Weekend & Classic
When: October 6 - 9th.
Where: JW Marriott Las Vegas
Featuring one of Greece’s top entertainers: Thanos Petrels & his band.

Op-Ed: HG Mentorship Program

When I was selected to attend Heritage Greece in 2012, I expected it to be an opportunity to meet fellow Greek-American college students and mutually reconnect with our Greek heritage. I expected to spend the two weeks following my birthday touring ancient Greek historical landmarks learning about our culture. I expected to be able to practice my Greek and gain back what I’d lost since graduating from Greek afternoon school in the eighth grade. And while all of that did happen, I quickly realized my expectations were wrong.

What the Heritage Greece program has created is a network – a parea – of Greek-American students who, in the diversity of our backgrounds and interests, all share the commonality of our love for our Greek heritage. That initial trip to Greece was only the beginning; or, if you will, an orientation to the Heritage Greece program, and through it the National Hellenic Society. I’ve been fortunate in that I was given the chance to be Co-Chair of the Washington, DC Region Heritage Greece Alumni Network, through which I have been able to meet many of the National Hellenic Society members in the local Washington, DC area. I’m proud that the Washington, DC Region has been chosen to kick off the Heritage Greece/National Hellenic Society Mentorship Program.

Throughout the chances that I’ve had to get to know the National Hellenic Society members, I’ve found myself inspired by their commitment to bettering the communities around them and leaving the world better than they found it. Independent of their choice in career, all of the members with whom I’ve had the good fortune of interacting speak with a passion about how their vocation gives them the wherewithal to give back. Regardless of whether mentors and mentees are paired because of similarities in professional aspiration or for more personal interests, the prospect of using Hellenism to expand the networks of young professional Heritage Greece members is an exciting one. I am thankful for my good fortune in having been approached to be part of the inaugural group of mentor/mentee pairings, and looking forward to the opportunities it creates.

Paul J. Markakis - DC. Heritage Greece Alumni Co-Chair: 2012 Heritage Greece Alumnus
Op-Ed: Prosfuges

“Epomeno stathmo: Piraeus. Next station: Piraeus.” It was my first time in Piraeus since I had taken a day trip to Aegina nearly two years ago but I remembered it all the same. Exit train. Follow the mass of people toward the main street. Pass by the Everest and smell the strange mixture of spanakopita and coffee. Cross the busy street without getting hit by a cyclist or taxi. Enter the port. It was all familiar to me yet I knew it was different. I entered the port and took a deep breath as I boarded the bus from Gate E8 to E1, anxious for what awaited me.

Everything seemed normal until I approached E1 and E2. That’s when the Coast Guard boarded our bus and started selectively asking for papers. I clutched my small bag, hoping that a US driver’s license would be sufficient; I had no boat ticket. In my mind, I practiced the Greek over and over again in my head. ‘I’m here to help the refugees. Eimai edo vna voithiso tous prosfuges.’ But no one asked me for anything, my skin still pale coming out of a Vermont winter and not yet acclimated to Greece. At the time I thought it was just luck that no one had demanded to see my papers, as I saw a young Greek man, about my age and sitting across from me, questioned. Later, when I spoke to one of the volunteer organizers, voicing my concerns about returning to the port without papers, she said plainly to me ‘You will never be asked. You are white.’

Passing through E2, my heart felt heavy as I looked on and saw tent after tent after tent, hundreds smashed together with clothes hanging outside and children running between them. I hopped off at E1, following an Australian couple who was boarding a ship headed to one of the Dodecanese islands. I wandered around, searching for any signs of the volunteer organizations that I had contacted. ‘Just show up to E1! We’re stationed there and always looking for help!’ I saw no one but refugees, hiding from the strong Greek sun in their small tents. Some children were kicking a ball around while mothers were walking around with young children. I didn’t understand — there were no apparent volunteer organizations. I walked through the gate waiting area only to find more tents and no sign of help. I even asked a man who worked for one of the ferry companies if he knew where I could find these people but as soon as he realized I wasn’t looking for information about his ferry line, he sneered at me and dismissed me. That’s when I saw two men, one blonde and clutching a DSLR, taking photos of the camp, the other older and Greek who almost appeared to be giving a tour.

I approached them and they explained to me that most of the volunteer organizations had moved north the week before, toward the border and some of the larger camps. I could hardly believe it. They didn’t think Piraeus needed more aid as most of the families had been moved. This could not have been accurate. I saw children and families milling about, countless tents that must have numbered in the hundreds if not the thousands. Resources were too thin and they decided to allocate more to the north. They asked if I was a nurse and I responded that no, I was not and I had no medical training. The only volunteers left were the doctors; there was only one, at a mobile clinic, with Arabic and Farsi translators. I thanked the men for the information and headed to the clinic. Here again, I was asked about the medical training that I lacked. The woman there, Kelly, apologized. There wasn’t much they could do and even less I could do. Soon thereafter, I was assigned my task: Pass out numbers to people as they come so we know who to see first.

Initially, it didn’t seem that many people needed the doctor. The first hour was slow and allowed me time to just take in my surroundings. I sat with a piece of paper and a red pen, children running around coming up to me, seemingly intrigued by this new person that had arrived in their makeshift home. Eventually my role morphed into both passing out paper and sitting with the children. Some of them were trying to learn English words from me, asking about numbers as they wrote them on my paper. One little boy gave me a tiny fistful of plastic beads from his collection and wordlessly insisted that they were for me to keep, motioning no when I tried to give them back. They were the same beads I had used as a little girl to make friendship bracelets and key chains. Another girl, about 8 or 9, helped me tear the slips of paper into near perfect squares and wanted to write out the numbers for me. She sat with me for nearly an hour, motioning and speaking Arabic with the few English words she knew sprinkled in. When she had to leave, she grabbed my hand to say goodbye before gathering up her younger brother and pushing her stroller alongside her mother. Watching the children was the hardest thing for me. In every child, I saw the faces of my nephews, waiting in this purgatory that had been thrust upon them. If I felt useless, how did they feel? I can only imagine the helplessness that swarmed over them, some of...
Op-Ed: Prosfuges (Continued)

them too young to fully grasp where they were or why.

One of the biggest issues was the lack of translators. We had to try to explain to people in the first two hours I was there to come back later, when our translators would be back. I overheard Anna, one of the organizers, trying to schedule shifts with translators. She explained to me that the biggest issue was during the day, when most of the volunteers are working. Luckily, one of the men was able to cover many day shifts but he didn't speak both Farsi and Arabic, leaving a gap. It was in that moment that I regretted not taking more language classes in college. As the hours passed, I felt useless, passing out paper after paper to waiting families, who were asking the translator to ask me how long it would take. I couldn't know. It seemed that even the most minor injuries took nearly an hour inside the mobile clinic. We were in the heat, baking under a small canopy, just waiting. I mostly stood, allowing everyone else to enjoy the limited seating. Some of the men, around my age give or take a few years, came up with the brilliant solution to bring benches from inside the port waiting area out to where we were but it still wasn't enough for the 15 or 20 people that were waiting.

As it got later and later, I decided to venture back. Most of the volunteers had driven right up to the clinic but I was reliant on public transport and the buses were coming less and less frequently with each passing hour as the number of ferries coming into E1 became sparse. I walked from E1 to E2, hoping to catch signs of a bus. When I finally boarded and headed back to the metro, I finally breathed again, clutching my new plastic beads and letting the tears roll silently as I counted the tents once more.

Alden King - 2012 Heritage Greece Alumna


As I took my seat in a courtyard beneath the Acropolis, I can honestly say that I had no idea what was in store for me. The play was just about the last thing on my mind as reflecting on the last (and the best) two and a half weeks of my life. How could it be over? It seems like just yesterday I was at the Welcome “Barbeque,” meeting the peers that would quickly become some of my best friends. I simply could not imagine going back to my life, so far away from anyone who had been on this life-changing journey with me.

The lights slowly dimmed and Socrates Now began. Immediately, I was enraptured by the performance. As I looked around, I saw about 70 of my new closest friends, and I began to think, “This is what brought us here. Our ancestors were revolutionary thinkers, they changed the world through mathematics, philosophy, and sciences, and here we are, thousands of years later, so what should stop us from doing the same?” Over the last two and a half weeks, I learned that I am surrounded by incredibly bright minds. It became clear that we were all chosen to take part in the Heritage Greece program for a variety of reasons including our creativity, ingenuity, and intelligence.

While watching Socrates Now, I gazed up at the Acropolis and came to realize that in the United States, the melting pot of cultures, we had large shoes to fill. As Greek Americans, we represent one of the most fundamental and innovative cultures in the world. We are some of the few people that can say they got in touch with their roots by marveling at the magnificence of the Parthenon and exploring the country where both their ancestors and democracy were born. We are descendants of one of the most advanced societies to have ever existed, and every one of us represents the Greek American society today.

This trip was far more than a vacation, it was a journey. Being Greek American is more than just attending Greek school or going to Greek festivals. It is a connection to a place and a culture whose value I did not fully grasp until embarking on this journey. This connection ties you to everyone from Socrates to the students of ACG (American College of Greece), and, for me, being Greek American means that I have a responsibility to live up to my ancestors by being innovative and persistently questioning the world around me. While I sat beneath the Acropolis, it dawned on me that being Greek American inspires me to be the best version of myself that I can be. As Socrates Now came to an end, I was saddened that Heritage Greece 2016 was coming to a close, but I also realized that it opened so many doors that my journey as a Greek American will never truly end.

Mackenzie Lynne Bogiages - 2016 Heritage Greece Alumna
Events: NHM Gala

This past May, Heritage Greece alumni had the opportunity to visit Chicago and volunteer at the National Hellenic Museum’s annual Gala. As the National Hellenic Society is a supporter of the museum’s initiatives, NHS members and HG Alumni were involved with the preparation and execution of the fundraiser.

After we arrived Friday evening, the first destination of our mini-reunion was a nighttime comedy show in the heart of the city. This show was our first chance to see one another after months apart. On reunions such as this trip, my HG family extends as I not only have the chance to see close friends from my own Heritage Greece trip, but also from previous years’ trips, extending my Greek friend group and network even more. Despite only meeting each other for a short period of time, we all bonded over our common experiences and similar memories of Greece, as we all expressed our enthusiasm for the program and a desire to visit Greece again someday.

The next day, we embarked on a private tour of the National Hellenic Museum. Having never been to Chicago before, this tour was a chance for me to see the museum for the first time and learn more about the organization we all travelled to assist. The featured exhibit we saw was “Transcending Boundaries: The Art of Anthony Quinn,” featuring information about the life of Anthony Quinn and multiple sculptures by the artist. One part of the exhibit even showed the workshop wherein he created his art. Of course, one of the highlights pointed out to us were the scenes and photos of Anthony Quinn starring in Zorba the Greek. It was amazing to see how someone who was not of Greek descent was able to embody Greek culture so well, as he cared so deeply about it, becoming Greek in spirit. His example serves as encouragement to the rest of us to value our heritage.

Another exhibit, entitled “The Greek Story in America,” featured photographs of early Greek immigrants and their businesses, as well as the history of the Greek Orthodox Church in the U.S., furthering our education about how our heritage transcended mainland Greece.

Following a delicious (and, needless to say, big) meal at Artopolis Café, where we met Greek-American professionals, it was time to prepare for the big event. It was what we were waiting for, as we all came together for the same purpose. Most of us helped out with the silent and live auctions at the gala, which were both successful in raising funds at the museum. The auction’s success came as no surprise given the wonderful prizes and the generosity of the purchasers. (Who wouldn't want to have lunch with Nia Vardalos in Beverly Hills?)

After the auction and dinner, it was time for the featured performance of the gala, a live concert by Greek singer Anna Vissi. This concert was a perfect end to celebrate a successful fundraiser, as the performance proved to be very lively and well-liked by the entire audience. The enthusiasm of Anna Vissi and her band at the concert mirrored that of all of the HG alumni who had the chance to attend such a fun event. Although we were sad to leave each other following the mini-reunion, we became even more excited in anticipation to see our HG family once again in Las Vegas this October.

John Banas - 2015 Heritage Greece Alumnus