

Education



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Principal Thanks Donors for St. Demetrios Success

By Stavros Marmarinos
Special to The National Herald

NEW YORK – If not for the support of its donors, the St. Demetrios Greek American Day School in Astoria, which houses the only Greek American high school in the entire United States, would still be operational, but would not be as successful as it is today. That is how the Principal of St. Demetrios Mr. Anastasios Koularmanis summed up the contribution of the school's donors and patrons and the important role they play, in an interview with The National Herald.

St. Demetrios' Principal made special mention of the donations made by the Patrises and Sarantakos families, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, entrepreneur/artist George Andreas, and others, to whom he expressed his deep appreciation. "Without their support, we would not be able to match the quality of education we are able to offer our students today," Mr. Koularmanis said. "We would be spending our time and resources struggling to maintain our core programs, as our student body would gradually decrease and our

teacher, an art teacher, a music teacher, a gym teacher, and a grade school teacher who handles the general subjects."

Presently, the Greek Department of St. Demetrios has four Greek literature teachers, a religion teacher, a general classroom teacher for the lower grades, two gym teachers, two music teachers, and one math teacher who have been dispatched from Greece.

"We have teachers from Greece working with us, and we have decided to place a greater emphasis on Greek language instruction," Mr. Koularmanis said. "We saw that the students attending our school had varying levels of competency in Greek. Some children spoke Greek fluently, while others could not speak at all. This created a problem when it came time to implement the curriculum."

Mr. Koularmanis spoke about the pluses of attending school at St. Demetrios, and focused on the school's large teaching staff, made up of teachers coming from both the U.S. and Greece. According to him, most parents who decide to send their children to St. Demetrios do so because they want them to

St. Demetrios is implementing this year is free tutoring in Math on Saturdays. The class is taught by a university professor. "A lot of parents are paying \$70-80 an hour so their children can receive tutoring," Mr. Koularmanis said. "Our School Board Chairman Mr. Nicholas Andriotis believes that parents should not have to pay for tutoring on top of their children's tuition. When parents pay their tuition, they should be assured that their child's education needs are being adequately served. If they are paying extra money for their child to get tutoring, then that means that the school has not done its job to the fullest. We also offer tutoring in other subjects, in addition to Math," Mr. Koularmanis said.

There are currently close to 650 children registered at St. Demetrios Day School, but officials are expecting the total number to grow because registration is still open and new parents are coming in every day to enroll their children. There were 625 students enrolled at St. Demetrios during the previous school year.

To date, there has been a 25% increase in the number of kinder-

past decade, and he pointed out that registrations have been increasing by 5% annually over recent years.

Due to the increased influx of students, for the first time ever, Mr. Koularmanis said that the St. Demetrios high school soccer and basketball teams will participate in high school athletic leagues. St. Demetrios will also send girls' teams to play in leagues starting February.

Speaking about the school's other extracurricular activities, Mr. Koularmanis cited many programs to occupy students' interest, including a computer club, the school newspaper, a photo club, an art club, and others.

Mr. Koularmanis pointed out that in addition to a highly touted Greek Afternoon School, St. Demetrios offers a Greek language instruction program for adults. Both programs are headed by Mr. Timoleon Kokkinos, longtime Principal of the St. Demetrios Greek Afternoon School.

One area of concern that Mr. Koularmanis did address is the gradual decrease in the number of students attending Greek American day school. Mr. Koularmanis openly admitted that he fears that smaller Greek schools will run the risk of shutting down in the future. "Our parish communities have to start doing more to address this concern. Take the Greek Parade we had in New York last April. The weather was nice, but there was limited turnout. Why? Couldn't we all have gone, if only to admire our children? Do we want the Mayor to take us off Fifth Avenue and send our parade to a smaller street? Our grandparents came to this country and accomplished so much, without any money or an education; and yet, they managed to open up schools. They came to a tiny neighborhood called Astoria and turned it into a Greek city. We have to wake up and start thinking about what we are going to do. What are we waiting for?"

Mr. Koularmanis also pointed out that there is not one Greek library in New York for Greek Americans and other residents to visit.

Mr. Koularmanis also cited the continued lack of homegrown Greek teachers as a concern. He maintained that it was not possible to staff a school solely with teachers sent over from Greece, and that this is not an adequate solution to the problem. Instead, he called for the establishment of a teacher's college, where Greek Americans can receive the proper training and go on to be the Greek teachers of tomorrow.

Anastasios Koularmanis, 38, was born in Canada but has been living in the U.S. since he was six months old. His parents came from Tripoli in the Peloponnese, where his wife, Maria, an employee at a pharmaceutical firm, also hails from. The couple has two children, John and Demetrios. Mr. Koularmanis has been an educator for the past 17 years, and has been working at St. Demetrios Day School for the past eight years.

Concluding the interview, Mr. Koularmanis said that his message to parents is for them to send their children to Greek schools so they can learn the Greek language. "To give you a personal example, it's one thing for me to hear my kids say 'I love you, dad,' and another thing altogether to hear them say it in Greek: 'S'agapo, bamba!'"



Students of St. Demetrios Greek American Day School in Astoria walk down the halls in between classes on Wednesday, September 3, 2008.

St. Demetrios School in Astoria Begins Classes

By Demetris Tsakas
Special to The National Herald

NEW YORK – The halls of the primary and secondary schools at the Community of St. Demetrios in Astoria filled once again with the happy voices of students – over 650 of them – who got the new school year off to an auspicious start last Wednesday, September 3rd. The teachers stood in the halls with renewed vigor and excitement to greet the returning students, amidst signs and posters welcoming the children back and wishing them luck for the new year.

Staff, parents and students were beaming about the excellent condition of the classrooms and school facilities. St. Demetrios School Principal Anastasios Koularmanis was flanked by the nearly 100 teachers, assistants, and other staff members, who turned out bright and early to ensure that everything was running smoothly as the largest Greek parochial school in the United States prepared to reopen. Seven of the fifty teachers assigned by the Greek Ministry of Education to serve at the Greek charter and parochial schools in the U.S. were on hand as well.

As the classes gleamed with the smiling faces of students returning to their familiar winter schedule and friends, their teachers prepared to once again resume their efforts to impart invaluable knowledge and skills upon them. The school uniforms and desks where the children placed their school books made the setting even more picturesque.

From early on, Mr. Koularmanis was busy meeting with this year's high school seniors and their parents to discuss the electives they will be taking, which are designed to give students a head start on the career path they will choose upon graduation. "The new school year has gotten off to a very promising start. I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone – parents, teachers and students – a successful school year and lots of luck, as well as to call on the Greek American Community to support Greek schools as much as they can, and to promote all the worthwhile work that is taking place here," Mr. Koularmanis told The National Herald just before the start of this year's classes.

This year, St. Demetrios is reporting a rise in student registration. According to Mr. Koularmanis, "there has been a sharp rise in the number of students attending the lower grades, especially for children ages

three to five. We have over 150 children in our pre-school. Last year we had 80 students, and at this moment there are already 130 children who have registered. In fact, as families continue returning from their summer vacations in Greece, we are hopeful that the total students in these grades will surpass 150. The number of kindergartners and preschoolers in our school has essentially doubled, and all signs are indicating that the next generation of Greek Americans – who have high standards and expectations when it comes to education – believe in the necessity of Greek education, which is why they choose to place their trust in a Greek American parochial school for their children's education. This is very important and encouraging for us, because it helps increase enrollment." Mr. Koularmanis also said that there are approximately 650 students attending both the primary and secondary schools at St. Demetrios, and that he is expecting this number to grow further.

A total of 70 teachers work at St. Demetrios – which offer classes from Grades PK – 12 – along with seven teachers who have been sent from Greece to serve the needs of Greek schools in the United States. There are, in addition, eight teachers working at the St. Demetrios Greek Afternoon School, and the total number of staff members surpasses 100 counting the teaching assistants, secretaries, and other personnel.

In regards to extracurricular activities, Mr. Koularmanis said that the St. Demetrios high school athletics programs has been enhanced, and the school soccer and basketball teams will now compete against teams from other parochial schools – mostly Catholic – because St. Demetrios is the only Greek American high school in the entire U.S.

Mr. Koularmanis also pointed out that St. Demetrios offers special math tutoring classes to its students on the weekends, and that this service is provided free of charge. "The tutoring session will be conducted by a college instructor, and it is open to students between Grades 7-12. This instructor will be working closely with our math department to streamline his classes. After reviewing the performance of rival public schools, we concluded that the greatest problem area for them is the subject of mathematics. This led us to the decision to place an even greater emphasis on math in our school. We have six math teachers at St. Demetrios, and their department is the largest in our school – second only to the Greek Department, of course. Our Greek Department has sixteen teachers, along with four science teachers who offer classes in Biology, Earth Science, Physics, and Chemistry," Mr. Koularmanis said.

Discussing the advantages students at St. Demetrios High School enjoy, Mr. Koularmanis said that "a lot of parents in the Greek Community are not aware that our seniors have the opportunity of taking a lot of classes which will help them when they get to college, as part of a program called College Now. Last year, one of our graduates, Helen Catsimalis, was accepted to Long Island University and went in having already fulfilled 36 credits. She is already one year ahead of schedule."

Enrollment at St. Demetrios High School is on the same level as it was last year, and Mr. Koularmanis attributed this to last year's largest ever graduating class. "Sixty children graduated our school last year, and this year we have around 50 new incoming freshmen, so enrollment figures will pretty much rival last year's. This is the first year ever that we have had to open a third section in our 9th Grade, because we have over 50 incoming freshmen attending," Mr. Koularmanis said.

St. Demetrios' Principal also spoke highly of the Greek Consulate. "We owe the Greek Government and the Education Coordinator at the Greek Consulate in New York, Mr. George Vlikidis, a heartfelt debt of gratitude for sending us teachers from Greece and ensuring that textbooks from Greece arrived here on time," he said. Mr. Koularmanis pointed out that the textbooks coming from Greece were a valuable asset to Greek American schools because they are new editions specially designed to meet the needs and abilities of Greek Americans students who are learning Greek as a second language.



The Principal of St. Demetrios Greek American Day School Anastasios Koularmanis welcomes 5th Grade students to the first day of school on September 3, 2008. Homeroom teacher Maria Kassimatis looks on.

high school would grow stagnant. There are a lot of wealthy Greek Americans who give money to non-Greek entities. My question is, aren't our Greek schools deserving of this help? Writing out a check is no big deal for them, but it makes a huge difference in the life of a child who is getting an education, or who wants to attend a Greek parochial school but cannot afford to do so."

Mr. Koularmanis noted that this school year there are 78 teachers working in the St. Demetrios Day School alone. Nine of these teachers have been sent directly from Greece, from the Ministry of Education, and three of them have remained on from last year. Together with the staff members of the St. Demetrios Afternoon School, Mr. Koularmanis said that the St. Demetrios school system employs over 100 persons.

"We have the largest number of teachers assigned directly from Greece working at our school," Mr. Koularmanis added. "This year, we were sent three Greek literature teachers, a religion teacher, a math

perfect their Greek, and gain a greater knowledge of the Orthodox faith and Greek history. "Unfortunately, the number of local Greek language teachers is constantly shrinking and so we must bring over teachers from the homeland who can teach our children how to speak Greek properly, while applying a modern teaching philosophy, filled with new ideas, instructional methods and programs."

Mr. Koularmanis cited the need for a larger teaching staff because of an increase in student registration. "We want to fill the gaps in our students' education – especially in high school. Math is our largest department, and we have six teachers working for us. Don't forget, we have a lot of students who transfer in from other schools, and many of these students have differing abilities. Our goal is to have all our students fully understand the curriculum and excel. To do this, we break up the classes into smaller groups of students with different levels, and each group gets assigned its own teacher."

One of the new programs that

garten students at St. Demetrios. The number of ninth-graders has also grown by 10%. "It is very important to note that last year, our eighth-grade students did not decide to attend high school somewhere else, as was the trend in the past, but instead chose to remain with us to attend high school as well. This is a testament to the fact that our school is doing a good job, things are going well, parents believe in us, and ultimately, they decide not to look for a high school elsewhere. This year, our Ninth Grade is the largest it has ever been in our entire history. We currently have 46 registered freshmen, and with ongoing registration, we project that this number will reach 50. For the first time, we are going to divide our Ninth Grade into three sections," Mr. Koularmanis said.

Another priority for St. Demetrios this year is to help high school students in their sophomore year score even higher on their SATs and other college entrance exams. Mr. Koularmanis said that this year St. Demetrios has posted the highest enrollment it has had in the

Students Excited for Another Year at Hellenic Charter School in Brooklyn

By Stavros Marmarinos
Special to The National Herald

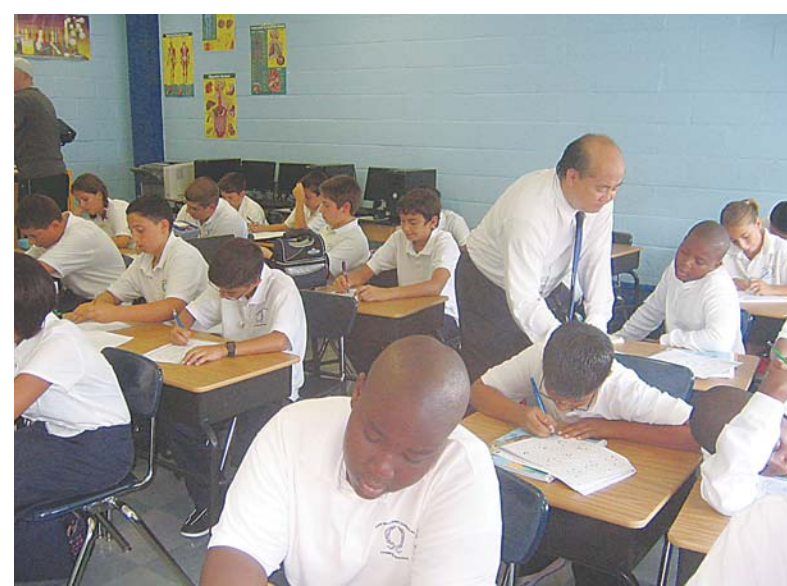
NEW YORK – "I was waiting for summer to end so I could come back to the school that I love," Sophia Wayne, a third-grader at the Hellenic Classical Charter School, which is based in the Koimisis tis Theotokou (Dormition) Greek Orthodox Community in Brooklyn, said.

Little Sophia said she is happy about the friends and acquaintances she has made at her school. "I like the fact that children who are not Greek are learning the Greek language and can speak it so well," she said.

There were many other children gathered next to her on Wednesday morning September 3rd, inside the school gymnasium, where they were met and welcomed by the Principal, Christina Tettonis. Meanwhile, the young students, who had not seen each other for two months they were away on summer vacation, embraced one another, laughed and shouted gleefully.

"I am very happy with the progress my child has been making in Greek," Sophia's mother Dina Wayne told The National Herald. "She has learned a lot in this school, and I am certain that she is going to learn to speak our language even better," she added. Ms. Wayne has two children who attend the Hellenic Classical Charter School in Brooklyn, Parakevi, who will attend 1st Grade this year, and Sophia.

"Both my daughters have really improved in Greek, in addition, of course, to the progress they have made in their regular English lan-



Teacher Benson Wang lends a helping hand to his class of seventh graders at the Hellenic Classical Charter School in Brooklyn.

guage classes," Ms. Wayne said. She added that she finds it very helpful that her daughters attend school with students from all different nationalities, races, and ethnicities, because it helps them grow accustomed to the society they are living in from a young age. She also said that she has spoken to several other Greek friends and acquaintances of hers about the Hellenic Classical Charter School.

At around 7:30 a.m., many parents began bringing their children to HCCS by car or on foot, and slowly, the entrance and hallway began filling up with people. The Principal, Ms. Tettonis, was on hand, standing right by the door to greet parents and students who were returning from last year.

Some of the students were seated in the school cafeteria, where they were waiting to be served breakfast, while others headed straight to the gym as they awaited to be escorted to their classrooms. In the gym, Ms. Tettonis and her staff welcomed the students back and wished them a successful start to the new school year. "We expect a lot from you, and we are certain that you will meet these expectations by studying hard and showing your interest in the programs that we have prepared for you," she added. Speaking to TNH, Ms. Tettonis said that she was pleased with the school's performance from the previous year, and this leads her to look to the future with optimism.

Ms. Tettonis also spoke about the

recently remodeled school library, which will be dedicated at the end of the month, as well as the new programs which have been put into place.

"We have a good teaching staff," said fifth-grader John Boudouris, who wants to become an architect when he grows up. "We have a really good school, and that is why my parents decided to send me here, to follow in the footsteps of my sister, who is a seventh-grader," he said, while taking the opportunity to wish all his classmates luck for the new school year.

"I went to Greece this summer and I was able to communicate in Greek," Billy Capetanakis, a fourth-grader, said. He also spoke very fondly about his teachers, who he said taught him so much. Angelo Leonardos, a fourth-grader as well, who dreams of become a doctor, echoed his classmate's sentiments and also spoke about how kind his teachers.

Angelo's mother, Effie, said that both her sons, Angelo and Demetrios, a seventh-grader, attend HCCS. "My youngest son learned how to speak, read and write in Greek," she said. According to Mrs. Leonardos, she feels that the parents who brought their children to HCCS are even more excited about the school this year, because they witnessed their children's progress with their own eyes.

The previous day, HCCS Board Chairman Charles Capetanakis, Esq. met with the school's faculty and staff and extended his wishes for a happy and productive school year. That same morning, the kindergartners went to school along with their parents. The

youngsters familiarized themselves with their classrooms, while their teachers spoke to the parents about the Kindergarten program.

Mr. Capetanakis was on hand for the first day of classes as well, together with Harvey Newman, a teaching fellow at the Center for Educational Innovation, who serves as Secretary of the HCCS School Board.

School Board Chairman Mr. Capetanakis said that each year more and more people are coming to see for themselves the progress and strides HCCS is making. "Last year was a very good year for our school, and we hope that this year will be even better," he said. Mr. Capetanakis also praised the Principal Ms. Tettonis for the initiatives she has taken to contribute to the school's development, while also speaking highly about the school staff. "We are all very pleased with the way that our school is being run and the progress it has made," he stated.

"This year, we have more Greek students," Director of School Operation Joy Petrakos said. "More and more parents from the Greek American Community are getting in touch with us, and are telling us that as time goes by our school is getting more and more recognition. We are still relatively new. This is only the fourth year that our school is in operation," she commented.

Nikolaos Leonardos, one of the founding members of HCCS, who currently serves as its Treasurer, remarked that he is pleased with the school progress, both as a school official and as a parent who sends his child there, and wished everyone at HCCS a successful school year.

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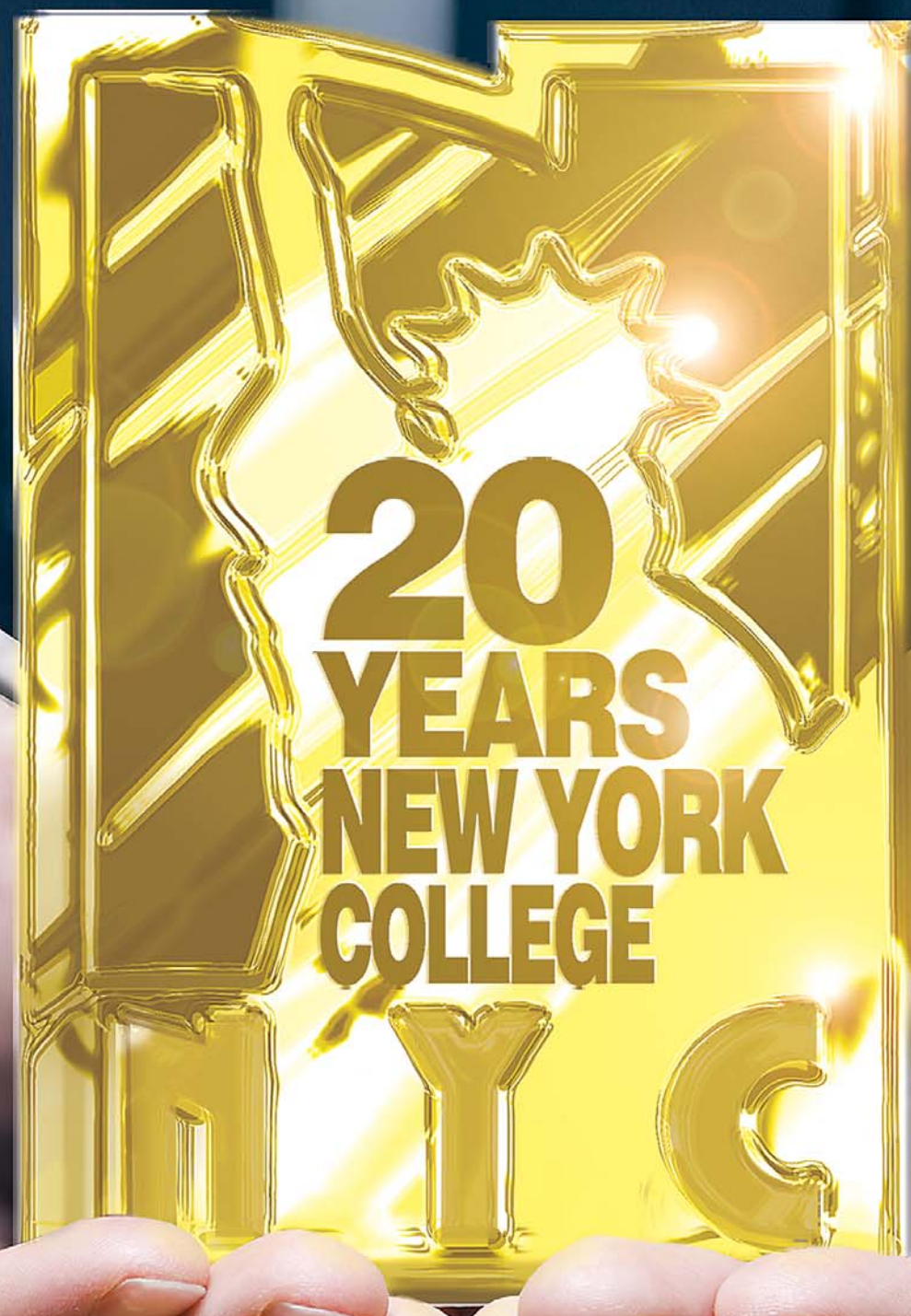
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