

Sports & Leisure

Athens 2004: The day after, 'Greece promised and delivered!'

On Friday, Nov. ^{x30}12, the Greek Chair of the University of Missouri-St. Louis hosted a lecture by Mrs. Demetra Egan, on the impact of the Olympic Games on Greece and the Olympic Movement.

Egan is Athens 2004 Program Manager for Greeks Abroad, Recruitment and Retention of Volunteers and International Torch Relay.

"Greeks pulled it off with style—Shame on us," said the *New York Times* for having little faith—to Athens we owe an apology." *New York Times* Aug. 31).

The Athens Olympic Games was a world wide celebration which revived the values of the Olympic Movement. Despite the many challenges Greece faced it managed to give a new spirit and image to the unique Olympic tradition of Greece.

Undertaking the Olympic Games was not only a huge challenge and an investment for the country. The Olympic Games were for Greece a unique opportunity to project a new image internationally—an image of a modern country in the European Union. In doing so, she created for herself a better future, not just as a tourist attraction but also for its development in other areas (construction, technology, the services industry, technology, people's skills).

One element that prevailed throughout the Games—which was also mentioned by all foreign correspondents was that the Greek Games, had soul. The spirit that was experienced in Athens through the Games, was born out of the soul of Greece, out of Greece's history and was driven by the passionate nature of the Greek people. And this soul was evident everywhere, in the way



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the programs were conceived (e.g. the Global Torch Relay idea, the ancient Olympia idea, the Olympic Truce revival, to the way they were implemented—the opening-ceremony, and the volunteers, and shown by the people/spectators in the venues—and reverberated in the stadia, yes, through the Zorba singing.

Nationally, the benefits were tangible and intangible. The most obvious ones are modern infrastructure (national airport, sporting facilities, new parklands, a new coastal zone), a network of arterial roads & highways, a sophisticated metropolitan/suburban transportation system (metro, suburban rail, tram), and enhanced tourist facilities & hotel accommodations.

The Games became a source for national pride for all Greeks, gave self-confidence for the Greek people, provided increased workforce skills and knowledge and increased employment opportunities. Internationally, a new perception of Greece and the Greek people in the world has been achieved, as Athens became a reference point for following hosts of Olympic Games.

Of course the post-olympic Greeks are not going to be different from the pre-olympic Greeks. In some respects, however, they will be behaving differently. Everybody realizes that what is needed is to build on all the positives which have come out of the Olympic Games, with target the long term improve-

ment of the country, and of ourselves, thus proving that indeed the Olympic Games are a milestone in the Greek history.

After the success and the Olympic Games (and Euro2004) Greeks can be proud not only of their past and history but as a modern country, which can play an important role in Europe and can offer visitors a lot. Greeks all over the world can feel doubly proud of their heritage and their Greek identity.

For more information on this and the other programs of the chair contact: Professor Michael Cosmopoulos, Greek Studies chair, University of Missouri-St. Louis, (314) 516-6241, or send an E-mail to cosmopoulos@umsl.edu or visit www.greekstudies.org