

St. Louis Greek Community dedicates Matsakis Cultural Center

ST. LOUIS—A capacity crowd packed The Matsakis Cultural Center at the University of Missouri – St. Louis to help honor and dedicate the opening of the Dr. Nicholas and Theodora Matsakis Cultural Center. On hand for the ribbon cutting was almost the entire Matsakis family, daughter Aphrodite, sons Elias and Demetre plus numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren, who took great pride in the honor bestowed upon their parents and grandparents.

As the guests acquainted themselves with the various sculptures of antiquity, photos, the library of volumes ranging from the Classical period, Byzantine and modern Greece, they availed themselves with an array of hors d'oeuvres.

Welcoming remarks were made by Professor Joel Glassman, chairman of The Center for International Studies at UMSL. Chancellor Thomas George of the University spoke glowingly of the progress the Greek Studies program has made since its inception and of the magnificent addition and positive effect the Nicholas and Theodora Matsakis Culture Center will have upon Hellenism in the greater St. Louis area.

AHEPA past President, Frank Manios presented the Medal of Freedom to Dr. Matsakis for his tireless and multi-decade advocacy on behalf of Cyprus freedom and equally for his strong endorsement for the preservation of Hellenism in the United States.

Dr. Matsakis, in his gracious remarks, cited The Order of Ahepa for the values he learned as a child on the island of Kaphathos and during his studies on the island of Cyprus during the 1930's. At the age of seven, his personal life journey began on the streets of Athens when he witnessed first hand the devastation of refugees fleeing from Turkish genocide in Asia Minor. As a young student in Cyprus, he saw first hand the Cypriots struggle for independence and participated in the demonstrations of the 1939 uprising. Shortly after, he came to America where he studied dentistry at St. Louis University, and while working part time as a Greek school teacher at St. Nicholas, and he still found time to work an almost full time job.

In spite of his long hours of work as a dentist to support his growing family, he still found time to devote to Hellenism and the youth of Ahepa. His appointment as honorary Consul of Cyprus added to his responsibilities, which he took in earnest. Dr. Matakis' fund raising efforts for the enclaved children of Cyprus are legend as money poured in from all parts of the U.S. and Europe. Hence today, there are 100's of now grown children who have benefited from his efforts, which still continue with zest, love and determination.

Mrs. Matsakis stated in her eloquent remarks "It has been said that the influence of the Greeks far exceeds their number. From arts to mathematics, from philosophy to science, from medicine to politics, Greek ideas and language have influenced, if not shaped our modern world. This nation was built on the democratic principles developed in ancient Athens."

"In my life time, I saw Greece support our great nation in two world wars. Greek immigrants who came to this country, built churches and communities. Greek Americans have been leaders in the professions, in commerce and dear to my heart in the great Universities of this country. Last year, we saw a celebration of old and new Greek culture as the Olympics returned to Greece. This Center is here to celebrate and honor all of this and more."

"We also owe much to so many great St. Louisans of Hellenic descent who in actions large and small each did their part in preserving our culture, our music and our language. Many have now passed on and they are deeply missed. We can all take joy in knowing that their grandchildren and their grandchildren's grandchildren will have this beautiful center as a place of enrichment and renewal."

Each of the talented children of Dr. & Mrs. Matsakis spoke of their parents in glowing admiration.

Elias Matsakis, a successful Chicago lawyer, acknowledged, "It is especially fitting that St. Louis, which has been known as the "Gateway to the West," is now going to be the "Gateway to Western Civilization" as the birthplace and cradle of the many great institutions of Western



Dr. Nicholas Matsakis (left) receives the Medal of Freedom award from AHEPA past supreme president Frank Manios.

Civilization that arose in Greece."

"I live in Chicago, and there are many, many more Greeks in Chicago, but I don't believe that anywhere does everything that is right and good about Hellenism, breathe any clearer or stronger than in St. Louis."

Professor Michael Cosmopoulos, chair of the Hellenic Government-Karakas Family Foundation Professor of Greek Studies said, "The Nicholas and Theodora Matsakis Hellenic Culture Center at the University of Missouri-St. Louis is a place where scholars, students, and community members are welcome to immerse themselves in Hellenic culture and history and to access political, educational, cultural, travel, and business information about Greece." The Center has five main constituents:

- The Mary E. Critzas Gallery of Greek Art features a permanent exhibit of ancient Greek and Byzantine art, as well as periodic exhibitions of artwork by modern Greek artists.

- The Karakas Family Library is filled with general-interest books and periodicals on ancient, Byzantine, and modern Greece as well as a collection of current brochures, informational booklets, and other printed materials from Greek public and private organizations, including subscriptions to major Greek newspapers and magazines.

- The Hellenic Spirit Foundation Conference Room is available for a number of events and activities related to Greek culture including lectures,

films, meetings, and performances.

- The Mary E. Critzas Archives of the Greek-American Community details the history of the local Greek-American community, including the documents resulting from the Greek Chair's Oral History project.

- The Andrew Dimarogonas Media Center holds computers with access to the internet and updated bookmarks for major Greek portals and Web sites. Also, the Media Center features a projection area with Greek films and educational and informational videos."

The Greek Chair, established some seven years ago by the generous support of The Hellenic Government and strong Greek American community endorsement, has made outstanding progress under the academic leadership of Dr. Michael Cosmopoulos.

The Nicholas and Theodora Matsakis Hellenic Culture Center was made possible by the following donors: Steve Chalmers, Michael and Deborah Cosmopoulos, John Critzas, Katherine Dimarogonas, Hellenic Spirit Foundation, Menelaos Karamichalis, Nicholas and Sophia Karakas, Katsinas Family Foundation, Elias Glavinas, Harry Lemakis, Demetrios Lappas, Elias, Demetrios, and Aphrodite Matsakis, Constantine and Maria Michaelides, Christos Papadopoulos, George and Renna Pelican, Demetrios Sarantites, Salvatore Sutura, Jeanne Tombras, Peter and Chrysoula Tomaras and Evagelos Tozakoglou.

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