

A magazine cover for "NEO" magazine. The title "NEO" is in large, blue, outlined letters on the left. On the right, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a white blouse with black piping and a black skirt, stands on a balcony, smiling. The background shows a city skyline. The cover includes a blue circle with "DEC" and a red circle with "\$4.95".

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Stacy Bliagos

on Community Service in New York

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and the world was made through him..."*

John 1:9-10

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Family

WISHING YOU A
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BRIGHTENED BY



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Wonder

AND FILLED WITH

Peace

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For more information, visit: thefaitheendowment.org



*Merry Christmas
&
Happy New Year*

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FOR ALL PEOPLE
AROUND THE WORLD !*

*THE METROPOULOS FAMILY,
DEAN, MARIANNE, EVAN AND DAREN*

Καλά Χριστούγεννα and Καλή Χρονιά!!

Merry Christmas to all our friends across the globe,

May the New Year bring us health, peace, and love!

The holidays are to remind us of what truly matters: coming together, supporting one another, and living as Christians and responsible citizens of the country and of our world.

As we are blessed, we must extend our hands generously to those in need throughout the year.

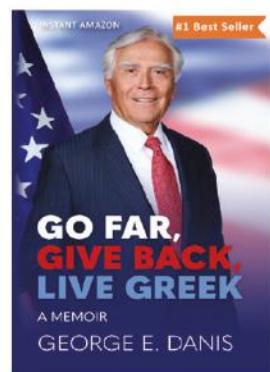
As immigrants, we understand the challenges of building a new life while honoring our heritage. That is why I continue to live by the motto: Go Far, Give Back, and Live Greek.

Wishing you and your families a blessed Christmas and a joyful New Year!

With warm regards,



George E. Danis



A close-up photograph of a Christmas tree branch. The branch is covered in green needles and several ornaments: a large gold bauble, a smaller red bauble, a gold bell, and a small gold star. In the foreground, there are several wrapped gifts. One gift is red with a gold ribbon and a red bow. Another is gold with a yellow ribbon and a yellow bow. There are also green and white gifts. The background is a solid teal color with a subtle bokeh effect of lights.

*Wishing all
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and
a Happy, Healthy & Prosperous
New Year!*

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very Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year 2026*



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and
a Prosperous New Year!*

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The Hellenic American Association for Professionals in Finance, Inc. (H.A.B.A.) is one of the premier Greek-American organizations in the New York metropolitan area. HABA is a not-for-profit organization established in 1982 to promote the professional and educational interest of Greek-Americans in the banking and finance industries. Its current active membership consists of over 200 professionals representing more than 50 institutions across the financial spectrum.

Since its inception, HABA has strived to serve the professional and educational interests of Greek-American financial professionals through the sponsoring of lectures, seminars, cocktail receptions with guest speakers and other events. Over the past years, HABA has had many distinguished speakers and lecturers.

We are thankful for each and every member of our Global AHEPA Family that continues to work hard to support, promote, and preserve our heritage and brotherhood.



**Wishing you a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season
Merry Christmas & Happy New Year
from Our Family to Yours!**

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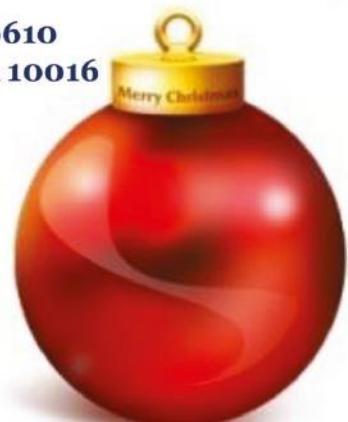
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From an anonymous friend*



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COVER PHOTO
BY DOROTHY SHI

FROM THE EDITOR



A WORLD OF WONDERS

When the wonders of the world become transparent, when the routines of life become trite, when the horrors of the world become routine, I babysit my three granddaughters with my wife and then I see the world through their eyes and see it all with wonder again.

Lila, who is three, put on a Christmas show at her pre-school, in her best Christmas dress (proud to say in the first row) and the first thing she did when she came onstage and got to see the whole world looking at her is wave to all of us and called out her mommy! She puts the sprinkles on cookies solemnly and eats the sprinkles on cookies first, and she went up and down the Christmas stockings and pointed out everybody's name. We couldn't be more proud.

Esme is two and will say your name four or five times when she sees you. She will also say hi to you four or five times, and then looks at you and say hi some more. She bumps her head against you and you smell her curls, her hand is like a tiny clamshell, and she's scared of Santa Claus. Her parents took her to take a picture with Santa and everyone is smiling, including their dog Moe, but Esme keeps a stony guard over the big whiskered guy in red who tries to be too friendly. Except when she laughs you can

see all her little teeth—and she loves Clementine oranges.

Zoe is one and the butterball. She has eyes like beacons that take everything in. Lift your hand and she will look at it, drop your hand and she will follow it, she stares at you for a good long while, until you do something silly, and then she smirks, until you toss her in the air, and then she gives you a belly laugh and you see her gummy smile and two teeth. When she sits on your lap you nuzzle her head with your chin and the world feels a safe place, not just for her, but for you, also.

We visit the apartments of my two daughters and see the toys of my granddaughters all over, and the world is a playground for them, and for us. And we can't help ourselves saying, "Good job!" and grinning with all our teeth like Ms. Rachel when they do something extraordinary, which is all the time in our eyes.

When the world seems trite, and a little scary, it's good to see it from the eyes of a child, who is seeing it for the first time, and is trusting you to protect them.

Hope you had a Merry Christmas and may your New Year's be a year of appreciation for all the wonders of life.

DIMITRI C. MICHALAKIS

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THI President and Executive Director George Stamas and Mike Manatos



THI Executive Board Member Nikos Koumettis honored alongside Coca-Cola CEO James Quincey



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THI President George Stamas



THI President and Vice Chair George Stamas and John Koudounis



THI 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient John Payiavlas with wife Marissa, son Anthony along with John Koudounis and Mike Manatos



THI Executive Board Member John Catsimatidis



Guest at THI Lord Byron Circle reception on the eve of the gala

THE HELLENIC INITIATIVE CELEBRATES RECORD-BREAKING WEEKEND IN NEW YORK \$2.7 MILLION RAISED TO SUPPORT GREECE

The Hellenic Initiative (THI) raised a record-breaking \$2.7 million through a series of events in New York City December 5-8 dedicated to THI's mission of investing in the future of Greece. The events shined a powerful spotlight on Greece's remarkable progress and ongoing challenges that the global Greek diaspora continues to address through THI's transparent, trusted and impactful funding. For THI is not just a relief for everything Greece has endured but a beacon of hope for everything Greece can become.

This year THI also held its 1st Annual Corporate Dinner which honored Coca-Cola CEO James Quincey on December 8 at the Union League Club. The beneficiary was Regeneration, co-founded by THI and Coca-Cola in 2014 to reverse the brain drain and revitalize the Greek workforce. It has become the largest employment and training program for young graduates in Greece, resulting in over 5,000 graduates hired across more than 2,000 companies in Greece. Those who joined THI President George Stamas and Coca-Cola CEO Quincey in offering remarks included: Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla; dinner Chairman and THI Board Member John Catsimatidis;

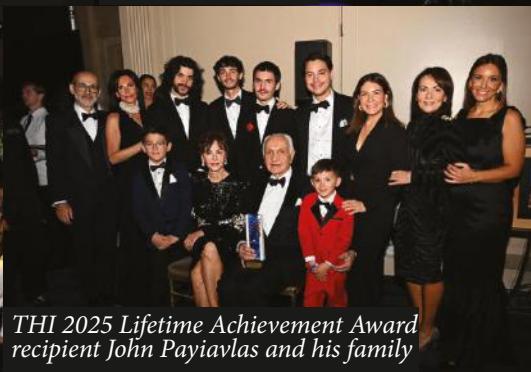
and Immediate-past President, Coca-Cola Europe, THI Executive Board Member and Regeneration Co-Founder, Nikos Koumettis, who was also honored this evening. Other honored guests included: the new Coca-Cola CEO (announced the following day) Henrique Braun; Greece's Minister of Development and Investment Takis Theodorikakos and Regeneration Co-Founder Panos Madamopoulos-Moraris.

At THI's sold-out 13th Annual New York Gala at Cipriani Wall Street on December 6, THI Co-Founder and President George P Stamas, THI Co-Founder and Chairman Andrew N. Liveris (via video), as well as THI Vice Chairs and Gala Co-Chairs John Koudounis and Mike Psaros, addressed the over 865 in attendance including THI Board Members, Lord Byron Circle Members, sponsors and other Hellenes and Philhellenes from around the globe. The evening opened with an invocation delivered by the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of America, Archbishop Elpidophoros. Before the entertainment began, the Chair of THI's International Ambassadors Princess Tatiana and THI's new Executive Director Mike Manatos announced

the record-breaking amount raised and special guest performer Antigoni – the recently announced representative of Cyprus at Eurovision 2026.

World-renowned actor and proud Greek Hugh Jackman narrated a short film on THI's impact and vision for the future, which can be seen [here](#).

A special highlight of the evening was awarding the 2025 THI Lifetime Achievement Award to John Payiavlas. He was introduced by all six of his grandchildren and was surrounded by his wife, children, grandchildren, their spouses and even 2 great-grandchildren as he accepted his award. A son of immigrants, born during the Great Depression, Payiavlas built from 2 employees to over 10,000 AVI Foodsystems, now the largest privately owned contract food service company in the United States. In a deeply emotional speech that brought the audience to a standing ovation, Payiavlas spoke about the essence of love, unity, and purpose, calling all Greeks and Philhellenes to unite under organizations like THI to help carry the Hellenic torch forward.



The gala was further elevated by the attendance of multiple high-ranking Greek Government officials, including Greece's "First Lady", wife of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Mareva Grabowski Mitsotakis; Deputy Prime Minister Kostis Hadjidakis; Minister of Labor and Social Insurance Niki Kerameus; Minister of Infrastructure and Transport Christos Dimas; Minister of Tourism Olga Kefalogianni; Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Haris Theocharis; Secretary General for Greeks Abroad Maira Myrogianni, Ambassador to the US Ekaterini Nassika, Consul General in New York Ifigenia Kanara and Consul General in Boston Symeon Tegos. Also in attendance were Congresswoman Nicole Malliotakis and the Chancellor of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, His Grace Bishop Nektarios of Diokleia.

THI Board Members in attendance at the gala, in addition to Stamas, Liveris (via video), Koudounis and Psaros included: Executive Committee Members Dean Dakolias (Vice Chair), John Catsimatidis, Father Alex Karloutsos, Nikos Koumoullis, Dennis Mehiel and Pericles Navab. Other Board Members

attending included: George Anderson, Achilles Constantakopoulos, Theane Evangelis, Andreas Kramvis, William Spell, John Vardinoyannis and Harry Wilson. For a full list of the remarkable THI Board members click [here](#).

Following the program and dinner, guests flooded the dance floor for the after-party to the sounds of the Jimmy Vali Band, Olympia and special guest Antigoni.

The weekend events kicked off on December 5 with a THI Lord Byron Circle reception at the offices of Calamos Investments overlooking the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree, where guests enjoyed exclusive wines of Château Margaux, provided by THI board member and longtime proprietor of the Château Corinne Mentzelopoulos. This was followed by another sold-out THI New Leaders Cocktail Party which brought together THI's Under-45 professional group for an evening of 'networking with a purpose'.

Founded in 2012, THI is the only global non-profit organization that unites Hellenes and Philhellenes globally around philanthropy by

investing in the future of Greece. Since its founding, THI has raised more than \$38 million and has grown to be the largest Greek Diaspora organization in the world. More information is available at thellenicinitiative.org.

George P. Stamas, THI Co-Founder and President stated: "This record-breaking week proves once again what happens when Hellenes and Philhellenes unite with purpose. Our pride in the funds raised is matched only by our gratitude to the global community whose love for Greece fuels THI's mission every single day."

John Koudounis, THI Vice Chair, stated: "The power of our Diaspora is global, strategic, and enduring. Every contribution echoes across Greece – in families supported, jobs created, and opportunities unlocked."

Michael Psaros, THI Vice Chair, stated: "The momentum we saw this week is extraordinary. It sends a loud message. The Diaspora is not only present – we are energized, united, and committed to impact."



by Athena Efter

For 53 years the Hellenic-American Neighborhood Action Committee, or HANAC as it is familiarly called, has served as a beacon of hope and assistance to the New York City community. Founded in 1972 to help serve the needs of city's Greek community, especially newer Greek immigrants, it has since expanded to serve New York residents of all backgrounds. From senior programs to affordable housing, from youth programs to legal assistance and everything in between, HANAC helps 30,000 vulnerable New Yorkers better their lives and access the resources they need to thrive. Since 2019, Stacy Bliagos has served as the Executive Director of HANAC. An attorney by trade, and a native New Yorker herself, Bliagos brings a decade of experience in local government administration to the position. NEO sat down with Bliagos to talk about HANAC and her role as the head of an invaluable social services organization.

Leading HANAC: **Stacy Bliagos** on Community Service in New York

PHOTO: DOROTHY SHI

Tell us a bit about your background. You've come from the legal world and have worked in the public services sector. What brought you to HANAC? How was that transition into the nonprofit sector?

I've always been driven by a desire to serve and advocate for others, which is what initially led me to law and later to public service. My work in government allowed me to understand how policy, community needs, and real-world implementation come together. HANAC felt like the natural next step place where I could blend that experience with mission-driven work that impacts people directly and immediately.

The transition into the nonprofit sector was energizing. It allowed me to work more closely with communities, respond more quickly to emerging needs, and lead an organization with a proud history of uplifting vulnerable New Yorkers.

HANAC has been around since 1972 and has grown and evolved significantly for over half a century. What were some of the most important accomplishments in that growth? And how did it move from serving the Greek community to serving all New Yorkers?

HANAC was founded to support the Greek immigrant community, but its mission was always rooted in helping those who needed it most. Over time, as New York changed, HANAC evolved alongside it.

Some of our proudest accomplishments include building thousands of units of affordable senior housing, expanding our social service programs across all ages, and developing comprehensive support from adult literacy and youth programs to mental health and workforce development.

Today, HANAC reflects the diversity of New York City. Our growth has been intentional, thoughtful, and always centered on meeting the needs of the communities we serve regardless of background.

What are some of the new initiatives and projects that you're guiding under your leadership? The ones that most excite you?

I'm especially excited about expanding our senior housing portfolio and exploring new models that integrate wellness, socialization, and aging-in-place supports. We're also strengthening our

intergenerational programming, deepening our adult literacy and workforce initiatives, and investing in technology that improves service delivery.

Another area I'm passionate about is enhancing mental health support across our programs, ensuring that clients of all ages have access to compassionate and culturally competent care.

Queens—and New York City in general—is one of the most ethnically diverse counties in the U.S. What unique challenges and opportunities does this present for a community-based organization?

Diversity is Queens' greatest strength, and it shapes every aspect of our work. The opportunity lies in creating programs that celebrate diversity programs that are multilingual, culturally responsive, and inclusive.

The challenge is making sure services stay accessible and relevant to communities with different histories, languages, and needs.

At HANAC, we see ourselves as bridge-builders. We're rooted in the immigrant experience, so we understand the power of culturally sensitive support and how it helps newcomers thrive.

Affordable senior housing is central to HANAC's mission. The newly elected Mayor Zohran Mamdani has made this a top priority. What would this mean for HANAC? Are you looking forward to working with the new mayor?

Absolutely. Any administration that prioritizes affordable housing, especially for seniors, will find a strong partner in HANAC. We have decades of experience developing high-quality, affordable residences that allow seniors to live with dignity and independence.

If the city expands funding, streamlines development processes, and supports nonprofits like ours, we can do even more. We look forward to working collaboratively with Mayor Mamdani to address one of the city's most urgent needs.

HANAC's scope is vast, from housing to youth programs, adult literacy to healthcare access. What's the key to making all of this work so seamlessly?

The secret is our people and our philosophy. We have dedicated staff who understand the communities we serve,

and we operate from a holistic perspective. People don't experience challenges in isolation, housing affects health, education affects employment, and social connection affects wellbeing.

Because we recognize these intersections, our programs complement one another. The result is a seamless network of support that follows clients through every stage of life.

Does HANAC work in partnership with other social service organizations? Have you had such collaborations or opportunities?

Yes, partnerships are essential to our mission. We collaborate with city agencies, nonprofits, hospitals, schools, community groups, and local businesses.

These relationships allow us to expand our reach, share resources, and create comprehensive solutions. Whether we're coordinating care for seniors, providing youth employment opportunities, or addressing food insecurity, collaboration strengthens our impact.

Are there opportunities for younger generations, high schoolers and college student, to volunteer at HANAC?

When opportunities arise, we welcome young people who want to give back and make a difference in their neighborhoods, gain experience, or learn more about community work. At various points throughout the year, students can volunteer in our senior centers, assist with community events, support youth programs, or participate in service-learning projects.

Finally, how has your Greek background informed not just what you do at HANAC, but how you lead your life in general?

My Greek heritage is rooted in family, community, and philoxenia. Those values have shaped me personally and professionally.

They inform how I lead: with empathy, inclusivity, and a belief that every person deserves dignity and opportunity.

Working at HANAC feels like an extension of that cultural legacy. We were founded by Greek immigrants who wanted to help others succeed, and I'm honored to continue that mission in a way that now embraces all New Yorkers.

Building the Future: HANAC's 53rd Anniversary Gala Honors Advocates for Affordable Housing and Community Care

by Athena Efter



RuthAnne Visnauskas, Stacy Bliagos, Helene Caloir, Tammy Laspalakis Berentson, Monica Morales

HANAC (Hellenic American Neighborhood Action Committee) celebrated its 53rd Anniversary Gala at the legendary Ziegfeld Ballroom with a 6 p.m. cocktail reception followed by dinner and dancing.

Protopresbyter Anargyros Stavropoulos, who offered blessings and prayers on behalf of Archbishop Elpidophoros, wishing everyone “a very uplifting and enjoyable evening of fellowship.”

Monica Morales then began the award ceremony by introducing HANAC’s “fearless” Executive Director Stacy Bliagos, praising her tireless leadership, advocacy, and dedication to spearheading affordable-housing efforts and meaningful partnerships.

In her remarks, Stacy welcomed guests and emphasized that the evening was more than an annual celebration—it was “a gathering of something extraordinary: the strength of a community that has stood together for five decades.” She honored HANAC’s founder, George Douris, noting that “he saw a need 53 years ago and he acted,” believing deeply in the power of purpose and compassion. Over the years, she said, HANAC has become a lifeline for thousands of New Yorkers—a place of hope,



Stacy Bliagos, Tammy Laspalakis Berentson

opportunity, and belonging. She highlighted not just HANAC’s past, but “the promise of a future” filled with impact, innovation, and inclusion.

Stacy thanked donors for “investing in the promise of a stronger community,” the staff for their tireless commitment—“the heart and soul of HANAC”—and elected officials along with development, government, and community partners for ensuring equity and opportunity remain central in public life. She closed with inspiring words: “Together, we are not just building housing. We are building hope. We are supporting families, empowering seniors, guiding our youth, and strengthening the social fabric of the communities we serve.” She also expressed gratitude to Evangeline Douris, Co-Founder of HANAC, Tammy Berentson, Chairman



Stacy Bliagos, Dr. Cameron Hernandez, Nancy Papaioannou, Helene Caloir, Tammy Laspalakis Berentson

and President, and the HANAC Board of Directors for their trust and support.

Stacy then presented the Volunteer of the Year Award to Angeliki Betzios, recognizing the essential role volunteers play in achieving

The invocation was delivered by Rev.



Stacy Bliagos, Joe Whalen, Jeff Fox, Tammy Laspalakis Berentson, Helene Caloir

HANAC's mission. She praised Angie's warm spirit and lifelong dedication, calling her "a true community champion." Angie, who has been with HANAC for over 45 years, expressed heartfelt gratitude to the directors and the community she serves.



Micki Garcia, Stacy Bliagos, Malik Swinson

Helene Caloir, HANAC Board Secretary, presented the HANAC Public Service Award to RuthAnne Visnauskas, Commissioner and CEO of New York State Homes and Community Renewal. Helene reflected on her parents' immigrant journey and their guidance to "never forget where you came from," noting how she carries that message into her work with HANAC. She praised RuthAnne as one of New York's finest public officials for her leadership in sustainable and affordable housing. RuthAnne spoke about growth, impact, and the ecosystem required to achieve them, emphasizing partnerships with organizations like HANAC that have revitalized neighborhoods for decades.

Tammy Berentson, Interim Chairman and President, then offered an overview of HANAC's work and key developments, ending with a call to action—to share HANAC's story widely because "the more people who know our story, the more we can do together." A moving short video followed, showcasing HANAC's programs and the power of community spirit.

The evening continued with the presentation of the Person of the Year awards.

The first honoree, Dr. Cameron Hernandez, was introduced by Mount Sinai Queens Board Member Nancy Papaioannou, who praised him as a "super leader" whose work mirrors the Douris family's legacy of supporting the most vulnerable. Dr. Hernandez, currently President and COO of Mount Sinai Queens and a Professor of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine, is known for his work in the Hospitalization at Home Program and for being a dedicated house-call physician.

He described receiving recognition from an organization as vital as HANAC as deeply humbling, stating that HANAC has long been a beacon for seniors, immigrants, and families. He spoke movingly about older adults gaining dignity, belonging, and resources through organizations like HANAC. He thanked Dr. David Rich for his mentorship and the Mount Sinai Queens team for their shared commitment to equity and care.

The second Person of the Year, Joe Whalen, Vice President of Suffolk Construction, was introduced by Jeff Fox of Foxy Management, who praised Whalen's wide-ranging talents, generous spirit, and unwavering presence. Fox highlighted Joe's leadership in creating a business unit focused on affordable housing and celebrated his role as a trusted partner of HANAC. Joe delivered a heartfelt speech, beginning with a tribute to his father, longtime Executive Director of Green Chimneys, a child-service organization that shaped Joe's own sense of social responsibility. His construction career has focused on schools, healthcare, and affordable housing—three pillars he described as places to learn, heal, and, in the case of housing, "feel safe and loved." He called affordable housing the most rewarding work of all. He reflected on Suffolk's work at HANAC's Garden Towers in the Bronx and expressed excitement for the new Silver Beach Project in the Rockaways. He thanked Shelley and Jeff Fox for introducing him to the affordable-housing community and praised Stacy Bliagos for her leadership in shaping HANAC into a premier housing organization.

The evening concluded with remarks from Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas, who first encountered HANAC as a Jackson Heights parent seeking after-school programs. She later came to appreciate the breadth of HANAC's impact—from youth services to support for older adults—and expressed deep gratitude for all HANAC does for older adults and working families.



Ian Kantor, Lisa Bova-Hiatt, Stacy Bliagos, Dale Degenshein



Stacy Bliagos, Lisa Bova-Hiatt, Monica Morales



Stacy Bliagos, Amy Fox, Jeff Fox



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Emmanuel Velivasakis, Distinguished Engineer and Author, Presents His Book at the Hellenic Cultural Center

by Athena Efter



The book's author Emmanuel Velivasakis

Emmanuel Velivasakis, distinguished and notable engineer of the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine at the World Trade Center, recently presented his book *Climbing the Peaks of the World*, at the Hellenic Cultural Center in Astoria, NY. An introduction was provided by Dean



Sevasti Boutos

Efkarpidis, a member of the Greek Writers Association. He noted that Velivasakis, when faced with the project of the rebuilding of the St. Nicholas Church and Shrine at Ground Zero, did not see the ruins before him. He saw

a message that the city would stand strong again. It wasn't just job for him, but a mission inspired by a sense of strength, faith, and community. It was a manifestation of his soul and life journey, connecting him to his own values, faith, and culture.

Velivasakis, born in Heraklion on the Greek island of Crete, grew up in the town of Kamarioti, and came to the United States to study. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in civil/structural engineering. With his expertise in structural design and engineering, he would go on to build some of the world's tallest buildings including the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, the Taipei 101 Tower in Taipei, Taiwan, the Jeddah Tower in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and the rehabilitation of the Dome of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., before moving on to join the team of world renowned Spanish-Swiss architect Santiago Calatrava to rebuild the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine, destroyed in the terrorist attacks in NYC on 9/11. His book "Climbing the Peaks of the World" is truly a reflection of his own journey that began as a young boy on the island of Crete to a journey around the world building magnificent peaks, which is a metaphor of his own inner personal drive to persevere and succeed, while at the same time connecting him to his roots, his values, his spirituality, and his sense of community.

Dean went on to note that Velivasakis "was a man who build bridges, but did not measure his life as a man who built bridges throughout his professional world, but how many bridges he built in life – bridges of steel that supported skyscrapers, bridges of faith like the St. Nicholas Church and Shrine, and bridges of community, like the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur."

Following the introduction by Dean Efkarpidis, a video presentation and message was shared by the book's editor, Anna Vlavaki, who is based in Heraklion, Crete. She talked about the man behind the words and how inspiring his journey was to her. He never forgot his family or where he came from, as he went on to

reach the highest pinnacles. She recalled how he told her that "logic many times sets us back" and how important it was to him to always have a "pure heart and soul" in order for there to be meaning. Through the book and the author's journey, Vlavaki understood that "what we do is not for the sake of showing ourselves, but our work and our actions, to inspire and be inspired" and how that can inspire us back to "climb the peaks" of our own journeys.



Collaborator and professional colleague Georgia Kokkinidou also addressed her thoughts and reflections, describing him as a man of great character and strong resolve who is always thinking ahead on his next venture to "climb the peaks", quoting the author's favorite author Nikos Kazantzakis "that to find your limits, you have to go beyond them", which she also believes is a true testament to how Velivasakis applies this philosophy to his own life. He didn't shy away from challenge, but instead embraced it through hard work and perseverance, which is the blueprint for climbing the highest peaks on our life's journey.



Nikos Alexiou, president of the Greek Writer's Association

Readings of excerpts from his book were followed by remarks from the President of the Greek Writer's Association, Nikos Alexiou. He noted that for Velivasakis, the peak is not just about the heights we climb to achieve professional success, but about the depth we find in that climb that brings us closer to our identity, our faith, our memories, our culture, and connects us to Greece and the Diaspora, inspiring us to contribute to our heritage and to the world. He added that the philosophical message the author is presenting to us is that "the peak" is an intrinsic value rooted in the love of country, a sense of duty, and a sense of contribution.



The book's editor Anna Vlavaki



Georgia Kokkinidou

The closing remarks and thoughts were presented by the author himself. Velivasakis expressed his heartfelt thank you to all who were present and referred to the evening as “a meeting of life on paper” that he was able to share with all. Within the pages of the book, he wanted to share his personal challenges and the triumphs of “climbing the peaks of the world”. He noted that it was about overcoming limitations, maintaining faith amid the challenges, and to keep climbing. He paid tribute to fellow Cretan and world-renowned author Nikos Kazantzakis by quoting him that you should “never see your limitations, but to break past them”. He noted how, as a young man, this concept became a whisper that fueled his inner fire “to climb the peaks” and followed him on his journey. He also recalled

how his own mother told him “to reach that place that you can’t”, and he found it strange at first. He asked himself “how could I reach that place that I can’t?” At first, he found it more of an invitation to do just that, and then he saw it as a debt, and finally he saw it as duty and responsibility to fulfill, emphasizing that “the greatest achievement behind success is not success itself, but the meaning behind the struggle.”

He noted that one of his most meaningful and important achievements was the rebuilding of the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Shrine and Church at ground zero. This project represented more than “climbing the peaks of the world” and success, but a climb toward fellow humanity, to connect spiritually and emotionally, and to rebuild hope.

Most important to him with his book was to bring a sense of Hellenic ethos to younger generations, and to show them how they can turn that sense of Hellenism into community - to go beyond the limits, to give back to their roots and to share it with the world. He added that “you will never be satisfied by neglecting who you are. You have to exert who you are culturally, that you are a Hellene, and then proceed, because that gives you more power to reach the highest peaks of the world.”

To Velivasakis, success ultimately means to reach the pinnacle but still be able to see yourself – to never forget where you came from, who you are, and the people that helped you along the way. We climb not for the sake of climbing, but to enlighten each other.

He ended his remarks by reflecting on the importance of language. Writing the book in the Greek language was of particular significance to him in terms of meaning. By expressing himself in his native language, his words carry the purity and authenticity of truth.

The book presentation was followed by a Q&A with the author, and wine and cheese reception with a taste of tsipouro, a strong Greek spirit often referred to as “Greek moonshine”, for those who really dare “to climb the peaks” and really reach for places they can’t.



Dean Efkarpidis

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GREEKS AND THE ANTI-SEMITIC POGROMS OF ODESSA

by Dean Kalimniou*

Odessa entered the nineteenth century as an imperial experiment. Founded in 1794, on the site of an ancient Greek colony, it developed rapidly into a major Black Sea port whose population was shaped by trade, mobility and imperial privilege. Greeks and Jews, fleeing persecution and seeking opportunity, arrived early and settled in large numbers. By the 1820s, both communities occupied prominent positions in the city's commercial and social life. Greek merchants dominated shipping, brokerage and international trade networks while Jewish traders, artisans and middlemen expanded steadily within retail, finance and grain export. Proximity and competition were unavoidable.

The burial of Gregory V in Odessa, after his body was fished from the sea in June 1821 provided the immediate setting for violence. Contemporary observers describe unrest breaking out during the funeral procession itself. The German writer Heinrich Zschokke, who was present in the city shortly after the events, recorded that Greek attacks on Jewish homes and shops occurred simultaneously in several districts. Windows were smashed, shops looted and individuals assaulted. The main synagogue was damaged. According to later reconstructions based on municipal records, seventeen Jews were killed and more than sixty were injured.

Over the following decades, economic relations in the city changed significantly. The abolition of Odessa's free port status in 1859, combined with the aftermath of the disastrous Crimean War, weakened Greek mercantile dominance. Jewish firms expanded into areas vacated by Greek trading houses. By the middle of the century, Jewish traders were prominent in grain export, retail and finance. Statistical surveys from the 1860s show Jewish ownership increasing steadily across commercial sectors. Greek commentators and merchants registered this shift with ever growing resentment.

A second pogrom targeting Odessa's Jewish population occurred in 1859, during the Orthodox Easter period. Its immediate catalysts lay in the circulation of rumours rather than in any identifiable political event. Jews were accused of ritual murder and of the desecration of a Greek Orthodox church and cemetery, allegations that drew upon long-established European antisemitic tropes.

In subsequent correspondence, Governor Alexander Stroganov attributed the outbreak of violence to religious fanaticism amplified by the spread of false reports.

Violence broke out among groups of Greek sailors and dockworkers, joined by local residents. Jewish homes and shops were systematically attacked. Contemporary accounts differ as to the number of fatalities. Some sources report one Jewish death, while others record two. Several individuals were seriously injured. Property damage was limited compared to later events, though the symbolic significance was considerable. Local newspapers described the episode as a street fight, avoiding the language of communal violence. Once the tumult had abated, the administration treated the matter as resolved.

The first major rupture between the two groups occurred in 1821. Its timing concerned itself with events taking place far beyond Odessa. The outbreak of the Greek War of Independence and the execution of Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory V in Constantinople reverberated across the Orthodox world. Odessa, home to a politically active Greek diaspora and to members of the Filiki Eteria, became a centre of intense agitation. Greek refugees arrived from Ottoman territories bringing accounts of violence, executions and reprisals. Within this charged atmosphere, allegations circulated that Jews in Constantinople had assisted Ottoman authorities during the patriarch's execution and indeed, had agitated in favour of it. These claims were repeated in the Greek coffee shops and clubs of Odessa with increasing insistence.

Imperial forces were deployed, though their role proved ambiguous. Zschokke reported that soldiers and Cossacks intervened unevenly and that looting continued in their presence. He further noted that advance warnings had circulated among Jews advising them to remain indoors, suggesting foreknowledge on the part of local officials.

The 1821 pogrom was treated by the authorities as a disturbance linked to extraordinary circumstances. No structural measures were put in its place to prevent later re-occurrences and the event was soon forgotten, its memory remaining largely confined to the Jewish community. Within Odessa's Greek milieu, the episode was subsumed by narratives of martyrdom and national awakening.

By the late 1860s, Odessa had emerged as one of the Russian Empire's largest Jewish urban centres, a transformation accompanied by the growing prominence of Jewish entrepreneurs within the city's commercial life and the corresponding decline of Greek firms. Within the Greek community, these shifts were increasingly experienced as displacement and loss, and responsibility for economic decline was frequently attributed to Jewish competitors. As a result, tensions hardened, and economic resentment found expression in religious language. Pamphlets circulated accusing Jews of exploiting Christian labour and mocking Orthodoxy, while the memory of Patriarch Gregory V was revived, often detached from its historical context and redeployed as a symbolic instrument of grievance.

Against this background, the pogrom of 1871 unfolded over several days and marked a qualitative escalation in the pattern of violence. It erupted again during Orthodox Holy Week, apparently triggered by a minor altercation whose precise circumstances remain unclear in the surviving sources. What can be established with greater certainty is that organized groups quickly coalesced and directed their actions toward Jewish districts of the city. Contemporary reports and subsequent investigations identified Greek merchants and agitators as the principal organizers, and the violence spread in a methodical manner, with Jewish taverns, shops and homes subjected to widespread destruction.

Municipal records and eyewitness accounts indicate that more than eight hundred homes and five hundred businesses were damaged or looted, leaving thousands of Jewish residents displaced. Official casualty figures recorded six Jewish deaths and twenty one injuries, although some contemporary Russian reports sought to minimize the number of fatalities. The scale and pattern of destruction suggest a degree of restraint in the use of lethal force, possibly shaped by a prevailing assumption that the authorities would tolerate extensive property damage while intervening decisively only in cases of murder.

The response of the imperial administration was marked by hesitation and delay. Governor General Pavel Kotzebue refrained from ordering decisive military intervention during the initial stages of the violence, while Jewish self defense groups were dispersed by police and Cossack units rather than permitted to protect their neighbourhoods. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, a rumour circulated among the rioters that imperial permission had been granted to destroy Jewish property. One Russian eyewitness later recalled a remark attributed to a Greek participant in the violence: "Do you think we could destroy and beat Jews for three whole days if that had not been the will of the authorities?" Order was restored only once the unrest began to extend beyond Jewish districts and to threaten the stability of the city as a whole.

Arrests followed in the aftermath, with approximately six hundred individuals detained, largely drawn from the urban poor. No prominent organizers were subjected to serious punishment. Official reports attributed the pogrom to intoxication, religious passion and class resentment, and an internal memorandum explained the hostility as arising from perceptions of Jewish economic dominance combined with religious difference. The language employed in these assessments avoided any sustained consideration of structural or systemic factors.

Jewish intellectual responses were swift and documented. Writing in Odessa in 1871, the jurist Ilya Orshansky framed the events in legal and structural terms: "Until such time as

the divergence between the Jews' actual and juridical position in Russia is permanently removed by eliminating all existing limitations on their rights, hostility to the Jews will not only persist, but in all likelihood will increase." His assessment circulated widely within Jewish legal and journalistic circles.

The journalist Mikhail Kulisher approached the pogrom from a psychological and historical angle. Reflecting on the events, he observed that "beneath the apparently accidental and singular Odessa pogrom we discovered something of enduring importance, namely, that Judeophobia was not a theoretical error of some kind, but a psychic attitude in which centuries upon centuries of hatred was reflected."

Taken together, the three Odessa pogroms form a discernible pattern rather than a series of isolated disturbances. Across all three outbreaks, rumours framed in religious language circulated amid periods of economic transition, frequently coinciding with moments of heightened liturgical intensity, while administrative hesitation operated as a permissive condition. During this specific phase of Odessa's history, the Greek community emerged as the principal initiator of anti-Jewish violence, a role that diminished after 1871 as leadership of pogrom activity passed increasingly to Slavic populations and organized far-right movements. In this respect, Odessa bears comparison with earlier imperial cities such as Roman Alexandria, where Greek and Jewish communities similarly competed for proximity to power, civic privilege and economic advantage, and where violence repeatedly erupted at moments when imperial authority proved ambivalent or strategically disengaged.

In Odessa, as in Alexandria, communal conflict unfolded within an imperial framework that rewarded intermediaries. Greeks in southern Russia had long functioned as favoured Orthodox agents of empire, occupying a position shaped by commercial utility, religious affinity and political expediency. This alignment afforded privilege, yet it also rendered the Greek community vulnerable to instrumentalisation. While direct state orchestration of the pogroms cannot be demonstrated, the pattern of official hesitation, selective enforcement and subsequent narrative minimisation suggests that Greek hostility toward Jews operated within tolerable bounds of imperial policy, serving at times to deflect social tension and to regulate competition without destabilising the broader order.

The consequences of this history extended beyond its immediate Jewish victims and profoundly shaped the Greek community itself. As Greek mercantile dominance declined and imperial favour became less secure, Greeks in Odessa came to occupy an increasingly ambiguous position within the Russian state. Following the Russian Revolution and civil war, the Greek

population of southern Russia would abandon the region in large numbers, dispersing to Greece, the Balkans and the wider diaspora. In exile, memories of Odessa were selectively reordered. Narratives of prosperity, philanthropy and national awakening were preserved, while episodes of communal violence were marginalized or omitted, failing to enter the usable past through which displaced Greek communities articulated their twentieth-century identity.

Greek-language sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflect this process of selective remembrance. Memoirs, communal histories and publications produced by Greek Odessans tend to emphasize educational institutions, churches, benefactions and revolutionary activity, frequently portraying the city as a site of harmonious coexistence later disrupted by Russian or Bolshevik violence. Where conflict is acknowledged, responsibility is diffused or reframed through the language of disorder and popular excess. The Greek role in earlier pogroms against Jews is rarely examined directly and, when mentioned, appears obliquely, stripped of agency and historical specificity. Silence thus functioned as a mechanism of communal self-preservation.

Within Odessa's historical archive, these events occupy an unsettled position. The city's reputation for cosmopolitanism endured, though fractured by episodes of collective violence that resisted incorporation into celebratory narratives. Greek and Jewish histories remained intertwined through commerce, language and shared urban space, even as trust was eroded and reconfigured. The pogroms did not extinguish Jewish life in Odessa, yet they altered its orientation, accelerating migration and sharpening political consciousness. At the same time, they contributed to a Greek diasporic memory shaped by loss and displacement, one that increasingly preferred to recall itself as victim rather than as an earlier participant in the exercise of communal power.

The Odessa pogroms therefore illuminate more than a sequence of anti-Jewish attacks. They reveal how imperial structures fostered competition among minority intermediaries, how privilege could be extended without protection, and how violence could be absorbed into administrative routine and later effaced from communal memory. As in Alexandria under Rome, coexistence rested on contingent favour rather than secure equality. The archival record that survives remains incomplete, reminding us that the histories communities carry forward are determined as decisively by what is set aside as by what is remembered.

^{*}) Dean Kalimniou (Kostas Kalymnios) is an attorney, poet, author and journalist based in Melbourne Australia. He has published 7 poetry collections in Greek and has recently released his bi-lingual children's book: "Soumela and the Magic Kemenche." He is also the Secretary of the Panepirotic Federation of Australia.



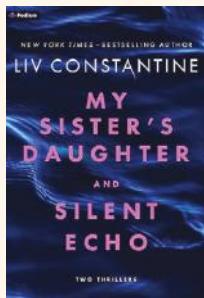
Mnemosyni's Musings...

by Maria A. Karamitsos

New Releases

Looking for your next read? Here are some fantastic new releases by Greek and PhilHellenic authors to add to your list.

FICTION



My Sister's Daughter and Silent Echo: Two Thrillers by Liv Constantine

Podium Publishing (November 11, 2025)

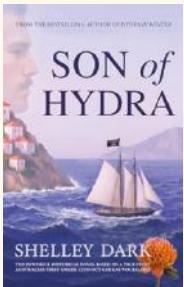
From the New York Times—bestselling author of Reese's Book Club pick *The Last Mrs. Parrish* comes two page-turning domestic thriller novellas.

In *My Sister's Daughter*, Ashley Bowers hopes her recently orphaned thirteen-year-old niece, Serena, will blend seamlessly into her own family once they've all had time to mourn. But as days become weeks, a series of troubling occurrences turn the once-peaceful Bowers home into a maelstrom of accusation, denial, and fear. Is Serena simply acting out after the tragic loss of both her parents? Or is something far more dangerous happening under Ashley's own roof?

A year after the death of her four-year-old son, Silent Echo's Charlotte Fleming is sleepwalking through life. Then she sees something that jolts her awake: Sebastian, alive and well in a stranger's social media post. As Charlotte obsessively searches for further indication that her son's accident was not what it seemed, she begins to suspect not only didn't he die—he was taken. And unearthing the perpetrator could shatter her world all over again.

Son of Hydra: A Historical Novel of Love, Exile, Redemption, and Australia's First Greek Convict by Shelley Dark

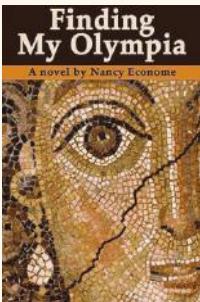
Shelley Dark Publications (November 17, 2025)



SON of HYDRA

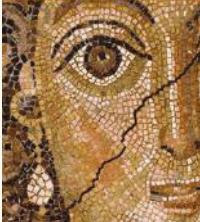
SHELLEY DARK

freedom, and everything he thought defined a man. Inspired by a true story, this sweeping tale of love and loss blends Greek and Australian history into a powerful work of fiction that explores pride, punishment, and what is truly the measure of a man.



Finding My Olympia

A novel by Nancy Economou



Son of Hydra is the untold story of Hydriot pirate Ghikas Vougaris, who became one of Australia's first Greek convicts. The son of a shipowner, he had everything — power, privilege, a future. But one reckless decision cost him his name, his

freedom, and everything he thought defined a man. Inspired by a true story, this sweeping tale of love and loss blends Greek and Australian history into a powerful work of fiction that explores pride, punishment, and what is truly the measure of a man.

Finding My Olympia by Nancy Economou

Kafeneon Productions (October 6, 2025)

In Woodland, California, 1955, Yianna Diamantopoulos leads a sheltered life in her Uncle Stavros' bakery. Their world is shattered when her older sister Olympia vanishes without a trace. Local authorities are quick to dismiss the concerns of immigrant families, leaving Yianna with a painful realization: she's on her own. She and Stavros confront the shadows of Olympia's disappearance and uncover deeper truths about themselves. Yianna's unwavering tenacity and Stavros' street-smart instincts race against time, proving that even in the face of hostile indifference, unbreakable family bonds can be the most powerful force of all.

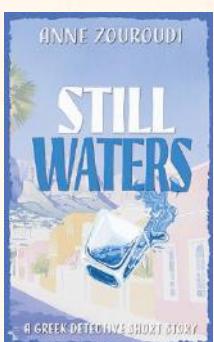


Kalivas! Or, Another Tempest by Nick Mamatas

C L A S H B o o k s (September 23, 2025)

You've heard of Mnemosyni, the Greek goddess of memory. Mythology buffs will know that she's also the goddess of storytelling—and mother of the Muses! So, it's only fitting to name a literary column in her honor. Here, you'll learn about authors, poets, books, and all things "Greek" literary.

Kalivas! Or, *Another Tempest* is a science-fiction revision of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which reframes the drama as an anticolonial fantasia through futuristic gizmos, a broken continent, and a one-act play invoking the theater of the absurd. Told by the Bard's least civilized and most human creation, it's a micro-epic for the modern era.

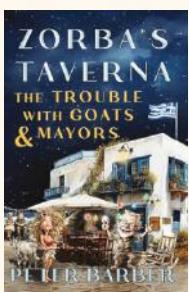


Still Waters: A Greek Detective Short Story by Anne Zouroudi

Independently published (November 21, 2025)

Still Waters is a short story for readers who have enjoyed Zouroudi's full-length

'Mysteries of the Greek Detective' series set in the timeless landscapes of Greece. In the heat of a Greek island summer, some quench their thirsts with cool, clear water. Others prefer something stronger, but disgraced government minister Gikas Fragolis has taken his love of the bottle too far. His habitual drunkenness has cost him his job and lost him many friends—but is it at the root of an enemy's wish to see him dead? In this first short story featuring the enigmatic Greek detective Hermes Diaktoros, he uncovers good intentions gone bad, and plumbs the murky depths of human nature.



MIXED GENRE

Zorba's Taverna: The Trouble with Goats and Mayors

Peter Barber Books (November 25, 2025)

Book 2 in the 'Zorba's Taverna' series welcomes readers back to Telios, the

Greek village where bureaucracy meets baklava and the goats have more political sense than the mayors. When a new wave of regulations threatens to close Zorba's beloved seaside taverna once again, Peter and his formidable wife Alex rally the villagers to defend their tables, their traditions, and their right to argue loudly

over dinner. Part memoir, part comic fiction, Zorba's Taverna: The Trouble with Goats & Mayors is a warm and witty celebration of island life, friendship, food, and the beautiful absurdity of trying to organize anything in Greece. If it didn't happen exactly this way... it absolutely should have.

POETRY

Driving the Beast: Poems by Christopher Bakken

L S U Press
(December 10, 2025)

Driving the Beast is a book about movement.

Christopher Bakken's poems shift between Greece and the American Midwest, tracking the restless nature of selfhood, while seeking glimpses of the sacred in landscapes scarred by history and political turmoil. The book's back-and-forth mirroring invites readers to confront their own reflections in



moments of catastrophe and wonder, and to view them alongside those of immigrants and refugees.



Wilted Flowers: A dark poetry collection by Despoina Kemeridou

Independently published
(November 19, 2025)

Part of the 'Echoes in the Dark' series, Wilted Flowers is a dark poetry collection drenched in darkness and sorrow. This illustrated collection of poems explores loss, grief, and that little glimpse of hope that stays alive until the very end.

Lots of great books to add to your list. Happy reading! See you next time for more of Mnemosyni's Musings.

Maria A. Karamitsos is a journalist, author, and poet. She's the founder & former publisher/editor of WindyCity Greek magazine and former associate editor & senior writer for The Greek Star newspaper. Maria also contributes to Greek City Times and TripFiction. Her work has been published in The Magic of Us-A Moms Who Write Poetry Anthology, The Pen Poetry Magazine, Voices of Hellenism Literary Journal, Highland Park Poetry, Recipes & Roots, GreekCircle magazine, The National Herald, GreekReporter, Harlots Sauce Radio, Women.Who.Write, KPHTH magazine, and more. Maria has contributed to two books: Greektown Chicago: Its History, Its Recipes and The Chicago Area Ethnic Handbook. She's currently editing her 1st novel. mariakaramitsos.com



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Betting on Heritage: NY NHS Chapter Hosts Fundraiser for Heritage Greece

by Athena Effer



The New York Heritage Greece Initiative recently held a fundraiser to benefit The National Hellenic Society's (NHS) Heritage Greece Program at the Strathmore Vanderbilt Country Club in Manhasset, LI. The event featured an art exhibition, and charity poker tournament and ladies' black jack tournament, all in the name of charity, well into the midnight hour.

Founded over 15 years ago, the mission of the NHS is to advance Hellenism and continue its legacy, especially among the next generation of Greek-Americans, through its Heritage Greece Program, which is a two-week cultural and educational immersion program for

Board of Directors Chair Lea Soupata stated that although they have many programs that they sponsor, like PBS programming and Greek cooking show maven Diane Kochilas, Heritage Greece is the NHS' signature program in an effort to preserve Hellenic heritage, especially among Greek-American students, and those who may be of dual heritages. Students get to choose between two major cultural and historic hubs, Athens or Thessaloniki, once they are accepted into the program. Students have the opportunity to "develop a network, develop friendships, and continue in this network, and then we try to support the network through local activities for them, and we have over 1000 alumni now. We even have a few couples that got married through this network."



added that "this program is the epitome of what needs to be done to preserve the Greek-American heritage, because it's always one generation away from disappearing. This program does a really good job of maintaining that bond, so that Greek-Americans still feel connected to the homeland." She also mentioned that for many of the students who attended the program that she met during her own odyssey eight years ago, this was their first time to Greece, and it really gave them a chance to see Greece through a different lens. For Stelios, the highlight was seeing the ancient agora, where many philosophers spoke, and getting a personalized tour of over 2000 years of history, connecting him back to that history and understanding all the foundations of what he loves and cherishes today. Both he and his sister are still actively involved in the NHS and promote the program.



qualifying Greek-American college students who participate in a cross-cultural exchange with peers from either the American College of Greece in Athens, or, more recently the Anatolia American University in Thessaloniki, which was added in 2022. Over 100 students, including 9 Greek Canadian students, have the opportunity annually to apply to this rewarding cultural and educational enrichment initiative. Students only have to pay for their personal expenses, additional meals, and airfare to Greece. All other expenses, such as tuition, accommodations, meals, transportation within Greece, and other program related costs are covered by the funds raised. The selection process is handled by the two schools in Greece, and students must have a 3.0 grade point average.

Former students, brother and sister Stelios and Lia Frankis, shared their impressions of the Heritage Greece program. According to Stelios, "the program was very eye opening to me. We've been lucky to travel to Greece other times, but this gave us the opportunity to see Greece through a completely different lens. We toured all of the major monuments, visited museums, and got to meet other Greek-American kids from across the nation and build lifelong relationships that I still cherish to this day." Likewise, his sister Lia





Harriet Nikakis, Lisdalia Martins, Angela Temple, Katherine Spuckles

NHS Executive Director Arthur Dimopoulos emphasized the importance of the program as being a “parea with a purpose”. Parea in Greek means a gathering of friends. He went on to state that “what we do really well is connect fourth and fifth generations to their roots in a way that’s inclusive, exciting, and with a customer centric approach. Next year our goal is to keep 15-20 students there and plug them into companies or entities that align with their career path, as a type of internship.”

The evening was indeed a “parea with a purpose” of friends and supporters getting together for a fun night of food, drink, gaming, and gambling for a cause. The main room was set up with several poker tables, each with its own dealer, and filled with groups of friends, primarily men, trying their

luck at the game of poker. A smaller room was set up for the game of blackjack for the ladies only tournament. And for those not so much into the sport of gambling, there were plenty of ways to be part of the “parea with a purpose”. The outdoor terrace was a great way to catch up with friends, while still supporting the initiative. And for those more creatively inclined, the spotlight was on three, local, talented Greek and Greek-American artists

whose beautiful work was featured for purchase. All the artists were present. Anna Frangoulis Atelier featured her stunning Byzantine iconography incorporating traditional techniques. Each piece was handcrafted with high-quality egg tempera paints and gold leaf, showcasing her unique expression. Penny Strong, a resident of Northport, Long Island, presented her skills as a self-taught painter who developed her painting talent later in life, upon retirement. Her work is described as abstract expressionism inspired by water themes and flowers producing a sense of movement. And lastly, Despina Zografos, a visual artist who hails from the Greek island of Crete, presented her unique creations that include a variety of mediums, such as hand cut paper, acrylics, cyanotype, photography, and video. Many of her pieces reflect her childhood memories of complex geometric patterns inspired by the crochets and embroideries of the women in her.

It was a wonderful evening of “high stakes” for a noble cause. Attendees were united in their purpose: to support Hellenic culture and help ensure that future generations of Greek-American youth remain connected to their heritage.

For more information on donating to the NHS, their website is:

<https://www.nationalhellenicsociety.org/donate>

More information about the featured artists can be found here:

<https://www.annafrangouliatelier.com/>

<https://pennystrong3.wixsite.com/website>

<https://www.despinazografos.com/>



Stella Zoitias, Stelio Katopodis, Angelo Katopodis, Amy Zoitias



Ilias Theodoropoulos, Greg Giannopoulos and friends



An evening of Elegance and Philanthropy



An evening of elegance and philanthropy was held at Americana's Veronica Beard boutique in Manhasset, where members of the community gathered to support the mission of the National Hellenic Society. Hosted in partnership with members of the Society's New York committee, who organize the annual Poker Night fundraiser, the event welcomed guests for a festive shopping experience in celebration of the holiday season. The evening was met with strong attendance and generous participation, with ten percent of proceeds benefiting key initiatives, including the Heritage Greece Program. The event underscored a shared commitment to cultural preservation, charitable engagement, and the enduring values of community and giving.



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A Bakery, a Family, a Neighborhood: 72 Years in Kypseli

Grigoris Remoundos, the owner of Remoundos Bakery, talks to NEO

By Kelly Fanarioti



At the intersection of Tinos Street and Kypselis Street, in the neighborhood of Kypseli, the Remoundos bakery has been operating continuously for 72 years. It is the oldest bakery still in operation in the area, and during the Christmas and Easter seasons it attracts residents from every corner of Athens, who come to buy its famous sweets.

The story begins in 1953, when two brothers, Grigoris and Vasilis, left their hometown of Andros Island and moved to Athens in search of work. They initially worked for an acquaintance who owned a bakery in Chalandri, before deciding to open their own bakery in Kypseli.

After several years, one of the brothers, Vasilis, stepped away, and the bakery came fully under the care of Grigoris. Today, Grigoris's grandsons, Grigoris and Giorgos, continue to keep the tradition alive, adapting it to the needs of the modern era while remaining faithful to their roots.



"The shop is inseparably linked to our childhood. This is where we grew up. Every morning before school, we would stop by to say good morning to our father, and when school was over, we would come by to pick up our meal. During the holidays, we also helped with the preparation of Christmas and Easter sweets. We made melomakarona, kourabiedes, tsoureki, and anything else you can imagine. Our entire lives are filled with the aromas of this bakery. There are customers who have known my brother and me since we were children. Some of them still call me Grigorakis", Grigoris Remoundos says to NEO.

After completing their schooling, they decided, together with their parents, to study baking at the National Baking School of London.

"That was a strange time," Grigoris explains, "in the sense that the rise of industrial bread production had just begun, and there was a prevailing fear that it would swallow up small neighborhood shops. In the end, things turned out differently, and we have remained in operation for 72 consecutive years".

The coal-fired oven was replaced by a gas oven, both deck and convection, capable of baking up to 66 loaves at a time. The two brothers' day begins before dawn; they rise in the middle of the night, around three in the morning, and work tirelessly, without a strict schedule. Their bread is made exclusively with flour from local mills, while the durum wheat they use is 100% Greek.



"It is a hard and demanding job that requires sacrifices. Our working hours are very different from those of most people. We wake up every day at 3:00 in the morning, come to the bakery, and get straight to work. During the period leading up to Christmas and New Year's, we close at nine in the evening," Grigoris adds.

The aroma of freshly baked melomakarona is hard to ignore and rarely leaves passersby unmoved. For this reason, the Remoundos bakery draws not only local residents but also former Kypseli locals who have since moved away, as well as visitors who have heard about or read of its famous Christmas sweets.

"The recipe has remained the same since 1953. The only thing that may change from time to time is our suppliers, whom we always make sure are based in Greece. We place great emphasis on our raw ingredients like quality thyme honey, butter, and nuts. Our customers are certainly looking for a distinctive taste in the products they buy,

but the ingredients also play a crucial role, and on those we never compromise".

A Neighborhood in Transition

Having grown up inside the bakery, Grigoris has, in a way, become a witness to the changes that have taken place in what was once a middle-class neighborhood of Athens. During the 1990s, many people from different countries settled in Kypseli, bringing with them the customs and traditions of their cultures.

After some years, the neighborhood went through a period of increased crime, but over the past six years it has been experiencing a renewed sense of growth.

"More and more young people from Greece and abroad are choosing Kypseli as a place to live and are showing great interest in local neighborhood shops. They support us on a daily basis and help recreate the sense of community we had forgotten in recent years,"

Beyond the social composition of the neighborhood, dietary habits have also changed over the years. As a result, alongside the bakery's classic loaves and savory goods, one can now find sugar-free sweets or cookies made with chickpeas and dates.

"We adapt to the times and to the needs of consumers. More and more parents are now looking for healthier options for their children and, for example, instead of buying a croissant, they will choose a cookie made from legumes or nuts. We also place particular emphasis on our customers with diabetes and prepare products for them on a daily basis,"



As we bring our conversation to a close, Grigoris feels the need to point out that this small, traditional bakery is not merely a source of income for him and his brother, but something far more meaningful.

"This shop carries a deep emotional weight for us. Beyond the fact that most of our childhood memories were shaped here, there are customers who knew our grandparents and parents, all of whom have now passed away. Many of them share stories about our ancestors. stories that even we ourselves did not know. It is deeply moving," he concludes.



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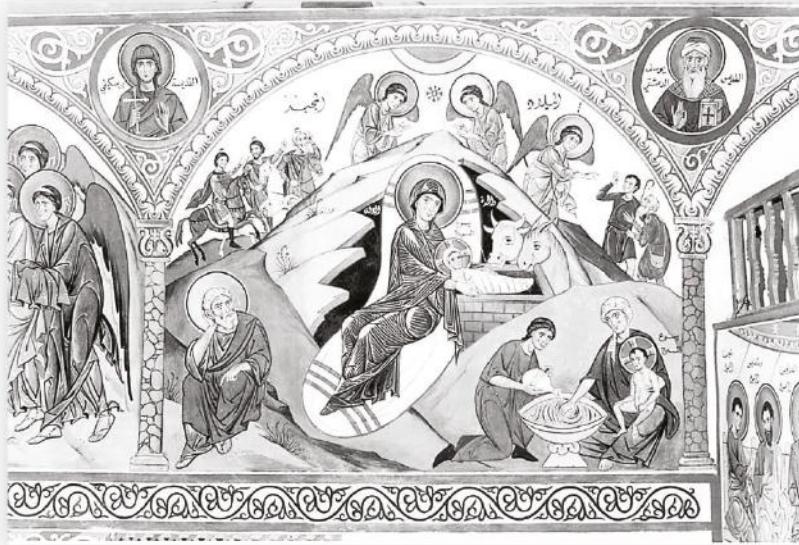
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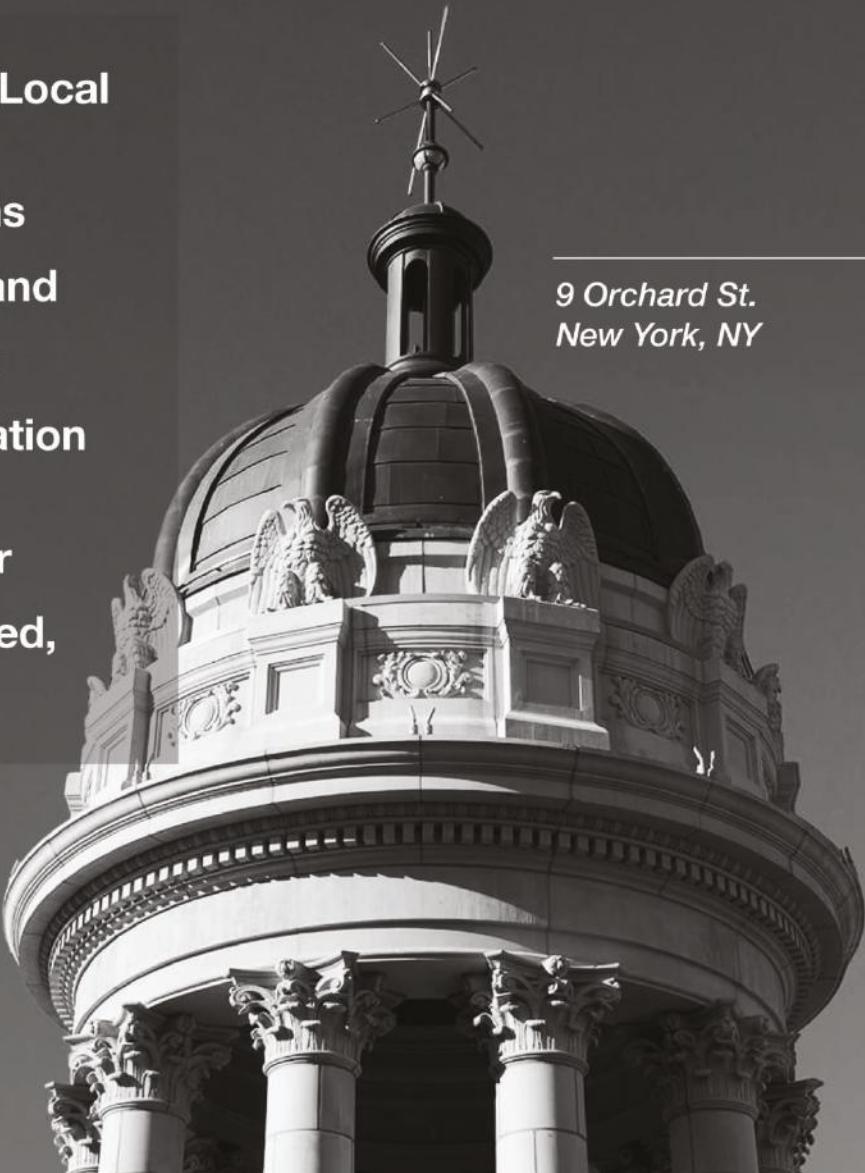
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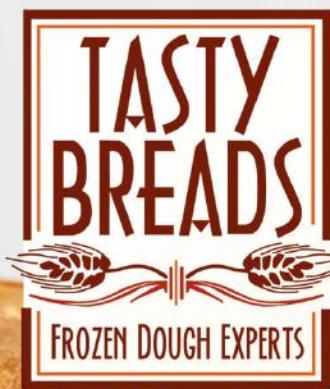
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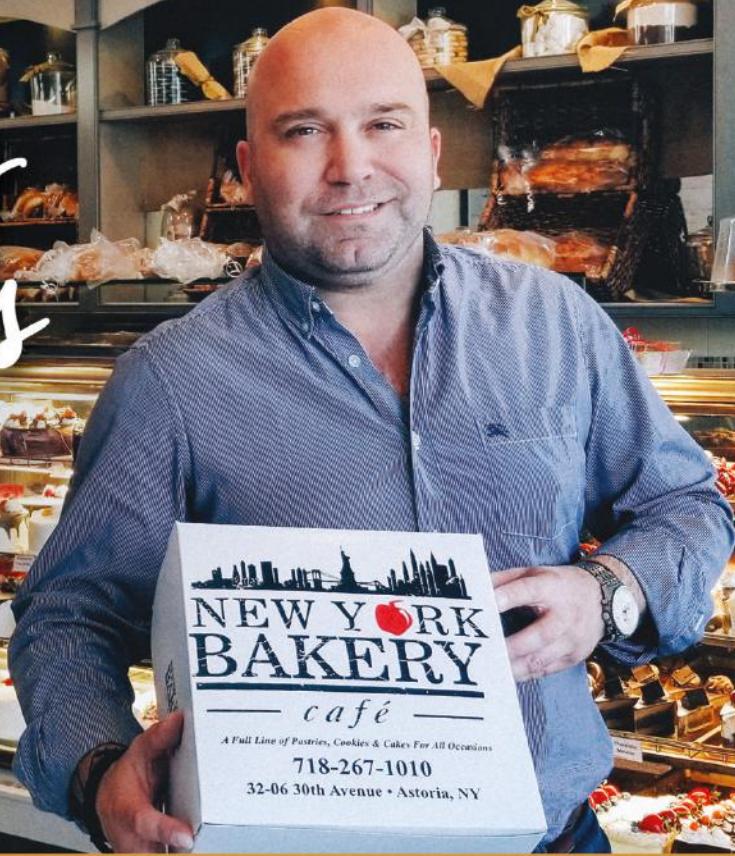


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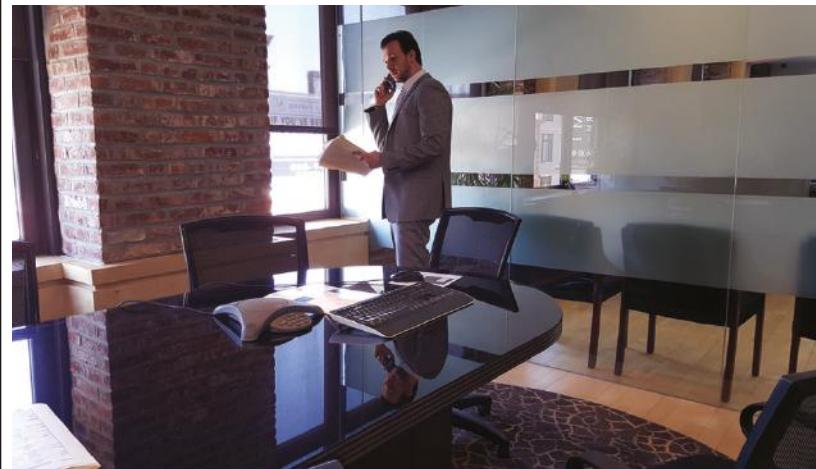
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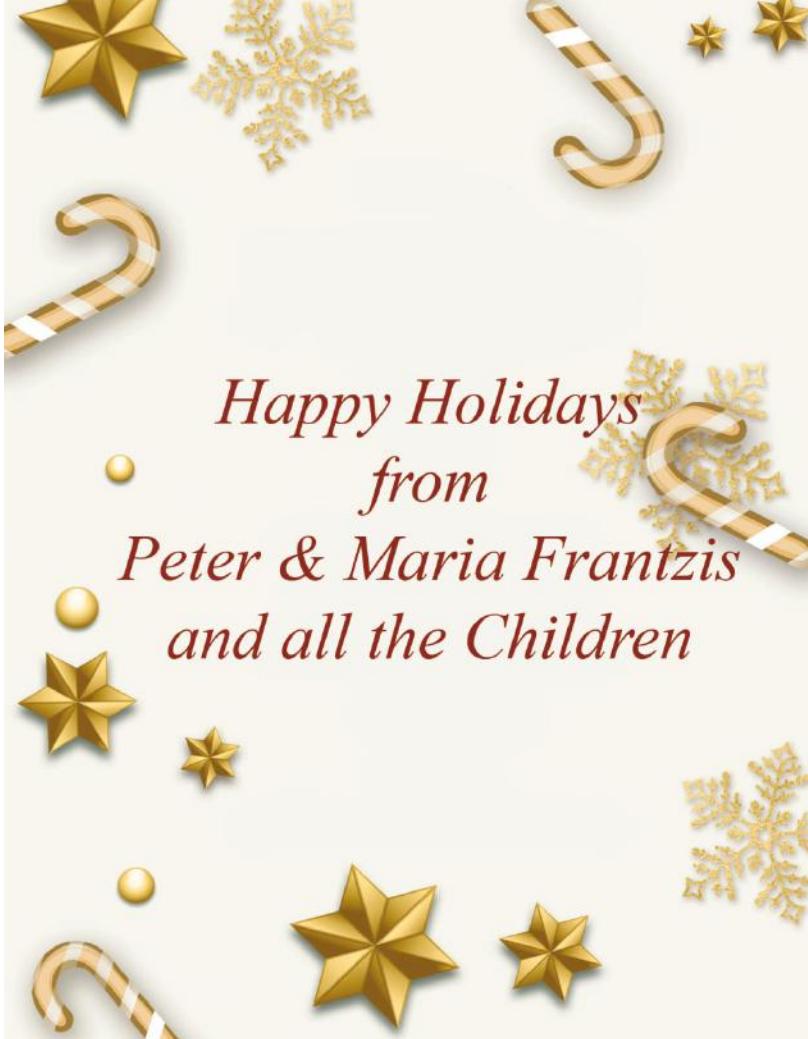
Happy New Year
from the Red Army!

Hello folks! We made it to one more year and we are older but we refuse to be wiser! It doesn't pay if it ever did. I wish you all a beautiful New Year and Merry Christmas to our Ukrainian and Russian friends who celebrate the same day with the Old Calendar, January 8. Hopefully this new year will finally bring peace and end another unreasonable conflict that has cost so many lives and tears! Let's hope that our military uniforms will only be used for fun, as with me in this picture. See you all next year!

by Demetrios Rhompolis
dondemetrio@neomagazine.com



Happy Holidays
from
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and all the Children



Glass for All Occasions!

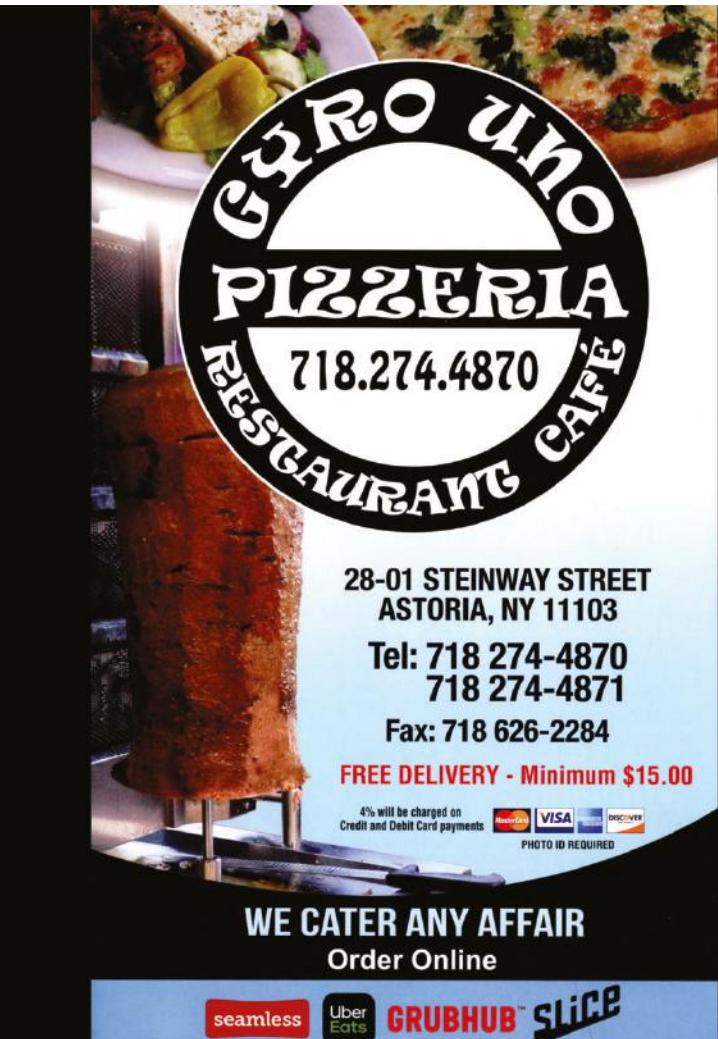
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Leona Lewis: Las Vegas residency 'A Starry Night'

by Markos Papadatos



Photo Courtesy of
The Venetian Resort Las Vegas

Grammy-nominated British pop star Leona Lewis, OBE, chatted about her "A Starry Night" residency at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas and being a part of the digital age. Track and field legend Wilma Rudolph once said: "Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us." This quote applies to international pop artist Leona Lewis.

'A Starry Night' residency in Las Vegas

Lewis is appearing in her "A Starry Night" Vegas residency, which runs through January 3rd at Voltaire at The Venetian Las Vegas.

This engagement marks her first ever live shows in the United States. The holiday-themed extravaganza treats audiences to Christmas classics, including the record-breaking "One More Sleep," as well as her timeless hits "Bleeding Love" and "Better In Time."

Lewis opened up about the perennial success of her global smash hit, the Grammy-nominated "Bleeding Love" and all her other many hits. "It's incredibly humbling. When you create music, you never know how far it will travel or who it will touch," she attested. "To have songs that people still sing, still feel connected to, after all these years... that's the greatest gift an artist can receive."

The digital age

On being an artist in the digital age, Lewis said, "It's fascinating and ever-changing. There's more accessibility, more creativity, more ways to connect with people globally. On the other hand, it also requires balance, navigating technology while staying true to yourself and the artistry. I try to embrace the innovation without losing the heart of why I make music," she elaborated.

Career-defining moments

On her career-defining moments, she reflected, "There have been so many! Winning

On her holiday residency, Lewis exclaimed, "I'm beyond excited. I've actually moved to Vegas to really be able to focus entirely on the show and give my absolute all every night. Vegas has such an energy, and bringing a Christmas show there feels really special," she noted. "We've created a very festive world for the night and moments that feel intimate and emotional, but also big, Christmassy and fun," she added.

Lewis celebrates a new milestone with 'One More Sleep'

Lewis has a major milestone to celebrate with "One More Sleep." It recently became the most-streamed British Christmas song of the 21st century. "That honestly feels surreal," she admitted. "When we made 'One More Sleep,' we just wanted to capture that magical, nostalgic feeling of waiting for someone you love at Christmas. To see it grow like it has... it means the world to me. I feel incredibly grateful that the song has become part of people's Christmas traditions," she expressed.

Lewis on the perennial success of 'Bleeding Love' and all her other hits

'The X Factor' was life-changing, of course. Recording 'Bleeding Love' was another defining moment and the Olympics closing ceremony was such a memorable moment," she said. "There have been quieter moments too: being in the studio, learning instruments, standing up for myself, creatively. Those experiences shape you just as much," she added.

Lewis on being made an OBE (Officer of the British Empire)

Leona Lewis was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2023 New Year Honours list for her services to music and charity. She received her actual medal from King Charles at an investiture ceremony that was held at Windsor Castle on July 16, 2025.

"It was such an honor; it was one of those moments you never imagine happening in your life," she said. "I felt proud, but mostly grateful for all the people and all the organizations I've been able to work with over the years. Giving back has always been important to me, and to be recognized for that was incredibly moving," she acknowledged.

Advice for young and emerging artists

For young and emerging artists, Lewis stated, "Stay grounded in who you are. Protect your voice not just your singing voice, but your inner voice. Surround yourself with people who believe in you and challenge you in the right ways. Also, keep learning; the journey is long, and growth is part of the beauty," she added.

Success

The pop songstress furnished her definition of the word success. "Success, to me, is living with purpose and joy. Success means creating work that feels true, connecting with people, and being able to use your platform for good."

Message for her fans and supporters

For her fans and supporters, Lewis expressed, "Thank you! Your love, your messages, and your support through every chapter, I carry it with me. You've allowed me to grow, to evolve, to try new things. I'm so grateful for you," she said, effusively.

On her Vegas residency, Lewis remarked, "I want the fans to leave feeling uplifted, embraced by what the season truly means, and reminded of the power of music that brings us together. If they walk out feeling a little more love, that's everything."

To learn more about Leona Lewis, follow her on Instagram and visit her official website.

Merry Christmas -
Happy New Year!

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