

# The National Herald

## Mentoring, Supporting the Next Generation the Theme at AGAPW Fete

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NEW YORK – Thanking those who helped her along the way and stressing the importance of guiding, mentoring, and otherwise supporting the younger generation of Greek-Americans, especially women, New York State of Assemblywoman Aravella Simotas thanked the Association of Greek American Professional Women for naming her Woman of the Year on March 26 in Manhattan.

The award, which is in the form of a crystal flame, was presented by AGAPW's founder and president Olga Alexakos in the context of AGAPW's celebration of Women's

History Month, whose origins were described by AGAPW vice president Aphrodite Navab.

Dr. Liana Theodoratou, Director of the A.S. Onassis Program in Hellenic Studies at NYU, presented AGAPW's third Excellence Tuition Scholarship to her student, a \$3000 grant, NYU sophomore Vaia Trittas. The evening's MC, Alexandra Kavouras, was the recipient last year and Nayia Moysidis of Columbia was the first winner in 2011.

During her welcome, Alexakos said of AGAPW that "We are about relationships. We like to bring people together. Our rule is that when you come to our event you must make five new friends," and she continued "Our mission is not only to encourage women, especially the younger ones, to succeed in their professions, but to help them develop the skills they need to become leaders in the community," like the evening's honoree.

The Consul General of Greece, George Iliopoulos and his wife Anthousa, and the Consul General of Cyprus Koula Sophianou were also present. Sophianou congratulated AGAPW and the honorees and said of Simotas, "she always talks about her background and values, and the people who have been helpful to her and those whom she wants to help instead of herself."

Another dominant theme at the event was the idea that the most valuable resource in the Greek-American, or any other community, is the experience and wisdom of its members that they can offer to one another.

Now that Simotas has added the role of mother to her life – she has a seven month old daughter – Simotas offered this recipe for high achievement and excellence: “You have to be very strategic, very good with your time and learn from other people’s experience.” But she added, “Don’t be embarrassed to ask someone a question – turn to the other people in this room and ask: ‘how do I do this.’”

She noted many women still fear the response of their bosses when they decide to have families or broaden their horizons. She urges people to seek advice on how to handle such circumstances. Simotas expressed her appreciation for the support and encouragement of the managing partner of the law firm she worked and is still affiliated with when she decided to run for the Assembly, and for her husband John Katsanos, who told her to “go for it.”

Simotas declared that without her family “I could not be who I am today.” Her father was supportive “although like a good Greek dad, he was concerned about the salary cut” but her mother really fired her up for the challenge after Simotas realized that a successful law career was not enough. She felt it was time to contribute to society in a more substantial way, championing issues like women’s rights and the environment.

After explaining how important it is for the community to continue to elect public officials to promote its issues at the local, state and federal levels, she paid tribute to revered Judge Nicholas Tsoucalas, who has long worked for that and who has helped countless young Hellenes through the years.

Simotas is proud to be numbered among his many former clerks. She also thanked her predecessor in her assembly seat, New York State Senator Michael Gianaris, for his support and guidance.

Simotas’ appreciation of the role of family in her life were echoed by Trittas. She thanked her mother, Angeliki Trittas, who hails from Alexandroupolis and raised her after the death of her father, who was from Larnaca, Cyprus, and her brother Yannis

One of the highlights of the evening was a surprise musical presentation by young soprano Flora Kirou.

The guests enjoyed a reception with Greek wines and hors d’oeuvres especially prepared by Zenon Taverna. The event was held at the penthouse of Armenian-American Dr. Virginia Davies who was also honored by AGAPW for the encouragement and material support that helped establish the organization. Alexakos also thanked Penny Tsillas, who was AGAPW’s first Woman of the Year for her inspiration and encouragement.

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