

# Epirotes Extend Christmas Cheer to New Year’s by Caroling thru Astoria

By Constantine S. Sirigos  
TNH Staff

NEW YORK – Some of things that enrich Greek-American community life are thanks to the efforts of its institutions and organizations, but much of what makes it wonderful to be a Greek in America comes from the efforts of big-hearted individuals.

On New Year’s Eve, the staff of The National Herald were jolted from their computer screens by reminiscences of the sweetest sounds of their youth – or their parents’.

Led by Demetrios Makrides, his brother Giorgos, and Demetrios Xaxiris, accompanied by their dear friend Dinos Avlonitis, filled the place with the music of the season that had an Epirotic flavor, traditional Greek Christmas and New Year’s carols played on simple instruments.

Demetrios Makrides, who has roots in Ioannina, is a medical physicist in the area of radiation oncology and he travelled to Astoria from Stanford, CT. He is active with the Ioannina Cultural Association, a past president, and he was the leader. His brother and Xaxiris, who is also from Ioannina, are

visiting from Greece for the holidays and they supplied the music.

After visiting TNH they went to private homes and Greek-owned businesses.

“We do this annually on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve in Astoria. The people we visit make donations and the money that we raise goes to a church-based philanthropic center in Ioannina called Durahan that includes a home for the elderly and an orphanage. TNH was told it is run by Father Athanasios Hatzis, who does remarkable work and that the ICA has made major contributions.

“We will raise what we can and add from our own pockets so we can help,” those in need in Greece.

“We feel joy when people are enjoying themselves, and with laughter and tears remember the old days.”

Indeed the carols and songs performed on traditional instruments – a simple hand drum played by Demetrios Makrides, a wooden recorder wielded by Xaxiris, and a simple triangle played by Demetrios Makrides – provided some of the most touching moments of the season.

“For us this is more valuable



The drum was played by Giorgos Makrides, Mitsos Xaxiris was on recorder – both visiting from Greece – and Demetrios Makrides accented the Epirotic festivities on the triangle.

than millions of dollars,” said the latter.

The holiday peregrinations are a win-win endeavor with value independent of the financial mission. “It makes us and our hosts happy – any money we raise for a good cause is a bonus,” he said.

His fellow Demetrios, nicknamed Mitsos, was going from office to office with Giorgos

Markides and paused to answer TNH’s questions.

“I made the recorder with my own hands,” he said. “I believe the flute and the drum are mankind’s oldest and most traditional instruments. Men grabbed reeds and blew into them, and stretched skins and beat on them,” he said with infectious joie de vivre.

Back in Greece, before retiring he was an elementary school teacher in Agrinio and near Ioannina.

The men from Ionnina were accompanied and their mission was documented photographically – surely the internet was on the verge of being enriched - by a dear friend from nearby place, Dino Avlonitis of the island of Corfu. He is known to TNH readers as a contributor of articles about local community sports but by profession he is a quality control manager for the Magellan New York aerospace company. Most of the year he helps keep the planes we all fly safe, but during the holidays he accompanies his friends “because I appreciate the joy they bring to people.”

By the time the guests departed leaving some of their kefi behind, everyone was ready to ring in the New Year.

# Cold Day, Warm Parish: Sts. George/Demetrios Touching Vasilopita Cutting

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they are now seeing the neighborhood take a strong turn for the better.

Archbishop Demetrios, who presided over the liturgy, paid tribute to the parishioners with a powerful comparison. He told the story hearing from Cardinal Dolan that his diocese had closed or would close 72 churches – some with as many as 1000 members.

When Dolan asked what the Orthodox Church does with its smaller parishes Archbishop Demetrios responded, “Your Eminence, we don’t close Churches.”

“Whatever we can do, we would love to see the Church revive again past president Paulette Adamis told The National Herald.

The archbishop alluded to the glory days when there were more than 500 members and several regional organizations were based there – on member, Gus Cherevas became AHEPA Supreme President. But he accentuated the present – a brighter future being implied for those who stayed the course.

“It is a great joy to be with you on the first Sunday of the New Year in this historic Church,” and thanked everyone involved including the parish council, the chanter Fotis Papadatos and all the volunteers. “Thank you for coming to be with us today,” he said.

With about 60 members, the parish can’t afford a full-time priest, but they appreciate Fr. Constantine Matthews coming from Connecticut. When he goes on leave a few months a year, the Archdiocese assigns a substitute and Very Rev. Chrysostomos Panos is serving until he returns. On Sunday he too thanked parishioners, friends of the parish and visiting clergy Archdeacon Panteleimon Papadopoulos and Deacon Eleftherios Constantine.

After the Divine Liturgy the hall was filled for the vasilopita cutting. The PC President, linguist and educator Tryfon C. Tzifas, welcomed the guests and thanked the Archbishop, to whom he said “you have touched us deeply and brought us joy.”

While many individuals and families deserve tribute, TNH took the opportunity to speak to representatives of two of them, Adamis and Ted Klingos.

Adamis told TNH that the parish was created in 1935 from



Above: The guests at the St. George and St. Demetrios Church vasilopita cutting pause for a commemorative photo. The children were thrilled to receive gifts of special sterling silver cross from Archbishop Demetrios. Left: It felt like the good old days on the Upper East Side as the pews were filled with parishioners old and new and friends of the parish.

There were too many to name, he said, but noted Tzifas and PC vice president Peter Stamos.

# The Lilting Lyrics of Pontian Carols Resound in Astoria

By Constantine S. Sirigos  
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NEW YORK – In these times of homogenized languages in all countries, it was a joy to hear traditional Greek carols sung in the delightful dialect rooted in ancient Greek of the Black Sea region of Pontos when the Pontian Society Komminoi of New York visited the offices of The National Herald during the holidays.

Led by the Society’s President, Dimitrios Molochitis, an environmental engineer born in Katerini in northern Greece with roots in Trapezounta and Sourmena on the Black Sea coast, singers, dancers, and musicians filled the building and the hearts of its inhabitants with music and memories.

Molochitis told TNH “We are singing the traditional holiday carols of Pontos accompanied by Pontian lyra,” the region’s traditional bowed string instrument.

He added, “They are the traditional Greek songs, but the children are taught to sing them with the Pontian accent. The practice sessions are also an opportunity for them to learn Pontian history directed by Eleni Tsitsatalidou.”

The society has three dance groups comprising about 55 children which are directed by Triantafillos Kalemkerides.

After visiting TNH, they divided into two groups to hit the main sections of Astoria. One band went to the 23rd Avenue Ditmars Boulevard area, near the Society’s headquarters, and the other visited stores on

Broadway and the 30th Avenue strip.

The Society’s new board of directors is developing some new initiatives with an emphasis on educational and cultural programs. “We will begin a series of four seminars on Pontian history and civilization and are working together with the monastery of St. Irene Chrysvalantou where the presentations will take place. The first one will be given by Dr. Isidoros Sidiropoulos on Friday, January 20 at 6:30 PM titled “The Greeks in Pontos, from myth to history.” On Friday April 1 “The monastic life and monasteries of Pontos” will be presented by the Very Rev. Ierotheos Markopoulos. Dr. Haralambos Vasiladiadis will present on Friday, May 13 at 6:30 PM “The Genocide of the Greeks of Asia Minor,” and on Friday, June 3 “Pontian Customs” will be presented by Vasiliki Tsanaktsidou.

Greeks are hungry for the history of their nation, but even more so for the food of its many regions. The women’s division of the Society will present “Pontos Tastes”, dedicated to Pontian Cuisine on Sunday, January 31at 1:30 PM at headquarters.

Molochites emphasized the importance of educational programs for young people and noted they will be using material produced by The Asia Minor and Pontos Hellenic Research Center in Chicago. Handbooks on the history of Pontos will be used with elementary school students and the Pontian Genocide is for college age individuals. “These will be used to teach the children of the Association,” he said.

Art, Fellowship, and Networking at AGAPW Vasilopita Cutting

The officers and guests of the Association of Greek American Professional Women (AGAPW) pause for a photo before cutting the New Year’s vasilopita, co-sponsored by the global Greek networking organization ALLIOnnet. (L-R) Irene Maragou, Aspasia Gounaris, Penny Tsilas, Irene Vandaraki – who curated and spoke about an exhibit by Greek painters on display at the venue in Manhattan’s Soho– Anthousa Iliopoulos, AGAPW President Olga Alexakos, Jenny Markotou, Marianthe Koulias, Agatha Mishto, and Dr. Stephanía Spanos.

