

Greek community has deep roots



**ADRIENNE
ASCAH**
URBAN LIFE

We return with the third installment of *24 hours'* profiles of Ottawa's immigrant communities.

The following is an edited interview with Pinelopi Makrodimitris-Karlis, president of the Hellenic Community of Ottawa.

Q: When did Greeks first start emigrating to Ottawa?

A: In 1871 there were 39 Greeks living in Canada. We believe that the first Greek to come to Ottawa came in 1895.

Q: What were some of the challenges the early settlers faced?

A: Based on our research we believe there were 10 Greek families living in Ottawa in 1910. They knew in order to preserve their lan-

guage, their culture and their religion they had to form a community. They had no community centre, no church and they had language barriers. They rented church space and brought in a priest from Montreal periodically to do services.

Q: What landmarks does Ottawa have from the Greek community?

A: Through fundraising, through sacrifices made by the people who founded the community, we have a church, on Prince of Wales Dr., and we have a community centre right next to the church. On Feb. 25, 1929 the Hellenic Community of Ottawa was established, so our community in Ottawa is celebrating 80 years.

Q: What are some contributions made by Greek Canadians in Ottawa?

A: We've been a very active community for a great many years. We have one of the most successful festivals that are put on every

Just the facts:

- The 2006 Statistics Canada census doesn't provide a specific number for Greek Canadians in Canada or in Ottawa, but the Hellenic Community of Ottawa estimates there are around 7,000 Greek Canadians living in Ottawa.

- GreekFest began as a one-day festival in 1974 to celebrate Aug. 15, a holy day in the Greek Orthodox Church and the name day for the Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church on Prince of Wales Dr.

- Now an 11-day celebration of Greek food, music, dance, arts and culture, GreekFest, takes place this Aug. 13-23.

year in the city, the GreekFest. We're constantly working and doing our part for charities like the CHEO Walkathon, fundraisers for the Heart Institute, we've had fashion shows to raise money for good causes like autism and most recently



MAKRODIMITRIS-KARLIS

our community contributed to the Heroes Fighting Hunger campaign for the Ottawa Food Bank.

Q: How would you describe the Greek community in Ottawa today?

A: I would describe it as dynamic, passionate, committed and progressive.

The community was founded in 1929 and this year they've elected their

first woman president. We also have a young board of directors. It's kind of like the founders of this community are letting go a little bit and letting a younger board take over.

— Adrienne Ascah appears Tuesdays and Wednesdays in *24 hours*. Send your comments or column ideas to Adrienne.Ascah@sunmedia.ca