

## Greek American Students Unite for Hellenism Nationwide

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representation for all Hellenic Student Associations of America, which will provide dynamic opportunities and promote large-scale activities; to advance Greek education and culture through study abroad programs in Greece and the cooperation of American and Greek universities on an academic-research level; to promote relations not only among the members of Hellenic Student Associations, but also with members of academic communities both Greek and non-Greek; to promote Greek interests in American universities, society and politics; to assist Greek, Cypriot and Greek American students, researchers and teaching staff to join, adapt and develop within the communities to which they belong; to develop a network of people and organizations throughout Greece and America which operates to benefit all participants at social, professional and academic levels."

Currently, eight members hold spots on the association's board, all of whom communicate with each other electronically on a daily basis. Two physical meetings are planned in the U.S. for board members within the academic year, there is one meeting during the summer and an annual national convention is planned for all members to take part in, according to Nikolettakis.

"It is important at this point of time to make clear that the association is making its first steps and it is now that we are realizing how broad and critical the scope that we serve is," said Nikolettakis. "Since we are now establishing our identity we feel that there is one thing we, the young Hellenic generation, are sure about: that we are carriers of Hellenism and Paideia (education)-two identical concepts for us in any move we make. This is how everyone else, in and out of the Hellenic Community, perceive us."

Thus it is a priority for us now to promote Hellenic Studies and Culture in the American Universities."

One such way of promoting these concepts, he said, are through the various programs NHSA plans on promoting offering to help individual associations develop their existing programs and events on to the national level by giving them opportunities to take initiatives they couldn't take before.

The association, for instance, hopes to develop the "Study Abroad Programs in Greece" which exist throughout various universities, so that they can address a larger scope of universities.

"There are already many characteristic examples that are indicative of the new scenery for the members of the NHSA," said Nikolettakis. "The Hellenic Association at Stanford, in cooperation with the NHSA, is holding an event during the upcoming weekend (May 2 to 3) that goes far beyond the scope and the boundaries of an individual Hellenic Association. It's called 'Bridging the Gap: Entrepreneurship in Greece and Synergies with Silicon



Members of the newly-established NHSA convened at the University of Connecticut to discuss the association's objectives and priorities. One of the association's main goals is to promote Hellenism throughout universities across the country.

Valley'. This means that in this case, there will be a series of workshops and next year, the NHSA will assign a different community/association to run the second workshop at a different university.

"Another example is our upcoming event on May 13 at the Ohio State University with Mr. Larigakis from AHI as the guest speaker on the topic: 'Greek American Relations and the New Political Landscape: How the Greek American Community can Impact American Foreign Policy'. We are now able through our broader network to invite guest speakers, support and organize events-not only the usual social ones- on modern topics, and we have the confidence and the experience from other universities to argue (and secure funding from the university) that Hellenic politics and affairs are indeed a hot topic. And we, the members of the Hellenic Association at OSU are sure that this event will be a huge suc-

cess not only because of our own promoting efforts, but also because we have been advertising it a lot through NHSA and we are expecting the contribution and participation of the different Hellenic Communities and Associations around Ohio."

Additional annual NHSA programming includes, "further developing the cooperation with networks established in Greece, especially with the creation of an NHSA Alumni Association back in our country and providing advice for all the Hellenic Associations on the full exploitation of the financial assistance (operational and programming funds) offered by the American universities."

Nikolettakis was born and raised in Iraklio, Crete and then moved to Athens with a Greek State Foundation Scholarship to study at the Athens University of Economics and Business (AUEB, formerly known as ASOEE) with a major in

finance in the Department of Business Administration. In Athens, he became involved in student and learning organizations and projects that offered what he said, were "unprecedented exposure to real life and opportunities to travel all over Europe, but also to more exotic destinations like China." Upon his graduation, with the financial assistance from the Fulbright Foundation and two additional scholarships, he came to the U.S. to study in the MBA Program of Fisher College of Business at Ohio State University. He is in his second and last year at OHU, where he and another student started the OHU Hellenic Association.

"My major personal drive is the continuity of this effort. It is something so broad that has the potential to create extraordinary impact, at the same time it is so easy just to disappear because of exactly how broad it is. And this can only happen if we motivate not only the Board, but all the members of the National Association to add their best value and put their best efforts towards the common goal: a strong Hellenic Student Association that justifies its National character through its activity, by serving its goals and purpose."

We should apparently be optimistic about it, but we should always have in mind that it is only up to us to keep growing and improving ourselves in order to deliver our common effort to the next generation that will move it one step further. This is my vision and the vision of the Board members: to make the next Board and every new member of the Association proud that they are members of the National Hellenic Student Association of America," Nikolettakis said.

To find out more about NHSA, its plans and its programs, visit: [www.nhsaofamerica.org](http://www.nhsaofamerica.org). Send inputs, comments or questions at [info@nhsaofamerica.org](mailto:info@nhsaofamerica.org).



Michael Siderakis and Matina Kastanas smile for a wedding picture.



The bride's parents Demetris and Nomiki Kastanas (center), and the groom's parents Elias and Maria Siderakis during the reception.

## Michael Siderakis and Matina Kastanas Get Married in NYC

**NEW YORK** – Michael Siderakis and Matina Kastanas were joined in holy matrimony on Sunday April 26 at the Holy Trinity Archdiocesan Cathedral in Manhattan. The newlyweds – the son of an entrepreneur and the daughter of the owner of TV station NGTV – held a traditional Greek wedding, with many guests and personalities from Greece and the Greek American community on hand.

The bride's father, Demetris Kastanas, could hardly contain his joy, not only because he was walking his only daughter down the aisle, but also because he was gaining a "wonderful son-in-law", as he told his guests at the reception at the Water's Edge Restaurant.

Archbishop Demetrios of America was in attendance, along with Metropolitan Paisios of Tyana, Bishop Vikentios of Apameia, Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Miltiades Varvitsiotis, former Greek Foreign Minister and main opposition PASOK MP

Theodoros Pangalos, former Greek Deputy Foreign Minister and PASOK MP Grigoris Niotis, former Deputy Sports Minister Giorgos Orfanos, PASOK Parliament Spokesman Christos Papoutsis, PASOK MP Michalis Karhimakis, Ambassador Demetris Alexandrakis, Greek Consul General in New York Agni Balta, World Council of Hellenes Abroad U.S. Regional Coordinator Ted Spyropoulos, Publisher/Executive Editor of The National Herald Antonis H. Diamataris.

The evening's entertainment was provided by the Stavros Theodorou Orchestra. After welcoming the wedding guests, Mr. Kastanas wished his children happiness in their new life together and performed unforgettable Greek hits along with singers Stavros and Amanda.

Matina Kastanas was born in New York and is a fourth grade teacher at a public school in Brooklyn. Her husband Michael Siderakis was also born in New York and is the owner of the Cosmos Diner in Manhattan.

## ALL HISTORY

# Gust D. Skondras: The Story of An Early Greek Confection King of Iowa

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date given for his initial arrival is 1898, even though no public documents record this claim. Whatever oral history within the Greek community may contend, City Directories do not show Skondras in Mason City before 1903. In point of fact published accounts disagree about even this date, offering 1905 as the year that Gust D. Skondras permanently settled in this city (Mason City Globe-Gazette June 1, 1953). Given Greek American labor practices, common at this time, all three dates 1898, 1903 and 1905 may in fact be correct.

All accounts, be they documented city records or oral traditions, agree that Skondras was the first Greek immigrant to put down permanent roots in Mason City, Iowa. The fact that Skondras was born in Athens on April 15, 1865 and so was nearly 40 years old, and the manner in which he arrived in Mason City, as an already well established businessman, suggests nothing else than that he had resided in the United States for quite some time. The oral history accounts, it should be noted, assert that while Skondras had in fact first arrived in Mason City in 1898, he did not stay long.

That in 1898 Skondras came to scout around the city of Mason City before arriving to establish his first confectionery is not implausible but typical of documented Greek business practices at this time. Whatever the case may be, not long after 1898 hundreds of Greek immigrants began to take jobs in Mason City's booming industries, the cement plants, brick and tile yards, the meat packing industry or with one of the five railroads who all called this central Iowa city-hub their permanent home. Skondras proved, during all his ten to fifteen year residence in Mason City (depending on which accounts one

wishes to believe), to have been a powerful social force for good within the community at large.

The first listing of Gust D. Skondras in the Mason City Directory is 1903, where he is cited as the manager of the Mason City Candy Kitchen at 205 South Main Street. Skondras is also noted as living at this same location. Then, on January 4, 1904, Skondras filed his Declaration of Intent (sometimes referred to casually as an immigrant's First Papers) to become an American citizen. We had no records or recollections as to why Gust Skondras, at the age of 39, elected to file these papers. Local Greeks do claim that while no laws were passed, foreign businessmen such as Skondras were required by the city to file these documents if they wished to stay in business.

In 1905 and 1906, we find that Skondras had joined in partnership with Gust Keriakedes and that the duo maintained, and heavily advertised, two locations: the original Candy Kitchen at 205 South Main and the new Olympia at 109 North Main. It was from this point onward that Skondras seems to have decided to stay in Mason City, given that his investments and business activities in the city only increased. It is worth noting, since it suggests the frugality common to such men, that Gust Keriakedes also resided at the 205 South Main building.

John Keriakedes, a brother of Gust Keriakedes, is cited as being in Mason City at this time and is noted only as a candy maker.

Skondras' documented progress in Mason City points to a steady and highly profitable advancement. This is obvious from the extravagant physical appointments of his two stores, the special events that were hosted in seasonal cycles and in his endless advertising campaign. From 1903 onward Gust Skondras advertised regularly in the Mason City newspapers. Skon-



dras' various advertisements note that he is a manufacturer of fine confections, ice cream and candies. His enterprises also sold fruits, nuts, cigars, and all popular fountain drinks, while depending on which advertisement you select, one sees that his stores also specialized in bon bons, chocolates, figs, dates, grapes, bananas, oranges and ice cream.

This listing may seem utterly unremarkable. Yet in 1903, and until well after World War II the presence of a wide variety of fruits and nuts such as figs, dates, grapes, bananas, oranges and others such foodstuffs anywhere in the nation where these items did not naturally grow was exceedingly rare. Before you think we have progressed in our age with having any fruit or nut we wish, in or out of season, is it not your experience that fresh handmade candies are nearly impossible to find, let alone, when you do, afford?

Skondras' advertisements were not without their own coy humor as in the endlessly run ad with the following words highlighted in bold-face type, here, as they are in the originals:

"MASON CITY people have placed the seal of [approval] on our EASTER EGGS and other confections which YOUNG LADIES say are "scrumptious and are indeed SWEET ENOUGH to sweeten the sweetest. Our Candies and Fruits are FRESH everyday and TO EAT our Chocolates is to be happy. MASON CITY CANDY KITCHEN 205 So. MAIN STREET (Mason City Times-Herald April 16, 1903)."

In 1908, Gust Skondras is listed as the sole proprietor of the Olympia which is still at 109 North Main but he is now rooming at an upscale boarding house at 102 North Main, The Kirk. It is also the first year that James Skondras, Gust's brother, is listed as both a candy maker and as working at the

Olympia. By 1909, the Keriakedes brothers are no longer involved with Skondras and by 1910 they are not even listed in the Mason City directories.

In 1908-1909, Gust Skondras is involved with his brother James in both the Olympia and at the Alps Café (207 South Main). The Alps Café, which opened sometime in mid-June 1909, is owned by "G. Skondras & Company." Skondras posted in June 1909 a large newspaper advertisement stating that the Alps Café had "been elegantly re-furnished with new fixtures, new electric lights, the walls all newly papered, and everything made perfectly clean." Live music was featured during dinner time and the Café proudly noted it produced its own bakery goods.

Still in the summer and fall of 1909, something happened between the Skondras brothers. We hear no more about the Alps Café in any Mason City documents but we

do find this brief announcement: "James Skondras, formerly associated with his brother, Gust Skondras, in the Alps café on South Main Street, will leave tomorrow for Charles City where he will open a new candy store in a few days. Mr. Skondras has secured a desirable location there and will conduct a fine store (Mason City Times November 23, 1909)."

It was not all grinding hard work and bitter conflict. During those halcyon days before World War I, the Olympia, on Saturday afternoons and evenings, hosted the Gates Orchestra which played classical music and popular tunes of the era.

In 1909, there was still no Greek Orthodox Church in Mason City but Skondras was elected the president of the local chapter of the Panhellenic Union. Late in 1909, Gust Skondras returned to Greece leaving James J. Manousos, his manager, in charge of the Olympia.

The excellent prospects for the candy business soon drew other Greeks to Mason City. In 1910, Theodore and George Bayz opened a confectionery store at 219 North Main.

In 1913, the Bayz brothers opened yet another at 223 South Main. 1913 is also the year that Peter Pappas briefly opened his confectionery store at 210 South Main.

In April 1914, Skondras returned again to Greece but stayed only four months of a planned six month trip because of impending war. At this time some 3,000 Greeks lived in Mason City. As living memory has it, once back in town Skondras immediately sold the store to James J. Manousos and without a moments pause, took the very next train to Des Moines, Iowa.

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