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Socrates-Demosthenes students help write Montreal's Greek heroes exhibition



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In the blue half-light of a gallery in Old Montreal, beneath a long frieze of meander patterns and among marble gods carried across the Atlantic, a row of small display stands holds something unexpected: the French handwriting and bright drawings of children, set beside vases and figurines made nearly 3,000 years ago. The pairing is the heart of a collaboration between the Pointe-à-Callière museum and the Socrates-Demosthenes school that turned 21 Grade 4 students into co-authors of one of the largest celebrations of Hellenic heritage ever mounted in North America.

That exhibition, **La Grèce des héros. Au temps de Troie**, gathers close to 400 objects from 28 Greek museums and archaeological sites, many of them shown for the first time on this continent. Produced jointly with the Ministry of Culture of the Hellenic Republic, it leads visitors through the world of Homer by way of statues, jewellery, weapons, ceramics and ritual objects, tracing the line where the passions of mortals meet the gods of Olympus. The journey moves between two founding ages, the bronze age of palaces and goldwork and the iron age of the poet, and includes a rare warrior's helmet made of boar tusks and delicate gold ornaments from the royal tombs of Mycenae. "In his account, Homer refers to real elements of his time," the museum's director general, Anne Élisabeth Thibault, has said of the period the show recreates. "Rarely has Greece granted a heritage collection of such scale to a museum in North America," she said.

The exhibition also marks the work of a Greek-Canadian archaeological mission active for more than 30 years at Argilos, in northern Greece, led by Jacques Y. Perreault of the Université de Montréal, a reminder of the ties already binding Canada to the Greek world.

For the families of the Greek community, the show carried a second meaning. The museum invited the Socrates-Demosthenes school, an institution of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, to take part directly in an innovative museum-education program, in recognition of the long bond between the community and the cultural heritage of Greece. The idea grew out of the strong response the community had shown to the museum's 2015 exhibition on the Greeks, from Agamemnon to Alexander the Great. This time the museum wanted the children of the community to contribute in a lasting way to the telling of the history and mythology of their ancestors' homeland.

The Grade 4 class at Campus II was a natural fit, since its students had already studied Greek mythology and ancient history and arrived with the background the project required. From the first days of the 2025-2026 school year, students, parents and teachers embraced the plan. The museum chose 21 of its exhibits and matched each one to a child. Working with their Greek and French teachers, the students were paired with a hero or a god according to personality, interests and character. Who would speak for the resourceful Odysseus? Which student best suited the beautiful Helen? Who would carry the weight of the powerful Agamemnon? The questions gave the children the sense that they belonged to a genuine cultural mission.

In October 2025, the Quebec troubadour Thomas Hellman visited the classroom three times. With his guitar and a gift for storytelling, he brought the episodes of the *Iliad* and the interventions of the Olympian gods to life in front of the students. Like a modern rhapsode, he carried the children into the world of the Trojan War and stirred both their knowledge and their imagination, setting the stage for the work that followed.

Then came the research. Each student studied the figure entrusted to them and gathered information in French, and with the help of the teachers and the museum team composed an original caption for the matching exhibit. Those short texts, written with the freshness of a child's thinking, now stand beside the artifacts and form a distinctive part of the visitor's path through the galleries. Leanea, 9, took up Cassandra. "This princess was given the gift of seeing the future in exchange for promising herself to Apollo," she wrote, before adding her own verdict: "I like that Cassandra can see the future and is beautiful." Kalliopé, 9, told the story of Menelaus. "Menelaus was the king of Sparta, Agamemnon's brother, husband of Helen, and a hero of the Trojan War," she wrote. "His wife was kidnapped by Paris, so he teamed up with Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Ajax to wage war on Troy to get his wife back."

The creative work continued on paper. The painter and graphic artist Marie Joelle Fournier came to the classroom and led the children through a series of art workshops over three sessions. The students drew and painted their heroes and gods in strong colour and personal style, giving Cassandra a crowned profile and a blue diadem and arming Menelaus with sword and helmet. Their paintings now hang in the exhibition under their own names, offering visitors a glimpse of Greek mythology through the eyes of a new generation. In the galleries, students in the white shirts and crested uniforms of the school can be seen beside their stands, some next to Apollo and Athena, others by Hector and Priam, with towering seated statues and cases of Mycenaean gold rising behind them.

The high point arrived on June 5. The Grade 4 class of Socrates II walked the completed galleries as official guests, among the first to pass through the exhibition, accompanied by their teachers, Eirini Tourkomanoli and Andréanne Gauvin-Gagnon. The emotion showed on their faces. Their eyes lit up at the sight of the authentic vases and archaeological objects they had known only from books and history class. Their command of the material impressed the museum's guides, and their pride reached its peak when they found their own words and artwork standing as part of an international exhibition of the first rank.

The school described the partnership as an example of education, culture and community joining forces to create an experience the children would carry for the rest of their lives, and extended its thanks to the students and teachers and to the museum team, including Annick Deblois and Andréane Nadeau, for the collaboration and its result. For generations, classical Greek, mythology and the great authors of antiquity formed part of the intellectual training of thousands of Quebecers, and the project added its youngest contributors yet to that long thread, giving the children of the diaspora a hand in presenting the story of their ancestors to the city.

La Grèce des héros. Au temps de Troie runs at the Pointe-à-Callière museum, in Old Montreal, until March 7, 2027.


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Η Πολιτισμική διπλωματία ως ορόσημο αντίστασης στον ισοπεδωτισμό της παγκοσμιοποίησεως



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Είναι πρόδηλον, ότι η πολιτισμική διπλωματία συνιστά ανυπερθέτως ένα εκ των ων ούκ άνευ εργαλείο σύσφιξης των διεθνών σχέσεων σε καθολικό επίπεδο, μεταξύ των εθνών κρατών, με κράτιστο γνώμονα, την αμοιβαία ειρηνική συνύπαρξη, ανεξαρτήτως την οικονομική ισχύ του καθ' εκάστου ή μη ή το επίπεδο τυχόν συγκλίσεως ή μη, των κοινών συμφερόντων επί του πεδίου της εξωτερικής πολιτικής.

Καθίσταται δηλαδή πρόδηλο, ότι εν προκειμένω, το φαινόμενο της παγκοσμιοποίησεως κάμπτεται εν μέρει, χάριν των διπλωματικών ισορροπιών, μεταξύ των εθνών κρατών, με επίκεντρο την αμοιβαία αναγνώριση και τυχόν πραγματοποιήση εθιμοτυπικών επισκέψεων, στα πλαίσια διατηρήσεως και αναθερμάνσεως των μεταξύ τους σχέσεών, (δηλονότι αφορά τις σχέσεις των εθνών) κατ' επιταγήν του πολιτικού δέοντος.

Δηλαδή πέραν της κατισχυσάσης πολιτισμικής κουλτούρας ή της προαγωγής της κυρίαρχης ομογενοποιημένης κουλτούρας καίτοι ενδεχομένως να έρχεται σε αντίθεση με την ζώσα εθνική παράδοση :

Ενδεικτικώς σταχυολογώ, εν προκειμένω, ορισμένες παγιωμένες πολιτισμικές επιδράσεις, ανά τον κόσμο και ουχί μονον εν τη Ευρώπη, όπως η φιγούρα του Αγίου Βασίλη, τα διάφορα τραγούδια, ορισμένοι κοινές εορτές φερ' ειπείν του Αγίου Βαλεντίου, ο μουσικός διαγωνισμός της Eurovision, ο κοινός ενδυματολογικός κώδικος και οι παγκοσμιοποιημένες επιλογές αισθητικής, η κατά το προσφυώς λεγόμενη μόδα και οι εν γένει ισχυροί μηχανισμοί καταναλωτικής επιρροής οι οποίο ναι μεν επιφάλλουν κατ' επίφαση συμπεριφορές, αυτές όμως ενίοτε εδράζονται σε παγιωμένες πολιτισμικές αντιλήψεις αλλότριες εκ των σφέτερων πολιτισμικών διαχρονικών παραδόσεων τους, με αποτέλεσμα, αρχικώς να φαίνεται αθώο ιδίως δια την νεολαία η οποία φέρεται περισσότερο ευάγωγοι και ευεπίφοροι με αποτέλεσμα να αλλοτριώνεται πολιτισμικά και να τείνει να αφομοιωθεί απεμπολώντας την πολιτισμική του ιδιαιτερότητα.

Πέραν των ως άνω βασίμων ελλοχευόντων κινδύνων λόγω της επελαυνούσης παγκοσμιοποιήσεως και της εγκαθιδρυθησομένης Νέας Τάξης πραγμάτων, η πολιτισμική διπλωματία καθίσταται ανεξάρτητη από τις εξελίξεις αυτές, καθότι φαίνεται να διευκολύνεται, διότι εξαντλείται εις ένα επίπεδο εμπλουτισμένης διεθνούς διπλωματίας με επίκεντρο την πολιτισμική όσμωση των λαών ακριβώς δια την άμβλυνση τυχόν της σύγκρουσης των πολιτισμών αλλά και της θεσμικής αντίστασης προς τον τυχόν κίνδυνο αφομοιώσεως του ενός πολιτισμού εκ του άλλου.

Αυτό το οποίο συμβαίνει εις την πρακτική καθίσταται η εξωτερική πολιτική μέσω της πολιτισμικής διπλωματίας σε επίπεδο διακρατικών σχέσεων να αποτελεί μία sui generis, κατάσταση εν σχέσει, με την εξέλιξη της επιρροής της παγκοσμιοποίησεως μέσω των μετανάστευτικών ροών, της αναπόδραστης σύγκρουσης πολιτισμών του συνεπακόλουθου αναγκαίου πολυπολιτισμού (αδηρίτως αναγκαία συνύπαρξη διαφορετικών πολιτισμών εν πλασίω σεβασμού της κυρίαρχης εθνικής κουλτούρας του κράτους έθνους υποδοχής , της γλώσσης και των παραδόσεων), κατά τη μετακίνηση των πληθυσμών, αλλά και την άναπόδραστη ραγδαία έξαρση της τεχνολογίας παγκοσμίως.

Η πολιτισμική διπλωματία μπορεί να λάβει χώρα σε ποικίλους τομείς όπως οι τέχνες, ο αθλητισμός, η λογοτεχνία, η μουσική, η επιστήμη και η οικονομία, ενώ δύναται να καθίσταται διμερείς και πολυμερείς με διάφορα έτερα κράτη και αποβλέπουν εις την εδραίωση σχέσεων εμπιστοσύνης προς αποφυγήν τυχόν συγκρούσεων και εντάσεων σε πολλαπλά επίπεδα (πολιτικά, οικονομικά, θρησκευτικά).

Περαιτέρω, η πολιτισμική διπλωματία1 λειτουργεί διττώς, τόσο ενεργητικώς όσο και παθητικώς δια τις αμοιβαδόν διπλωματικές σχέσεις μεταξύ των κρατών, δοθέντος ότι η Ελλάδα, ερείδεται και εις την ιστορική πολιτισμική της παράδοση, ήδη γνωστή τοις πάσι, για τον ιστορικό εθνικο-απελευθερωτικό αγώνα αλλά και για τον δαψιλή ελληνοχριστιανικό πολιτισμό του, από την Αρχαία Ελλάδα, το Βυζάντιο έως την ίδρυση του νεοσύστατου Κράτους με την συμβολή του Οικουμενικού Πατριαρχείου.

Δηλαδή η σύνθετη ιστορική διάσταση επιβιωσεως του Ελληνισμού μετά τον διαμελισμό της Οθωμανικής αυτοκρατορίας κατά την εθνοθρησκευτική, εποποία και επανάσταση των Ελλήνων, αλλά και την καταλυτική συμβολή από το Φανάρι, ο ΕλληνοΧριστιανισμός, διασώθηκε και οικοδομήθηκε, εκ της κόνεώς του, εκ της επιμόχθου ιδρύσεως ενός εθνικώς ανεξάρτητου και εδαφικώς ακέραιου κράτους.

Η πολιτισμική μας κληρονομιά, συνιστά τα ιερά τιμαλφή του Γένους μας, η γλώσσα μας, ο πολιτισμός, οι τέχνες, τα διασωθέντα κείμενα της φιλοσοφίας και των επιστημών, από την αρχαία Ελληνική Γραμματεία έως το Βυζάντιο, συνιστούν εχέγγυα πολιτισμικής διπλωματικής εγκυρότητας.

Ισχυρός παράγοντας καθίσταται και το θρησκευτικό συστατικό στοιχείο του πολιτισμού μας, εν τω πλαισίω της θρησκευτικής διπλωματίας προς αφενός σύγκλιση και προάσπιση της οικουμενικής διαστάσεως της ζώσης Ορθοδόξου παραδόσεως, επί των ομοδόξων, εξ ετέρου, όμως την άμβλυνση οιασδήποτε έντασης, έριδος ή τυχόν σοβούσης συγκρούσεως, επί ετεροδόξων εξ αφορμής του θρησκευτικού φονταμενταλισμού.

Η ως άνω βεβαιότητα, επιρωννύεται, διαρκούσης της μετανεωτερικότητας 2της μεταψυχροπολεμικής περιόδου, όπου εν μέρει, επιβεβαιώνεται η θεωρία του Χάντιγκτον περί σύγκρουσης πολιτισμών, λόγω κυρίως της δυναμικής επιρροής και νοηματοδοτήσεως των θεσμών εισέτι σε πολιτειακό επίπεδο (ιδίως ως προς τις χώρες της Μέσης Ανατολής) το θρησκευτικό στοιχείο (τρομοκρατία, φοντομενταλισμός με θρησκευτικό ελατήριο).

Εν κατακλείδι, η ασφάλεια των Διεθνών σχέσεων3, λόγω του ολοένα μεταβαλλόμενου και ρευστού περιβάλλοντας, η εργαλειοποίηση ιδίως της θρησκείας και της μεταναστατεύσεως συνιστούν, καινοφανείς υβριδικές μορφές απειλής, οίτινες χρήζουν, νέες στρατηγικές αντιμετώπισης, από τα κράτη, ως προς τούτου δε καταλυτικής σημασίας δύναται να διαδραματίσει προληπτικώς και επιμελώς μεθοδευμένα και η πολιτισμική διπλωματία.

Χαράλαμπος Β Κατσιβαρδάς
Δικηγόρος Παρ' Αρείω Πάγω και Στ.Ε
Ανεξάρτητος Βουλευτής

1 Νικόλαος Βασιλειάδης, (2022), Πολιτισμική Διπλωματία, Θεσσαλονίκη , εκδόσεις Νικόλαος Βασιλειάδης

2 Νικόλαος Βασιλειάδης (2025), Υβριδικές και Αναδυοόμενες απειλές στις Διεθνείς Σχέσεις, εκδόσεις Παπαζήση

3 Αθανάσιος Η. Μποζίνης (2025), Υβριδικές και Αναδυοόμενες απειλές στις Διεθνείς Σχέσεις, εκδόσεις Παπαζήση

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Socrates-Demosthenes school graduates 141 in a celebration of language and heritage



Photo: Harry Barba / HCGM



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Purple and blue light washed across the draped walls of the Palace convention centre in Laval, where rows of white-covered chairs faced the stage and crystal chandeliers hung above hundreds of waiting families. Phones rose into the air as a long line of students in deep blue caps and gowns moved down the patterned carpet, and the hall filled with applause. The graduation of École Socrates-Démosthène, held earlier this month, brought together a class drawn from five campuses to close their elementary years and to renew a promise the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal has carried across generations, the preservation of the Greek language, faith and identity in a Canadian city far from Greece.

The ceremony unfolded on the evening of June 12 before a full room, opening with the procession of the graduates and the school's directors. Christos Filandrianos, a teacher and director of Campus Socrates III, served as master of ceremonies and welcomed parents, grandparents and guests of honour. Father Nicodemus, a graduate of the school who now serves as a parish priest in the community, led the gathering in prayer and asked the children to remember the sacrifices their parents and grandparents had made for them. The consul general of Greece in Montreal, Nikolaos Karalekas, was unable to attend and sent his congratulations to the graduating class.

Georgia Tsakalis, director general of the school, told the graduates the evening was one the whole community had awaited with impatience. She thanked the families and educators she called the guardians of the community's heritage and culture, and described the spirit of the school as a blend of philotimo, philanthropy and warmth. "Life becomes understandable only by looking back," she said, telling the students that in time they would recognize these years as among the best that life had offered them. Tsakalis has led the school for some 27 years.

Two graduates read compositions about their time at the school, one in Greek and one in French. Zoi Nicoletopoulou, of Campus Socrates III, said she had started in 2018, holding her parents' hands before boarding the school bus, and was now saying goodbye alongside her 22 classmates. "My school was always my second home, and now that it is time for me to leave, I know well that a part of my heart will remain here forever," she said, crediting the teachers who taught her three languages and helped her believe in herself. Louis-Arnaud Cherubin, of Campus Socrates II, traced his path from online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic to his gratitude for the teachers who guided him through it.

A long series of awards followed, presented campus by campus with the support of community foundations, the parents' committees and local sponsors. Students received honours for excellence and effort in Greek, French and English, along with prizes in mathematics, physical education, dance, visual and performing arts, entrepreneurship, perseverance and philanthropic engagement. Filandrianos noted that the dancers among the graduates give up an hour or two of their dinner time each week near the end of the year to prepare the Greek dances they would perform for their families. The evening's highest honour, the President's Prize, went to one student from each campus for academic achievement, character and service.

Basile Angelopoulos, president of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, told the 141 graduates they had formed bonds that would last a lifetime. "Tonight we celebrate your achievement, and we invite you to continue to stay close to your community," he said, announcing plans to form an alumni committee in the coming year. He said 86 per cent of children who leave Socrates-Demosthenes go on to the private high school of their choice, a figure he called remarkable, and described the graduates as the future of Hellenism. "I see the future of Hellenism, and I am very optimistic that we are heading in a very good direction," he said.

The school traces its origins to 1909 and now stands as the largest private French-language school in Quebec, with more than 1,000 children enrolled across its campuses. Michael Pazadzis, vice-president of the community and a 1988 graduate of the school, said the trilingual program shapes students into ambassadors of both Hellenism and Canada. Members of the parents' committees described the fundraising that sustains the schools, including the community's annual radio marathon and a fundraising procession that together raised $650,000 this year and nearly $4 million over the past 15 years, money directed to equipment, programs and families in need. One committee member said every child kept within the schools keeps a piece of Hellenism within the community. The civic presence of the community has grown alongside its classrooms, with the month of March recognized as Greek month in Outremont and Laval and the Greek flag raised at local city halls.

As the formal program gave way to the dinner-dance, a young drummer carrying a daouli led lines of graduates onto the floor, and families rose from their tables to join hands in circle dances beneath the chandeliers. The 141 diplomas were presented campus by campus, beginning with Campus Socrates V, and the evening closed with the graduating class performing a farewell song conducted by Dimitris Ilias of Chroma Musica.

Χρόνια Πολλά για την Ημέρα του Πατέρα





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Greek-Canadian members of Parliament speak of heritage and country at a record Liberal convention in Montreal





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Inside the Palais des congrès, the light turned everything red. A circular fixture overhead glowed with the party's single-letter emblem, rows of Canadian flags framed the main stage, and the hum of several thousand voices filled a hall dressed wall to wall in crimson. Delegates moved through the concourse in red lanyards, past tables stacked with shirts and caps reading "Canada Strong," while volunteers handed out narrow placards on tall sticks for the crowd to wave. Many in the room called the atmosphere electric. Running through that national gathering was a current that carried particular meaning for readers of this newspaper: a group of members of Parliament of Greek heritage, present among the faithful and ready to speak about country, community and the long Hellenic contribution to Canadian life.

The 2026 Liberal National Convention brought more than 4,500 Liberals to Montreal from April 9 to 11, the largest policy convention in the party's history. Over half of those who attended were taking part for the first time, gathering for plenary sessions, campaign trainings and policy debates, and to elect members of the next national board of directors. It was the first convention since the federal election of April 2025 and the rise of Mark Carney to prime minister, and it unfolded as the party sat within reach of a majority in the House of Commons.

"This convention showed the strength and momentum of our party," said Sachit Mehra, president of the Liberal Party of Canada, in a statement marking the convention's close. He said that from first-time participants to long-time organizers, Liberals had stepped up to share ideas, connect with one another and chart the party's path forward.

For Emmanuella Lambropoulos, a Liberal member of Parliament from Montreal, the gathering carried the warmth of a home crowd. "It's a great convention this year. I think it's the biggest convention that we've seen, the biggest Liberal convention," she told The Montreal Greek Times. "A lot of people from out of town are here today, and what's really nice is how many young people have decided to come to the convention and join the Liberal Party. We can see a renewal for sure." She credited the past year of work for the surge in interest. "Mark Carney and the work of our team in the last year has really inspired a lot of people to come out and to join the party, to be part of the movement," she said, pointing to Conservatives who had crossed the floor as a sign of the moment. "It was a very successful convention."

Annie Koutrakis, who represents the Laval riding of Vimy, described a hall charged with purpose. "At the convention of the Liberal Party of Canada in Montreal, more than 4,500 people came together, many attending for the first time," she said. "Under the leadership of Mark Carney, the energy and optimism were clear as we focus on building a stronger economy and supporting families." She tied the weekend back to the work that follows it. "I am proud to serve my constituents in Vimy, in Laval, and to help deliver opportunities so Canadians can get ahead and feel confident about the future," she said.

The longer arc of Greek-Canadian participation in public life was present in the room as well, in the person of Eleni Bakopanos, a former member of Parliament and the first Greek-born woman elected to the House of Commons. "It's a great pleasure to be in another Liberal convention. I've been to a few, but this is the biggest," she said. She spoke of a party that struck her as united, "working together to make a better Canada, because Canada is a big country," and said she had been impressed by what cabinet ministers shared about the scope of their work. "I'm very proud to be a Liberal, and I'm very proud to be a Canadian," she said.

That dual pride, in Canada and in the heritage that several of these members carry, was put most plainly by Peter Fragiskatos, a member of Parliament of Greek descent. "All of us who have the honour of serving this country as members of Parliament, of Greek heritage, love Canada. We are Canadian, but also we are very, very cognizant of the fact that the Greek community has helped to build this country," he said. "And that is something we carry with us." He framed that inheritance as a responsibility owed to earlier generations of Greek immigrants. "Those stories of those who came before us, we stand on their shoulders, and we want to do right by them by contributing to the country. So we'll continue to do that," he said.

The convention's central moment came on the afternoon of April 11, when Carney delivered the leader's keynote to a standing-room crowd. He was introduced by Diana Fox Carney, who told the hall that in her travels she heard people thank Canada for its leadership, describing the country as "a beacon of hope, a pathway forward in a confounding world." She offered a portrait of Canada seen through international eyes as one of "unity, strength and pragmatism."

Carney opened by telling Liberals they were "remarkable because of what we will do together," saying they "show up for a better future for all Canadians." He cast the present as a hinge in the country's history, telling the room that "the world's changing not gradually but suddenly," and that Canada was "in the middle of a transformation that will define our country for generations." He returned often to the idea of shared purpose. "Canadians are being called to serve ... for something, for each other," he said, adding that "kindness is a virtue not a weakness." Switching between official languages, he told delegates in English, "We are the masters of our destiny," and in French used the phrase that translates as "masters in our own home." The crowd rose to applaud several times.

Much of the speech wove together a year of policy under the banner of "Canada Strong." Carney spoke of building a stronger and more affordable economy, of boosting competition in telecommunications, banking and grocery stores, and of expanding the country's electricity grid to "power homes and businesses and Canadian sovereignty." He pointed to 14 major national projects, to increased defence spending, and to Canada's support for Ukraine and its work with Nordic partners and the United Kingdom to protect the Arctic. He described artificial intelligence as "the defining technology of our era" and set out a goal of "AI for all," governed by Canadian values and accountable to Canadians. Recalling Canada's postwar willingness to build at speed, he said the country was being asked to take risks again, and noted the recent Artemis II mission that carried Canadian astronaut Col. Jeremy Hansen on a flight around the Moon and back.

The gathering opened, as it began each day, with O Canada sung in both official languages and a land acknowledgment offered by an Elder. Organizers said the strong turnout in Montreal built on a year of record engagement, including a leadership race that drew nearly 300,000 Canadians into the party and the party's best year of grassroots fundraising.

The convention closed on April 11. By-elections in three ridings followed on April 13, and the Liberals won the seats that gave Mark Carney's government a majority in the House of Commons. The Carney government's shift to a majority is a unique occurrence in Canadian political history, achieved mid-mandate rather than through a general election.

Before the great migration:

The Greek presence in early Quebec

A faded Byzantine icon, a Cephalonian pilot in Spanish service and a string of altered surnames along the St. Lawrence point to Hellenic roots in Quebec that reach back centuries

By Dimitri Papadopoulos
with files from John Coconas



Along the wharves of the St. Lawrence, where ocean ships once unloaded their crews into the river towns of Lower Canada, the Greek story in Quebec began in quiet, carried ashore by sailors whose names slowly dissolved into French and whose grandchildren would grow up knowing little of the islands their forebears had left behind. That hushed beginning, traced today through worn church icons, parish records and the memory of old families, is the thread running through one of the most intriguing chapters of Hellenism in the Americas: the question of when, and how, the first Greeks reached the shores of Quebec, and the slow assimilation that nearly erased them.

The difficulty begins with the records themselves. A precise date for the first Greeks in the greater Montreal region remains, by most accounts, beyond reach, owing to the absence of clear and specific documentation. Their presence can be followed only through the visible marks they left behind, a christened child here, a Hellenized surname there, an heirloom passed down through generations. The prevailing view among researchers and historians holds that the arrival of the first Greek immigrants in the province of Quebec, and in Montreal in particular, began around 1843.

The earliest Greeks in Montreal, whether they came as registered immigrants or slipped ashore as stowaways, were overwhelmingly men of the sea. Many married into the local population, most often French-Canadian women, and over time altered their names. With each passing decade their ties to their origins thinned, until they were absorbed into the wider society and effectively vanished as Greeks.

That pattern was set down decades ago by the educator and historian George Demetrios Vlassis, whose English-language volume "The Greeks in Canada" appeared in Ottawa in 1953 and remains a foundational reference for the community's early history. "No one can speak with certainty about the first Greeks of Quebec," Vlassis wrote, in a passage rendered here from the Greek. He went on to observe that from the early 17th century onward many arrived as sailors, lingered for various reasons in the ports along the St. Lawrence, married and were completely assimilated into the local French population.

The idea of a Hellenic footprint on these shores well before organized migration finds its boldest illustration far to the west. Ioannis Phokas, a navigator from the Ionian island of Cephalonia born in 1536, sailed in the service of King Philip II of Spain under the name Juan de Fuca, and in 1592 explored the broad strait that today separates Vancouver Island from Washington state and forms part of the international boundary between Canada and the United States. The Strait of Juan de Fuca still carries his name, and he is widely regarded as the first Greek to set foot on what is now Canadian soil. His voyage, recorded by English chroniclers and confirmed two centuries later by the survey of George Vancouver, places a Greek mariner on the Pacific coast generations before the river towns of Quebec heard their first Greek voices.

The most evocative evidence from Quebec itself survives in an account preserved in the community's archival press and compiled by journalist John Coconas. It concerns Vasilis Kranidiotis, described in the account as among the few whose presence in the province reached back to the late 18th century. In the winter of 1908, Kranidiotis set out from Sorel, the river town where he had lived for many years, in the company of the painter Spyros Athinaios and a companion named Nikolas Tagaras, intending to seek their fortunes in another city. Their carriage crossed the province to the northwest, and in heavy weather the driver, Spyros Kranidiotis, lost control of the horses. One animal broke loose and bolted onto a large farm, and the three men followed onto the property to recover it.

The owner came out to his front step to see what was happening. The travellers, fluent in French after their years in Sorel, explained themselves and mentioned, among other things, that they were of Greek origin. At those words the farmer, known locally as Monsieur Eustrat Thaken, lit up with joy and told them that his own father had been Greek, a man who had died many years earlier. Thaken, then past 75 and born in Saint-Antoine, Quebec, spoke of his father with deep affection, recalling a man loved and admired throughout the district.

While his guests sat inside his manor house, Thaken withdrew into the inner rooms and returned holding a very old icon, the names of its saints faded in Byzantine lettering. It was an image of the Three Hierarchs, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, the three fourth-century church fathers honoured in the Orthodox tradition as patrons of faith and learning. The icon had belonged to Thaken's father, a sailor who, in all likelihood around the middle of the 17th century, had carried it across the Atlantic and up the great river, a small portable sanctuary that outlasted the man, his language and even the memory of his homeland.

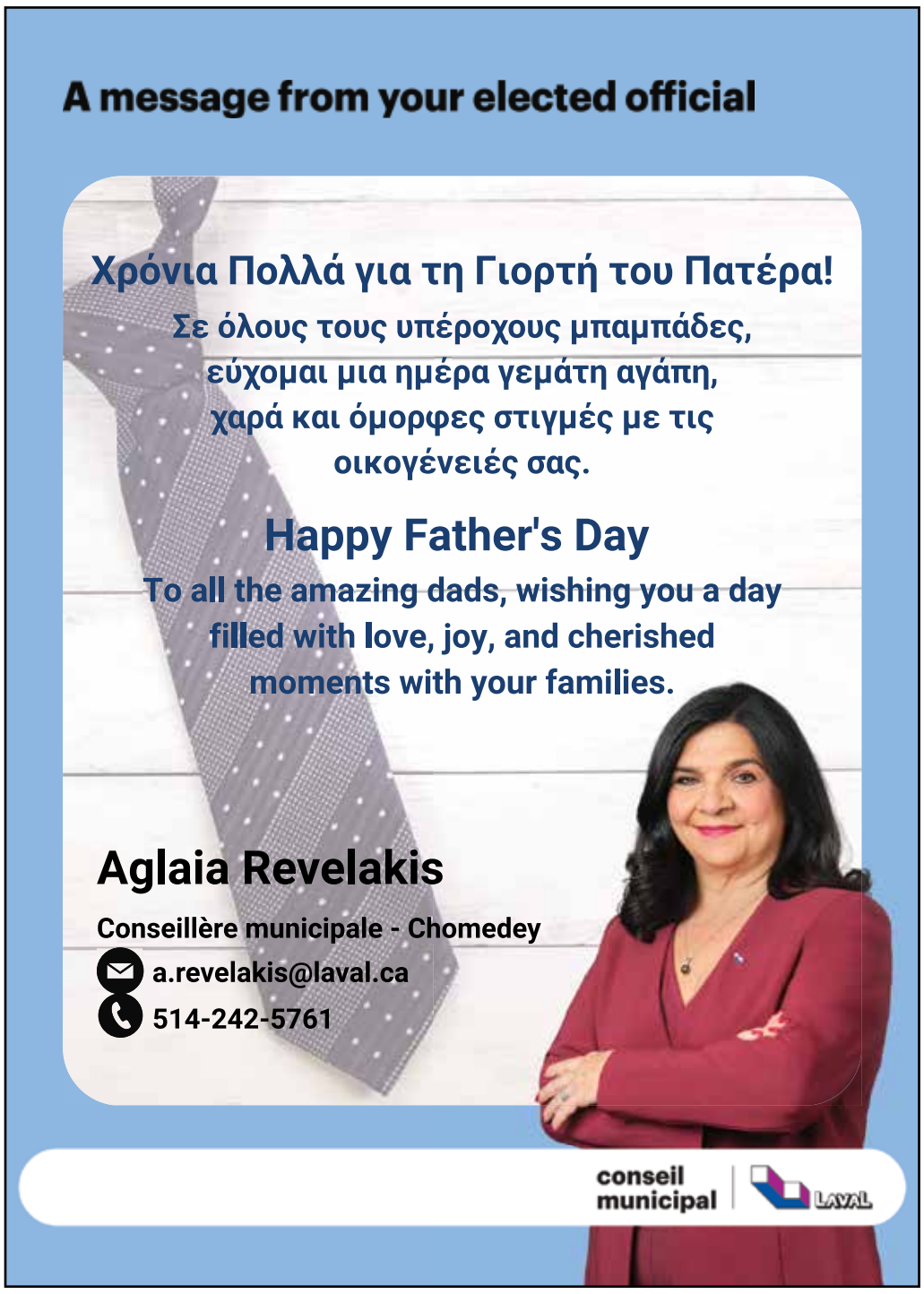
Other traces point the same way. Across Franco-Canadian society, and especially in the towns strung along the St. Lawrence, a number of Hellenized or altered Greek surnames survive as quiet markers of forgotten origins, lending weight to the view that Greeks were present in Quebec well before the 17th century. These families married, raised their children in French, lost contact with their roots and dissolved into the founding population of the colony, leaving fragments of their names behind.

The archival photographs that accompany the original feature capture the human texture of that long arc. In the formal, sober poses common to the period, groups of young immigrants and families stand and sit before the camera, the men in caps and the women in long dresses, a child clutching a white pitcher in the foreground of one image and parents cradling infants in another. They are portraits of a community in the making, a people learning to live as both Greek and Canadian on the banks of a northern river.

By the 1981 census, Canada counted more than 154,000 people of Greek origin, some 49,000 of them in Quebec, with the overwhelming majority living in the greater Montreal area.

In the next issue of THE MONTREAL GREEK TIMES: The first Greek families of Montreal.





Saint-Jean-Baptiste: Quebec's National Day and a Greek South Shore tradition





Dimitri PAPADOPOULOS
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Every year on June 24, Quebec marks its National Day, better known across the province as Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. Its roots reach back to ancient summer solstice customs, later absorbed into the Christian calendar as the feast of Saint John the Baptist. In New France, bonfires and public gatherings gave the day a festive religious character. In the 19th century, it acquired a broader civic meaning for French Canadians, especially after the 1834 Montreal banquet organized by journalist Ludger Duvernay, which helped transform the feast into a celebration of language, culture and national identity.

Today, the Fête nationale du Québec is observed through concerts, parades, neighbourhood gatherings, fireworks and community events across the province. It is also a day when Quebecers of many backgrounds take part in a shared public celebration, each community bringing its own history and traditions to the wider Quebec story.

For Montreal's Greek community, one of the most familiar local expressions of this period takes place on the South Shore, where the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal's South Shore Region has long held its St. Jean Baptiste Greek Festival around the June 24 holiday. The festival is centred on St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, located at 5220 Grande Allée in St-Hubert, a parish whose first liturgy was held in December 1985.

The annual festival has become a meeting point for families from the South Shore, Montreal, Laval and beyond. It combines the spirit of a Greek panigiri with the timing of Quebec's National Day: food booths, souvlaki, pastries, coffee, traditional music, dance groups, youth volunteers, seniors, parents' committees and parish organizations working together. Recent editions have also highlighted the continuity of the event, including the 43rd year in 2025.

In this way, Saint-Jean-Baptiste is not only a Quebec holiday observed by the Greek community from the outside. On the South Shore, it has become part of the community's own calendar, linking faith, summer, family, language and heritage with the public celebration of Quebec itself. It is both a Quebec celebration and a Greek community homecoming.



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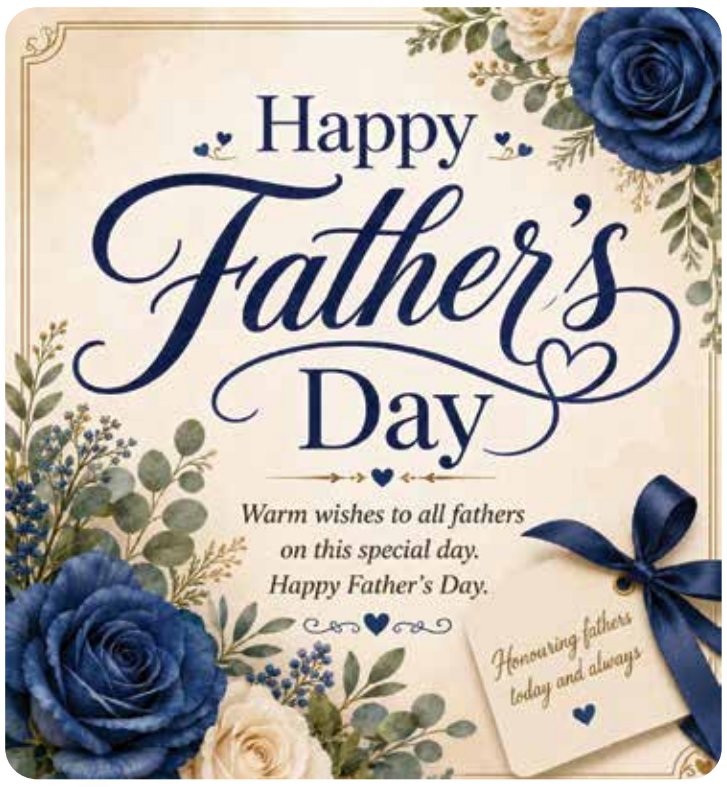
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Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Blue and white linens covered the round tables in the hall of Saint George Cathedral in Montreal on May 9, where tulips and sprays of baby's breath stood in small vases beside printed programs and name tags marking the speakers and mentors. By mid-morning the room had filled with students, young professionals and community leaders, coffee and croissant in hand, leaning across the tables to introduce themselves while a sponsor slideshow played on the screen at the front. A current of anticipation ran through the hall, and it set the stage for a day given over to questions that have long occupied the Greek-Canadian diaspora: how a younger generation finds its footing in careers and leadership, and how the Hellenic identity carried across the Atlantic is kept alive and passed forward.

The occasion was the launch of NextGen Skills Talks, a new initiative organized by the youth department of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal. Held from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., the gathering brought together more than 70 Hellenic students, young professionals, mentors and community leaders for a full day conference of career exploration, mentorship, skills-building, networking and leadership development. It brought together 20 active youth organizations from Montreal, Ottawa and the United States, among them university and college associations, church youth groups, dance troupes and regional Greek association youth groups, including a table of Saturday school students attending alongside their teacher, and it produced 14 new community memberships before the day was out.

The event was conceived, organized and emceed by Antonia Macris, youth secretary on the community's board of directors, who developed it over several years of consultation with student groups seeking greater access to mentorship and professional development. "We encourage everyone today to introduce yourselves, to participate, to ask questions, and make new connections with people who maybe you've never met before, or people who you have but never had the opportunity to get to know," she told the room as the program opened.

"We hope participants leave with new connections, new inspiration and greater confidence in their future path," Macris said. "We want young people to see how they can grow, lead and contribute within our community while discovering the shared goals that connect so many of our youth organizations. Sometimes one conversation, one mentor or one opportunity can change the direction of what comes next."

Opening remarks came from Macris alongside Basile Angelopoulos, president of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, and Nikolaos Karalekas, consul general of Greece in Montreal, who each spoke to the value of youth engagement and the responsibility of one generation toward the next. Angelopoulos drew on the blue and white table settings to make his point, casting the day as an exercise in giving to those who would follow. "Give and take is the best way that we could go forward and build a stronger community," he said, describing the gathering as a chance to give to the next generation "so that our next generation can become even better than the first." He returned to the idea of Hellenism as a shared inheritance held in trust. "It defines us, but we are its custodians," he said. "Every generation is the custodian of that trait, and we are the custodians long enough to pass it on to the next generation."

That sense of stewardship ran through the Youth Groups Showcase that followed, as Macris moved among the tables and invited representatives from each organization to introduce themselves and describe their work. A representative of MET Youth Montreal explained that the group, whose name comes from the Greek word for metamorphosis, operates as a faith-based Orthodox network for young people. Others spoke or supported from the Hellenic student associations of McGill University, McGill Law, Concordia University, the University of Ottawa, Ottawa Law, John Abbott College and Marianopolis College, as well as the National Hellenic Students Association; parish organizations included MET Youth Montreal, MET Youth Saint-Dionysios and the St-Nicholas Youth Association of Laval; dance troupes such as La Troupe Folklorique Grecque Syrtaki, Romiosyni and Laografiko Ergastiri Montreal; and the youth wings of the Arcadian, Kefalonian, Messinian and Pontian associations of Montreal, alongside organizations including the Socrates Educational Foundation, the Montreal Greek Film Festival and AHEPA's Maids of Athena and Sons of Pericles Montreal Chapters. The showcase widened the room's awareness of how many avenues exist for young Hellenes to stay involved.

A leadership spotlight by Denise Vourtzoumis, president and co-founder of Pink in the City, opened the speaking program with reflections on resilience and confidence drawn from her own career. Two panel discussions followed. The first, on careers in public service and community impact, brought together Effie Giannou, deputy mayor of Montreal; The Honourable Eleni Bakopanos, a former member of Parliament; and Joseph Polossifakis, an Olympic fencer who works in government relations at Suncor. Bakopanos traced her entry into public life to youthful conviction. "It was very idealistic, and I chose the way to do it was through political action," she said. Polossifakis told the students that sport had shaped his approach to everything that came after it. "From day one, you have to take a lot of accountability for yourself. You win or you lose," he said. "I'm accountable for my results, for my actions, what I need to do to get better."

The second panel, on creative Hellenic identities across borders, turned to entrepreneurship, personal branding and the digital pathways now open to young people, with executive coach Nina Balaouras, international DJ and producer Andrew Pololos, and Adoni Vassilyadi of Ottawa, vice-president of MET Youth Canada and a Greek content creator who spoke about representing Hellenism beyond Montreal and across the wider diaspora.

Over the Mentor Lunch Power Hour, attendees moved into small groups with professionals drawn from aviation, medicine, philanthropy, technology, education, entrepreneurship and the arts, gathering around a donated buffet of Greek pastries and savoury dishes. Several mentors offered the day's most personal moments. Adrian Maris, a commercial airline captain, drew laughter as he described a circuitous route to the cockpit. "I wanted to be a doctor, then an engineer, then a farmer, and now I'm here as an airline pilot because I'm afraid of flying," he said, adding that he teaches others to fly in his spare time. "Quite honestly, I don't work a day in my life because I enjoy this."

Other mentors included Athena Sita of Innovitech, Alexander Koutelias of the Orchestre Métropolitain, Dr. Costa Papadatos of Vanier College and the Socrates Educational Foundation and physician John Kremastiotis, whose conversations with participants ranged from leadership and workplace experiences to education and career development.

For the youth department, the gathering reinforced a role it has cultivated as a hub linking Hellenic youth organizations across generations and cities, expanding opportunities for collaboration beyond Montreal and extending those ties into the broader North American diaspora. The event was offered free to existing youth members and carried a $25 fee for others that could be applied toward a community membership, set at $25 for those aged 18 to 25 and $50 for those older, with admission free for anyone under 18. It was made possible entirely through community sponsorship, with all food, beverages and materials donated by local businesses. Community sponsors included Ambrosia, Alphabet Café and Ambros Coffee, Bernie Beigne, Harry Photography, Petros Taverna, Zoubris, Kilo Desserts, Salamina, Groupe Alimentaire Miron, Skoulakis, Marc Angelo, Christina's Cuisine, Press My Buttons and Absolut Disco. Organizers say the initiative is expected to continue in future editions, reflecting a growing interest in mentorship, leadership development and intergenerational engagement among Hellenic youth, and building on participation and feedback from youth organizations, mentors and attendees across the community.

The formal program concluded at 3 p.m., with many participants remaining to network until approximately 4 p.m.

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Canada Day and the Greek celebration of belonging in Laval





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Every year on July 1, Canadians mark Canada Day, the national holiday that commemorates the creation of Canada in 1867. On that date, the British North America Act, now known as the Constitution Act, 1867, brought together the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec into a new federation called the Dominion of Canada.

The holiday was first observed after Governor General Lord Monck called on Canadians to celebrate the anniversary of Confederation in 1868. In 1879, July 1 became a federal statutory holiday, known for many years as Dominion Day. In 1982, the same year Canada patriated its Constitution, the holiday was officially renamed Canada Day.

Canada Day is often described as the country's birthday, but it is more than a date on the calendar. It is a celebration of Confederation, of the country's institutions, of its people, and of the many communities that have helped build Canadian society. Across the country, it is marked with concerts, family gatherings, citizenship ceremonies, flags, fireworks and community festivals.

For Greeks in the Montreal area, Canada Day has also become closely connected with one of the major events of the summer: the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal's Laval summer festival. Held around July 1 at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church in Chomedey, the festival has long brought together Greek families from Laval, Montreal, the North Shore and beyond.

The celebration combines the symbols of Canada with the traditions of Hellenism. Visitors gather for souvlaki from the grill, Greek pastries, frappé, music, dancing, children's activities and the familiar reunion atmosphere of a Greek community festival. It is a place where generations meet: grandparents, parents, children, volunteers, youth groups, community leaders and friends who return year after year.

In Laval, Canada Day is therefore celebrated with both the maple leaf and the blue and white of Greece. It is a moment to honour the country that became home to thousands of Greek immigrants and their descendants, while keeping alive the language, faith, food, music and customs they brought with them.

For the Greek community, July 1 is not only a national holiday. It is also a celebration of belonging: proud to be Greek, proud to be Canadian, and proud to contribute to the life of Quebec and Canada.

SENATE SÉNAT
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Senator Leo Housakos wishes the Greek community of Montreal a Happy Canada Day as we celebrate all the things that make this the best country in the world to call home.


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Greek Roots honours young Hellenes at 2026 Chrysalis Gala in Laval



Image: Harry Barba / Photo Booth



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LAVAL, Quebec — Beneath a wash of deep blue light, the ballroom of the Palace Convention Centre was set for something close to a coronation. Round tables wore black linen and gold chargers, royal-blue napkins stood folded at every place, and arrangements of white and pale-blue hydrangeas crowded the foot of the stage. At the centre of the room, catching the light, stood a flame-shaped glass award engraved with two figures whose outstretched arms open into a butterfly. The image is a chrysalis, the still moment before flight, and on the evening of May 9, 2026, it framed a gathering devoted to the young people of Montreal's Hellenic community and to a larger question facing a community marking 120 years in this country: how to prepare the generation that will carry its faith, language and traditions forward.

The occasion was the Chrysalis Gala & Awards, presented by Greek Roots, a youth-driven Canadian nonprofit organization that connects young people of Hellenic heritage through volunteerism, mentorship and cultural experience. Now in its second year, the gala gathered community organizations, families, mentors, sponsors and elected officials under the theme "Empowering Youth to Soar Beyond Boundaries." Guests arrived for a cocktail reception in the foyer before moving into the hall for a four-course dinner and the awards program. Founders George Andreopoulos and Anna Dimitrokalis set out the evening's purpose plainly in the program. "Greek Roots was founded on a simple but powerful belief: when we invest in youth, we strengthen the future of our community," they wrote.

That belief gave the night its civic weight. The gala served as a point of connection among Hellenic associations, schools, churches and community groups, each invited to put forward young people whose contributions deserved to be recognized. Greek Roots describes its work in three words printed across its banner that evening, "Empowering Youth. Building Community. Embracing Hellenism," and the room reflected that aim, seating teenagers and university students at the same tables as long-serving community leaders.

The gala served as an honours night for young Hellenes. The event was designed to recognize the exceptional achievements and contributions of youth of Hellenic heritage within the community. Hellenic associations and community groups had been invited to nominate young people who exemplify the timeless Hellenic values that have influenced Western civilization for centuries. Nominations were accepted across categories that included critical thinking and innovation, personal excellence, civic responsibility, philanthropy, environmental stewardship, and arts, literature and culture.

Antonia Macris, 2025 Changemaker of the Year recipient who returned this year to present an award and who serves as youth secretary on the board of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, congratulated the nominees and encouraged them to continue pursuing their goals. "To all the nominees, you will go far, and this is just the beginning. Keep on learning. Everything you do, however small, does make a difference and causes a ripple effect in what you do next. Celebrate your wins because this is a win for all of you."

Joining Macris at the lectern to present the other Changemaker awards were Joseph Polossifakis, senior advisor, government and community relations at Suncor Energy and a 2016 Olympian in fencing, and Jacob Danassis, the 2025 Under-24 Changemaker of the Year recipient. Addressing the finalists, Polossifakis praised their achievements, saying, "I can't believe what these changemakers have accomplished at such a young age," and expressed pride in their contributions to the community. Danassis reflected on the significance of passing the award to the next generation, noting that the recipients' hard work and dedication "represent the bright future of our community." The evening's hosts, Greek Roots ambassadors Evdokia Deligiannis and Diana Ruano Plescha, opened the program and introduced the finalists, who stood together on the stage in formal dress as their names were read and the glass trophy waited at the side.

From a larger field, a selection committee chose 10 finalists for the Changemaker of the Year awards, and their stories were presented in short filmed interviews shown to guests between dinner courses. The decision to feature every finalist in a filmed profile reflected a desire to showcase the breadth of young volunteer talent within the community. The range was wide. Among the nominees were a 15-year-old autism advocate who visits schools to raise awareness and inspire greater understanding; a Secondary 5 student who carried a sustainable-energy project to the Quebec regional science fair; a university leader who founded a campaign that collected more than 500 boxes of feminine hygiene products for women's shelters; and a McGill University student recognized for academic excellence while mentoring youth and promoting Hellenic identity through community programming. Their work spanned hospitals, research institutes, parishes, dance groups and student associations across Montreal and Laval.

The 2026 Changemaker of the Year awards went to Peter S. Katsepontes in the under-18 category and Dennis Klapsis in the under-24 category. In the category for those 25 and older, the award was shared, presented jointly to Michael Crilis and Lia Zaharakis. Greek Roots also named two Volunteer of the Year recipients, Gregoris Kantzos in the under-18 category and Panagioti Kantzos in the under-24 category, presented by Massimo Briganti. They were drawn from a slate of nominees the organization said represented part of a volunteer corps of more than 300 young people who have together given more than 2,400 hours in service of Hellenic organizations across the region.

The keynote came from Basile Angelopoulos, president of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, which is observing its 120th anniversary this year. Speaking from a clear acrylic lectern as guests looked on from candlelit tables, he tied the gala to a long history of building institutions for those who would follow. "We are proud to support initiatives that encourage young people to lead, to serve, and to remain connected to the values and traditions that unite us," he wrote in his welcome to guests, thanking them for "helping strengthen the future of our community." In a statement circulated with the evening's program, Andreopoulos added that the nominees "demonstrated the many ways young people are already shaping Montreal's Hellenic community."

Music threaded through the night. Maria Tsafatinos, a 12-year-old pop and country vocalist who trains with the Montreal-based Chroma Musika, performed alongside Christos Argyriou, a 21-year-old guitarist from Thessaloniki now studying kinesiology at the Université de Montréal, who offered his interpretations of Greek classics. The room rose for DIONYIO, a young Montreal artist of Hellenic heritage whose blend of pop and urban sounds includes "Bleu Blanc Rouge," a Montreal Canadiens anthem that has drawn attention in the city. Guests lifted their phones to film as he moved to the front of the stage, the glass Changemaker trophy glinting on a cocktail table beside him.

Along one wall, a long table held the evening's silent auction, a spread of sports memorabilia and gifts assembled to support youth programming. Framed and signed Montreal Canadiens jerseys anchored the display, among them a Lane Hutson sweater, a framed photograph of Jean Béliveau and the number 24 jersey of Chris Chelios, the Hockey Hall of Fame defenceman of Greek descent and son of Greek immigrants who won the Stanley Cup with Montreal in 1986. His jersey on the table drew a quiet thread between the city's hockey history and the room's Hellenic one.

The night drew support from across the community. Members of Parliament Annie Koutrakis, Sherry Romanado and Sameer Zuberi were among the contributors, alongside local Greek businesses and family sponsors. In a written message translated from French, Zuberi commended Greek Roots for "mobilizing passionate young volunteers and investing in leadership and mentorship," and credited the organization with helping to build "an engaged and caring next generation." The Laconian Brotherhood of Canada, another supporter, said Greek Roots helps "foster the values of Hellenism" while preserving Greek culture in communities across the country.

The silent auction, stocked with the Canadiens memorabilia and other items, remained open for bids until 11:30 p.m., and the evening closed with dancing.

Archbishop Sotirios honoured for 90 years of a bright journey





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Beneath crystal chandeliers, amid long tables crowned with white orchids and the steady glow of floating candles, the cultural centre of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada filled on the evening of June 14 with the low murmur of a community gathered for a single purpose. A wide screen above the head table carried a grainy image from another century, and the room rose to its feet as clergy in black robes processed toward the front, one young guest holding a small Greek flag against his chest while a girl in a white dress watched the procession pass. The evening that followed would trace nine decades of one life, the patient building of Orthodoxy in Canada out of the most modest of beginnings, and the question that sits at the centre of every diaspora gathering, which is how a people abroad keeps its faith and its language alive for the children who will inherit them.

The gathering took place on Sunday, June 14, at the Metropolitan Cultural Centre of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada in Toronto, where more than 600 people sat down to a formal dinner in tribute to the life and ministry in Christ of His Eminence Archbishop Sotirios. The evening marked the official presentation of a commemorative volume from the Saint Nicholas Cathedral Community, titled "90 Years of a Bright Journey," the most recent of four books the community has published since 2022 to record the historical and continuing ministry of the archbishop.

The event was organized by Anastasia Sotiropoulos, president of the Saint Nicholas Cathedral Community, working with a team of volunteers. The head table brought together Archbishop Sotirios; Ignatius, the former metropolitan of Arta, who travelled from the Church of Greece accompanied by Archimandrite Theologos Ntouvalis; the Reverend Father Photios Tsamis, president of the Clergy Syndesmos of Canada; the Reverend Father Evangelos Athanassoulas, parish priest of the Saint Nicholas Cathedral; Abbess Alexia of the Saint Kosmas Aitolos Monastery; the consul general of Greece in Toronto, Ioannis Chatzantonakis, with his wife, Marilena Griva; Archon Evagelos Sotiropoulos, president of the Ecumenical Patriarchate Archons in Canada; Archon Jim Anas, treasurer of the Archdiocese; Zoe Veroutis, president of the Philoptochos of Canada; and Betty Skoutakis, president of the Greek Community of Toronto. Among the elected officials in attendance were Vince Gasparro and Jean Yip, members of Parliament; Effie Triantafilopoulos and Jonathan Tsao, members of the Ontario legislature; and Nick Mantas, a Toronto city councillor.

The formal program opened with the evening's masters of ceremonies, Nancy Gymnopoulos and Vicky Topos-Tsakalos, who introduced Nicholas Sirmalis, a graduate of the Patriarchal Toronto Orthodox Theological Academy, to sing the Greek and Canadian national anthems as the hall stood in silence.

In her welcome, Anastasia Sotiropoulos spoke of the weight of the moment and the response it had drawn from the community. "The love of our families was proven to be even greater than the walls of this room," she told the gathering, describing the hundreds who had called wishing to attend. She described the archbishop in the language of leadership rather than office. "He is a true leader," she said, "a leader who is always there for his people on the front line."

Father Photios Tsamis carried the greetings of the clergy across Canada and used the occasion to remind those present of how recently the church's present comforts had arrived. "We have big churches, we have decorated churches, we have everything today," he said, "these came because one, the archpriest, took care of them." Consul General Chatzantonakis followed with words of esteem on behalf of Greece, reflecting on the meaning of the archbishop's work for Hellenism in Canada and for the bond between the community and the motherland.

Archon Evagelos Sotiropoulos then presented the four volumes the Saint Nicholas Community has produced since 2022, extending the community's thanks to the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Chrysopigi in Chania, Crete, which assisted in the publications. He began, by his own description, with a peculiar photograph, the same faded image projected on the screen behind the head table. It showed a scene from 1963, when the future archbishop, then a young priest ordained only a year earlier, baptized an infant in Saskatchewan in a plastic garbage can for want of a font. "That's where we came from as a church and that's where we came from as a community," he said. He set the image against the present, recalling the first arrivals from Greece who had built the church. "Many came from motherland Greece," he said, "with little in their pockets but with a strong and unyielding desire to work for the betterment of themselves, their family, and this gracious country that we love and call Canada."

The personal thread deepened with Archon Jim Anas, treasurer of the Archdiocese's national board of directors and a collaborator of the archbishop for more than 50 years, who painted his portrait from memory. "Sixty years ago at a Greek Orthodox youth conference in Montreal, I met a young priest," he said, recalling a first encounter that began with a difference of opinion. He reached back to the diocese he inherited on the eve of the archbishop's arrival. Asked to review the finances in 1973, he found, as he put it, "just over a thousand dollars in the bank of the diocese." From that point, he said, the archbishop led a transformation of the church across the country. He remembered the regional youth assemblies of the 1980s that drew hundreds of young people, reaching 500 at one gathering, and the fireside talks where nothing was off limits, down to the bishop's favourite hockey team, which in those years, he noted with a smile, was the Montreal Canadiens.

The keynote was delivered by Ignatius, the former metropolitan of Arta and a longtime friend of the archbishop. He spoke with evident emotion of the honoured guest's childhood, of the humility that has marked his bearing, and of the work accomplished across a lifetime of service in the vineyard of the Lord. At the close of his address, the cathedral community presented him and the archbishop with flowers and a token of gratitude at the lectern.

Final remarks came from Archbishop Sotirios himself, who spoke in his familiar manner, with plain words and without notes. He recounted a difficult childhood in Epirus, his early devotion to the church, and the benefactors who made his education and his ministry possible. "It is not a shame to ask for the advice of people who know better than you," he said. "It is not a shame to be humble." He measured the distance the church has travelled. "Here in Canada, when I came in 1962, we started from the very beginning," he said, returning to the image of the infant he had once baptized in a garbage can, now an adult and a benefactor of the same Saskatchewan community. He reserved his deepest gratitude for the Ecumenical Patriarch. "The Great Benefactor, not only of myself but also of the Church of Canada, is His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, whose determination and vision led, in 1996, to the establishment of Canada as a separate Metropolis, distinct from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America," he said. "This historic decision greatly fostered the growth and flourishing of the Orthodox Church in Canada."

The archbishop returned again to the simplest of instructions, drawn from the example of Saint John the Evangelist, whose sermon, he recalled, ran to two words. "Love one another," he said. He spoke too of the years behind him and the road ahead, telling the hall he had tried his best and would continue to do so, and acknowledging that he was giving serious thought to retirement.

The musical portion of the evening followed, as the assembled clergy chanted "Axion Estin," the Apolytikion of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra, and the fimi of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Youth dance groups then took the floor in traditional costume, the dancers in red and dark blue skirts and embroidered white blouses moving in line across the centre of the hall while the guests looked on.

The evening closed with a reception of Lenten fare, served in observance of the Apostles' Fast.

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