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Greek lawmakers hear Montreal's case for schools, culture and youth





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Beneath a Greek flag and the blue banner of the European Union, in a wood-panelled committee room hung with deep red curtains and a painting of horsemen crossing a sunlit plain, the Hellenic Parliament turned its attention across the Atlantic on September 23 to one of the oldest organized Greek communities in North America. The Special Permanent Committee on Hellenism of the Diaspora devoted the first item of its evening sitting to the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal and its 120 years of service, placing on the parliamentary record the community's case for Greek-language schooling, faster consular services, public health coverage for Greeks abroad and stronger ties for a new generation, in a hearing that would also show how quickly an institutional presentation can lose its way.

Committee chair Filippos Fortomas, a New Democracy member of Parliament for the Cyclades, welcomed community president Basile Angelopoulos, anniversary committee chair Justine Frangouli and Father Nicholas Alexandris in the chamber, with executive director George Tsantrizos and several board members joining by videoconference from Montreal.

Angelopoulos read a memorandum describing the community as "one of the most historic and most active organizations of the Greek diaspora." He asked Athens for a stable, institutional posting of teachers from the Ministry of Education to staff the five branches of its trilingual Greek, French and English day schools, a permanent cultural partnership with the Ministry of Culture, free camps and visits to Greece for diaspora students, and more staff at the consulate in Montreal, where he said appointments for citizenship and passports are being given as much as a year out.

"The community has the infrastructure, the experience and the audience," he said. "It needs, however, the active participation of the state to strengthen Greece's cultural presence in Montreal."

Tsantrizos described an institution that oversees five private day schools, a high school, six churches, a cultural foundation and social services, with Greek instruction dating to its first school in 1909.

Frangouli recounted an anniversary year that saw March recognized as Greek Heritage Month in Ottawa, followed by recognitions in Laval, in Montreal and in the National Assembly of Quebec, along with three summer festivals. "It was a moment, one summer, when everyone was drinking to the health of the Hellenic community," she said.

The most moving testimony came from Angelopoulos, who left Nafpaktos at four months old. His father earned $25 a week, and every Saturday the family wrote to the grandparents in Greece, slipping $5 into the envelope. "If you keep us at a distance, we will stay at a distance," he told members. Alexandros Kazamias of Course of Freedom said he obtained his own Greek social security number only at 54, upon his election, despite travelling to Greece since he was five.

Fortomas pledged to forward the memorandum to the deputy foreign minister responsible for Greeks abroad and to the ministers of education and culture. "The Hellenic Parliament must listen to the diaspora, record its real needs and carry the voice of Greeks abroad to the state," he said in a statement on September 25.

The hearing began to unravel once Frangouli, after noting her anniversary mandate ends with the year, introduced herself as president of the Lyceum of Greek Women of Montreal, a separate organization, and used the community's time to promote its immigrant monument and its proposed Greek museum, closing that segment by placing "the Lyceum of Greek Women" at Parliament's disposal. She then turned to health coverage, contrasting diaspora Greeks with "all the migrants, the illegal ones," and urged members to pressure their parties "especially before the elections."

A running dispute over pension taxation with Paraschos Papadakis of Greek Solution followed, until Fortomas cut in: "Let's not have a dialogue." Father Alexandris from Toronto then ranged across postal voting, investment incentives and 3,000 diaspora cars with foreign plates.

Retaking the floor, Frangouli urged members "not to take the focus away from the 120 years of celebrations and the community's requests," then moved directly into European election turnout, credited New Democracy, accused the other parties at the table of "petty politics" over diaspora constituencies and recalled being elected a vice-president for the media at the Council of Hellenes Abroad in Thessaloniki. Fortomas thanked her for a "very assertive" intervention. "I agree with a great many of these points, but it is another conversation, and not one for today," he said, handing the floor back to Angelopoulos "to close as brilliantly as he began."

The transcript shows the anniversary chair speaking roughly 2,400 words across 16 interventions, against about 1,600 for the president in three. When Fortomas asked whether the president wished to close, it was Frangouli who answered, "Let the president close." On a day meant to showcase a 120-year-old institution, its elected president spent long stretches of his own hearing as a supporting speaker, and it fell to a Greek parliamentarian to steer the delegation back to its own agenda.

An official presentation before a national legislature carries a narrow and demanding brief: a single voice, led by the elected president, speaking for the institution named on the agenda and leaving members with a short list of requests they can carry to the ministries. The Montreal delegation delivered that list in its opening memorandum, then buried it beneath a separate association's museum project, a quarrel over pension taxation, partisan credit for the governing party and a history of the defunct Council of Hellenes Abroad. The committee draws its members from every party in the chamber, several of whom had just heard a community guest accuse their parties of "petty politics," and the community needs their goodwill for its requests to travel any further. Papadakis had already told the delegation he hoped "we do not stay only at the level of theory." The parliamentary record of September 23 now holds a clear account of what Montreal's Greeks need, set beside an equally clear account of a delegation that struggled to keep to its own agenda.

Frangouli also spoke the delegation's final words in the chamber, asking leave for the Montrealers to withdraw so the committee could attend to its internal business.


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Ιθυτενής Ευθυπορία του Έθνους



Χαράλαμπος ΚΑΤΣΙΒΑΡΔΑΣ
hariskatsivardas@yahoo.gr

“Η στιγμή επέστη που θα αγωνισθώμεν διά την ανεξαρτησίαν της Ελλάδος, την ακεραιότητα και την τιμήν της...

Μολονότι ετηρήσαμεν την πλέον αυστηράν ουδετερότητα και ίσην προς όλους, η Ιταλία μη αναγνωρίζουσα εις ημάς να ζήσωμεν ως ελεύθεροι Έλληνες, μου εζήτησε σήμερον την 3ην πρωινήν ώραν την παράδοσιν τμημάτων του Εθνικού εδάφους κατά την ιδίαν αυτής βούλησιν και ότι προς κατάληψιν αυτών η κίνησις των στρατευμάτων της θα ήρχιζε την 6ην πρωινήν.

Απήντησα εις τον Ιταλόν Πρεσβευτήν ότι θεωρώ και το αίτημα αυτό καθ’ εαυτό και τον τρόπον με τον οποίον γίνεται τούτο ως κήρυξιν πολέμου της Ιταλίας κατά της Ελλάδος.

Έλληνες Τώρα θα αποδείξωμεν εάν πράγματι είμεθα άξιοι των προγόνων μας και της ελευθερίας την οποίαν μας εξησφάλισαν οι προπάτορές μας.

Όλον το Έθνος θα εγερθή σύσσωμον. Αγωνισθήτε διά την Πατρίδα, τας γυναίκας, τα παιδιά μας και τας ιεράς μας παραδόσεις. Νυν υπέρ πάντων ο αγών.

28η ΟΚΤΩΒΡΙΟΥ 1940 - ΔΙΑΓΓΕΛΜΑ Ι. ΜΕΤΑΞΑ

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Το έπος του 1940 σηματοδοτεί την θυσιαστική αυταπάρνηση των προγόνων μας οι οποίοι γηθοσύνως προέταξαν τα στήθη τους, ενάντια εις τον μακράν ισχυρότερο εχθρό, με αίσθημα ευθύνης και δικαίου θέτοντας προεχόντως και κυρίως ως προτεραιότητα της προάσπιση των θεμελιωδών διαχρονικών Αρχών και Αξιών, του έθνους, της Θρησκείας και της Πατρίδος μας, δια ταύτα, ούτοι πολέμησαν γενναίως, αόκνως καταφέροντες καίρια πλήγματα στον εχθρό.

Ο ηρωισμός των Ελλήνων και η σιδηρά αντίστασή τους, προξένησε παγκόσμιο θαυμασμό και απετέλεσε παράδειγμα για πολλούς άλλους λαούς στο μέλλον.



Οι συμπατριώτες μας και οι πρόγονοί μας τότε, επέδειξαν τον δέοντα σεβασμό στα Ιερά και Όσια του Γένους μας, ιστάμενοι ανυπερθέτως το ύψος των περιστάσεων, δίδοντας σφοδρές μάχες με τον εχθρό, τιμώντας επαξίως του προγόνους του έθνους μας, οι οποίοι αγωνίσθηκαν εκ συστάσεως του παρόντος έθνους αλλά και προηγουμένως δια την διάσωση των πρωτοτοκίων της Φυλής μας, τα δομικά και συνεκτικά στοιχεία της πολιτισμικής μας ταυτότητας.

Τιμούμε με λοιπόν με αίσθημα ευθύνης αποτίοντας το ελάχιστο φόρο τιμής, μνημονεύοντες με απόλυτο σεβασμό τις ψυχές εκείνες οι οποίες επέπεσαν στο πεδίο των μαχών, ενδεχομένως ακρωτηριάσθηκαν ευρισκόμενοι εν ζωή και εν γένει μνημονεύουμε συν Θεώ, ζώντας και τεθνεώτας, με ανυπέρβλητη ευγνωμοσύνη προς το πρόσωπό τους.

Συγχρόνως κύπτουμε με σεβασμό το γόνυ προς τους ήρωες εκείνης της περιόδου, οι οποίοι, ουδόλως ήταν ριψάσπιδες, ψοφοδεείς ή κομμουνιστές, αλλά τουναντίον γνήσιοι πατριώτες, οι οποίοι προτίμησαν να έλθουν αδιαμαρτύρητα σε μετωπική σύγκρουση με τον εχθρό δια να περιφρουρήσουν την εθνική μας αξιοπρέπεια, την εθνική τιμή και υπόληψη η οποία εθίγη από την ιταμή πρόκληση της όμορης χώρας η οποία ανεπαίσχυντα κήρυξε την πόλεμο προς την Ιερά, ευφρόσυνη και αιματοβαμμένη πατρίδα μας.

Ὅμως το ρέον αίμα των θυσιασθέντων ηρώων μας συνΕλλήνων, εκ των οστέων τους, αποτέλεσε την δυναμική αυτή συνθήκη η οποία απώθησε τον επίβουλο εχθρό κατά των Ελληνικών εδαφών και κατόρθωσε η Ελλάς να ανακτήσει το κύρος της να καταστεί φόβητρο των Ιταλών και εν τέλει να αποσπάσει εις το αιώνιο βιβλίο της ιστορίας την πρώτη θέση δια την αγωνιστικότητα, το πάθος, την αφοσίωση, και την ακατάβλητο αγάπη δια την γλυκεία πατρίδα μας.

Η υπερεκχειλίζουσα αυτή ευαισθησία του τότε στρατού μας, μας προξενεί σήμερον κρουνό δακρύων, δια της αφοσίωση των ανθρώπων αυτών προς το έθνος συνέχοντας στην διαχρονία του τον ζώντα εις την καρδιές, στον νούν και της ψυχής μας, Ελληνισμό αρχής γενομένης από την Αρχαία Ελλάδα, διατρέχοντας εν συνεχεία προς το Βυζάντιο και τέμνοντας το ανεξάρτητο ελληνικό έθνος κράτος μας.

Μόνιμη επωδός εις την σημερινή επέτειο η σπουδαιότητα της ιστορικής μνήμης, κεφαλαιώδης έκφανση της ιστορικής συνείδησης, συστατικό στοιχείο αυτής, διότι ένας λαός, ένας έθνος δίχως ιστορική αυτεπίγνωση είναι καταδικασμένο νομοτελειακά να ζει ανελεύθερο, διότι ασυνείδητα θα διολισθαίνει προς τα ίδια σφάλματα του παρελθόντος εν παντί και πάντοτε.

Το διακύβευμα της αυτοθυσίας λοιπόν είναι το ακαταμάχητο αγαθό της Ελευθερίας και της Εθνική μας ανεξαρτησίας, το πολυτιμότερο αγαθό για έναν λαό να ζει ελεύθερος να αυτοδιατίθεται και να αυτοκαθορίζεται με γνώμονα τα παρελθόν το παρόν και το μέλλον, μόνον αν ένας λαός είναι πράγματι αδέσμευτος και ακηδεμόνευτος θα σκέπτεται, θα ενεργεί ελεύθερα και θα διεκδικεί την διαρκή του ελευθερία στο χρόνο, πράγμα το οποίο συνιστά ανυπερθέτως το διαρκές ζητούμενο και θα επιδιώκει αενάως με σφοδρότητα, ένταση και πάθος την εθνική του ευημερία, την πρόοδο την εξέλιξη και την συνεχή βελτίωση του ως έθνος και εν γένει λαός.

Ως εκ τούτου λοιπόν, δεύτερος θεμελιακός πυλώνας είναι το έθνος, εξ αυτού του λόγου και στην Συνταγματική έννομη τάξη του 1844, 1864, 1911, 1927, 1952, το έθνος θεωρείται ως πηγή όλων των εξουσιών, μετά ταύτα τροποποιήθηκε χάριν του θιασωτών του άξεστου Μαρξισμού και μετετράπη, ότι δήθεν ο λαός λογίζεται ως πηγή των εξουσιών, όμως ο συνταγματικός νομοθέτης μην μπορώντας να αποστεί από την πάγια Συνταγματική εθνική θέση όρισε, ταυτόχρονα ότι οι εξουσίες που έχουν την προέλευσή τους από τον λαό «υπάρχουν για τον λαό και το έθνος».

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Community assembly weighs surplus, schools and crumbling roofs



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Autumn sunshine still warmed the grounds of the Hellenic Community Centre of the South Shore in Saint-Hubert on the afternoon of Sunday, October 18, as members filed into the gymnasium, embraced old friends and took their seats in long rows of blue chairs beneath twin projection screens. An opening recitation of the Lord's Prayer, spoken in unison in Greek, set the tone for a gathering devoted to the stewardship of a 120-year-old institution. Over the three hours that followed, the annual general assembly of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal heard evidence of a dramatic financial recovery, ambitious plans for a $10-million endowment fund, frank talk about aging buildings and school enrolment, and repeated reminders that the Greek language remains the living heart of communal life in Montreal.

A live electronic dashboard projected above the floor confirmed that 122 members had been admitted and that the quorum of 100 had been comfortably reached, with 73 attendees from the South Shore, 31 from Montreal, 17 from Laval and one from the West Island. Members elected Mr. Nick Pagonis to chair the proceedings and Mrs. Eleni Panagiotarakou as secretary of the assembly. When the minutes of the June 28 special general assembly were read aloud entirely in Greek by Mrs Panagiotarakou, who had offered to proceed in English, the chair paused the agenda to mark the moment. "We are the only community in the Greek diaspora whose principal language at our official gatherings is still Greek," he told the hall. "Congratulations to the new generation that keeps our roots strong."

The central business of the day was financial, and the news was the best the community has received in years. John Charalambopoulos, a partner at Richter, the community's external auditing firm, walked members through audited statements for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2026. Revenues reached $18.8 million, up close to $1 million from the previous year, lifted by school fees, church income and a combined $1.8 million from dances, festivals and fundraising campaigns. With expenses held essentially flat at $19.3 million, the accounting deficit narrowed to $446,264 from $1.5 million a year earlier, and once non-cash amortization is set aside, the year produced an operating surplus of $644,626, compared with a shortfall of roughly $512,000 the year before. Members voted unanimously to approve the statements and to reappoint Richter for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027.

President Basile Angelopoulos, delivering his first annual report since his team took office, described a year of financial discipline in which an operating deficit of about $500,000 was converted into that surplus, an improvement he placed at more than $1.1 million in 12 months. He credited the finance committee led by Treasurer Eleni Chilakos, saying that today no community dollar is spent without its approval, and he pointed to a transparency policy that has placed every community contract on the organization's website for any member to read. "The element of trust is returning to our community," he said, citing calmer tones, fuller halls and festivals in Laval, Montreal and the South Shore that drew more than 14,000 people over a single three-day weekend, with young people making up an estimated 70 to 80 per cent of the crowds.

That restored credibility, Mr. Angelopoulos argued, now makes possible the project he considers decisive for the community's future, an endowment fund managed professionally and independently of any administration, present or future. Commitments of $1.3 million have been secured and $550,000 already sits in the bank, he reported, with a first round of donor meetings beginning the Wednesday after the assembly. "With the experience of this first year, I can tell you that if we do not reach $10 million, it will be a failure," he said, noting that a conservative five per cent return would deliver half a million dollars to churches, schools, cultural and social programs every year in perpetuity.

The president reserved his warmest words for the volunteers he affectionately calls his "thieves," asking the roughly 50 board and regional council members present to stand. "These are the people who "steal" hours from their work, from their families and from their personal interests for the benefit of the community and of Hellenism," he said. Volunteer tradespeople of Greek descent have renovated the community's eight derelict seniors' apartments, which now rent at market rates, repaved the entrance of the Wilderton offices on extended payment terms, and replaced a dangerous staircase in Laval. New leases and gifts added more, including about $70,000 a year from an Armenian secondary school renting the upper floor of the Hood building and a $250,000 donation for an elevator at Holy Cross church in Laval. Fundraising told a similar story. A rained-out golf tournament still cleared $100,000, the lottery netted $233,000, and the schools radiothon raised $450,000 against a $200,000 target, financing washroom renovations and new desks across five campuses. The next radiothon, set for December 5, carries a $1-million goal.

The afternoon was candid about what remains undone. The gymnasium roof above the assembly leaks so badly that a contractor warned it could fail, the lowest repair bid stands at $300,000, and 22 workers were restoring the Montreal community centre roof even as the president spoke. He placed the most urgent repairs at about $2 million within some $20 million of accumulated property needs, noted that debt service consumes $1 million a year, and announced town hall meetings to decide, as a community family, how the critical roofs will be financed before winter. Membership also drew scrutiny, with about 2,500 members on the rolls and annual dues revenue of $109,000, down from $173,000, prompting a proposal from the floor to double the $50 fee and a reflection from board member Dimitri Katsaounis that three youth events this year drew more than 1,200 participants under the age of 22.

The report of the internal audit committee, presented by Nick Mitsopoulos, commended the board for stabilizing the finances while urging permanent institutional safeguards, including the 24 formal executive committee meetings a year required by the bylaws, written hiring approvals, position-based email accounts to preserve institutional memory, and rigorous record-keeping for the administrations of the future. "If we continue to operate like this, at some point there will be a board, in five, 10 or 20 years, that is not as capable, and the same problems will return," Mr. Mitsopoulos cautioned. General Secretary Catherine Stephanou responded that 50 resolutions have been adopted in open board meetings since the administration took office, with every minute and resolution available to any member, and Mr. Angelopoulos pledged that each recommendation would be studied and implemented, observing that the committee's role "is to pull ears, not to toss flowers."

The schools, the community's largest undertaking and the anchor of its mission to pass the language to the next generation, dominated both the committee's report and the question period that followed. For the first time since the merger of the schools, the committee found, total enrolment at École Socrates-Démosthène has fallen below the threshold of 1,000 students, to 976 this year from 1,059 a year ago, a cumulative decline of 18.66 per cent since 2021, while the average primary class has thinned to 19.8 students against an operational break-even point of about 25. Asked from the floor why families were leaving, Mr. Mitsopoulos cited several factors from the committee's review, among them a year in which the Démosthène campus shared its principal with a Laval sister campus, a parents' petition on class sizes in Laval that gathered nearly 600 signatures, and public radio statements by the schools' most senior administrator describing the 50-year-old buildings as inadequate in the middle of recruitment season. "Who will enrol their child when the head of the schools says there is a problem there?" he asked, recommending systematic exit surveys of withdrawing parents and a formal, data-driven recruitment and retention plan brought back before the assembly.

Mr. Angelopoulos took the question head-on. The decline from the previous year, he said, stands at 7.8 per cent, and he is awaiting the province-wide statistics due at the end of October, noting that between 2021 and 2025 the Greek school's losses tracked the average for Quebec schools, private and public alike. He added that part of this year's drop reflects deliberate choices by the administration itself. Students whose families had gone three years without paying tuition were released from the rolls, and a small number of children whose behavioural needs had been assessed by outside professionals were redirected so their classmates could learn in calm, with independent specialists now evaluating incoming students before admission. A preliminary survey of departing parents, he reported, found that some had moved far from the campuses while others judged the tuition beyond their means, and demographics weigh on every school in the province, with households raising far fewer children than earlier generations.

He closed the school discussion on what he called the community's treasure. Fully 86 per cent of the children who graduate from Socrates-Démosthène choose which private secondary school they will attend, he said, offering his own granddaughter, who holds three offers for next year, as happy proof. The $100,000 marketing campaign approved at the June 28 special assembly, which had projected a school deficit of about $302,000 on 50 fewer pupils, is already showing results, with 266 families visiting the October 3 open house compared with 66 a year earlier and a dozen registrations already recorded on the South Shore. Education secretary Vassilios Christodoulopoulos told members that the causes of declining enrolment are shared by schools across the network and are being worked on steadily, crediting Christina Voga, Mrs. Papachristou and their team for the open house turnout and reporting that a formal statute governing the parent committees, developed in consultation with the parents themselves, is now officially in force.

The committee's presentation itself became a talking point, delivered for the first time as a 13-minute recording of two artificial-intelligence voices conversing through the loudspeakers, a format several members found difficult to absorb in one sitting. Mr. Christodoulopoulos reminded the hall that such tools "require strong human intervention, because they often create what we call hallucinations," pointing to a bylaw citation the recording had garbled. The gymnasium's acoustics, intermittent microphones and lights kept dimmed for the projectors added their own tests of patience across the long afternoon.

The assembly adjourned shortly after five o'clock on a motion by Andy Crillis, seconded by Ms. Stephanou, as the ladies of the South Shore offered homemade sweets at the door in support of the community.

Liturgy returns to Saint Paraskevi chapel in Elgin Quebec after years of silence





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Beneath the old trees of a farm in Elgin, a small white chapel with a stone porch and four turquoise columns sent Byzantine chant across a sunlit lawn, carried by a loudspeaker set in its tiny belfry. Worshippers seated on folding chairs followed the divine liturgy through the open doors as an icon draped in red and gold brocade and crowned with flowers waited at the head of the stone path. The service marked the return of worship to a sanctuary that had stood silent for years, and it drew together a promise kept to a departed Cretan couple, a caretaker of Armenian heritage who has watched over their chapel ever since, and families intent on handing faith, language and custom to the generations that follow.

The Chapel of Saint Paraskevi, known to Greek speakers as Agia Paraskevi, stands at 2458 chemin de la 1re Concession, near Huntingdon and close to the border with New York State. Evangelia and Dimitrios Saridakis built it on their farm, and the inscription above its entrance dates it to 1995. The couple are buried on the grounds. The liturgy celebrated on July 26, the feast day of the saint, was the first held there since their deaths roughly eight years ago.

The revival began with Pavlos Flikas, whose native village in Greece also honours the saint with a church of its own. For seven years, he said, the obstacle had been finding a priest to serve the chapel. He raised the matter with Laval city councillor Aglaia Revelakis, who keeps a country home in the area. "I told her, 'Aglaia, I have a problem. We cannot open Saint Paraskevi,'" Flikas recalled. "She told me, 'Tomorrow we will find a priest.' And her dream came true, and of course mine, because I wanted very much for us to open the church and worship as everyone has now come to do."

Revelakis said the gathering came together in a single week. The first priest she called was bound to memorial services that Sunday, and within minutes Father Antonios telephoned to say he would come. He had consecrated the chapel at its founding. "When I brought him here, he was stunned," Flikas said. "He told me, 'I opened this church.'"

Inside, icons cover nearly every wall beneath a brass chandelier ringed with candles. Father Antonios, in white vestments embroidered in blue, raised his arms before an iconostasis bearing the Virgin and Child and Christ Pantocrator, while chanter Athanasios Zoitakis, who has served at Holy Cross parish for 15 to 20 years, sang the responses from a lectern. "I see God every day," Zoitakis said. "Sleep is death, and when I rise in the morning, it is a resurrection."

Tradition holds that Saint Paraskevi was born in Rome in the second century to devout Christian parents and named for Friday, the day of the Crucifixion. Arrested under the Emperor Antoninus Pius, she was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil and pitch and emerged unharmed, and when the emperor was blinded leaning over the vessel, her prayers restored his sight. The church venerates her as protector of the eyes. "Let us call upon Saint Paraskevi to save us and to open not only the eyes of our body but the eyes of our soul, so that we may see the truth and walk the road of salvation," Father Antonios said after the service.

The chapel's survival owes much to a caretaker known to worshippers as Jack, who is of Armenian heritage and who promised Evangelia Saridakis that he would keep it open each year. "They were very, very good people," he said of the couple. "Here there is a piece of Greece, of Crete, in Canada." He spoke of visitors who credit the saint with answered prayers, among them a woman told by doctors she would never have children who is now a mother, and a man whose failing sight was restored.

Longtime visitors recalled the couple's hospitality. Zoe Batsis, a familiar figure in the community's Greek schools, said she had come for years while Evangelia was alive. "It was very moving to see her after the liturgy handing out food and welcoming everyone," she said. "I still get goosebumps." Evangelia Tsoumpanaki, who knew the family for half a century, was moved to tears. "They were full of philotimo, hospitable, the best," she said. "Among the finest of Crete."

In earlier years the feast drew a full panigyri, with buses arriving from Laval and parishes across the region, stalls serving sandwiches and souvlaki, and religious goods from a monastery. Flikas intends to restore that scale next year and plans to invite Abbess Thekla and her monastery to assist. Kostas Milonopoulos, a former president of the Hellenic Community of Laval and Revelakis's husband, pledged his support. "I told Pavlos that he needs help," he said. "Every year, if he wishes, I will come here with him to help however I can." Tina Flikas, who attended with her husband, voiced a broader concern. "Let us not leave our churches to become deserted," she said. "It would be a shame."

Continuity across generations ran through every conversation on the lawn. Revelakis urged young people to join their elders at liturgies and feast days as readily as they attend festivals. "When you marry and have children, the first thing you will do is start bringing your children to church so they take the path of God," she said. "We must teach our children to continue what our parents taught us, because we learned it from our parents," Milonopoulos said, adding that language, faith and customs must be preserved together. Batsis, born in Canada to an immigrant father, said her children speak beautiful Greek and her grandchildren are working at it. Her granddaughter Marie has begun lessons on her own and writes to her in Greek, and her grandson Christakis applied for and received Greek citizenship. Young Anastasia, among the smallest worshippers, offered her own testimony. "I go to Socrates school," she said. "I'm learning Greek."

After the service, Michalis Hatzichristos distributed the antidoron from the artoklasia offered in the saint's honour. Asked what Saint Paraskevi would tell young people today, he answered simply: "To forgive and to have love."

A closed bridge on the access route delayed many worshippers, who continued to arrive at the farm well after the liturgy had ended. Revelakis said the chapel would remain open to receive them.

The founding of Evangelismos, Canada's first Greek Orthodox church

From a summer liturgy to Saint Lawrence Boulevard: the founding of Montreal's first Greek church

Three decades after a borrowed hall first echoed with the Divine Liturgy, the Greeks of Montreal weathered an impostor in a cassock, welcomed their first priest and consecrated the Evangelismos church in 1910.



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Interior view of the Church of Evangelismos in 1910

On the first Sunday of August 1897, in a hall above a confectionery on one of Old Montreal's commercial streets, a few score Greeks stood shoulder to shoulder with Russian and Syrian worshippers and heard the Divine Liturgy for the first time in years, the responses rising in Arabic and Greek together beneath an icon of the Mother of God. The scene, recalled decades later by one of the city's pioneer Greeks, carried within it the longing that would shape the next thirteen years of community life, the wish for a priest of their own, a sanctuary of their own and a school for their children. This instalment of the series, continuing the account carried in the previous issue of Greek Times, follows that longing from the rented halls of Saint Catherine and Notre Dame streets through the organizing of the first Greek Orthodox community in Canada, the impostor whose conduct nearly undid it, and the raising, in 1910, of the Evangelismos church on Saint Lawrence Boulevard.

The memory of that summer liturgy survives in the testimony of Charalambos Koutsogiannopoulos, the community's first president, set down by the pioneer Ioannis Th. Fouriezos. As Koutsogiannopoulos told it, a Syrian friend came into the confectionery he kept with his brother Dimitrios one June afternoon and began to sing the Easter hymn Christos Anesti in Greek, in the middle of summer. The Syrian carried a letter from an Orthodox priest of his own people, who had written that he would come to Montreal on the first Sunday of August to serve the liturgy and commune all the Orthodox of the city, Greeks, Russians and Arabs alike. When Koutsogiannopoulos offered to rent a hall and to pay for its cleaning, the Syrian refused any fee. "I have not come, dear Harry, to rent out the hall of my house," he said, in the account rendered here from the Greek. "I have come to invite you so that we may all worship and commune together, the Orthodox, since some of us have not heard the Gospel these ten years."

Word spread within hours among the Greeks who pushed carts through the streets, and on the appointed Sunday the faithful crowded the upper room, kissed one another as on the night of Resurrection, and left asking when a priest and a church of their own might come.

The answer waited on numbers, and the numbers were climbing. The collapse of the Corinthian currant trade and the hardship that followed had turned a trickle of emigration into a flood, and between 1901 and 1910 some 173,513 people left Greece, against fewer than 17,000 in the decade before. By 1906, according to the educator and historian George D. Vlassis, roughly a thousand Greeks were living in Montreal. The official counts ran lower, Vlassis recording 66 people of Greek origin in the province of Quebec in the 1901 census and 772 a decade later, figures the historian Georgios Vasilakis judged too modest once undocumented arrivals and the Greeks' habit of going unregistered were taken into account. Koutsogiannopoulos remembered a smaller city than the one that stands today, its northern edge at Pine Avenue, its western reach ending at Guy Street where the road was still packed earth, and its commercial life running along Saint James, Notre Dame and Saint Lawrence.

Resolved to put down permanent roots, a handful of the faithful bought a set of sacred vessels in 1903, silver and gold, crosses and a chalice, in the steady hope that one day the community would have a priest to use them and a church to house them. They drew up a plan, petitioned the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece for a clergyman, and bound their efforts to the pattern that

Greek settlements across North America would make their own, the triptych of community, church and school. In 1906 they constituted the Koinotita, the first organized Greek community association in Canada, with Koutsogiannopoulos as president, Kostas Mitrakos as general secretary and Dimitrios Pergantis as treasurer, supported by a council of pioneers. Around the community gathered the first national associations, Patris, Anagenisis and the Panhellenic Union, formed to help newcomers find lodging and work, while a ladies' benevolent society tended to the needy, among them a party of 62 Greeks who arrived together in 1902 and were settled through the women's care.

It was into this season of hope that an unexpected figure stepped. The community's chroniclers record that as word spread of the first temporary administrative council, a Greek-born man who had once served as a "priest" in Lowell, Massachusetts, reached Montreal and began officiating in a rented hall on Notre Dame Street. In the language of the old account, "amid feelings of the deepest enthusiasm and exemplary concord," with the community's program advancing as hoped, "there suddenly appeared the man who had once served as a 'priest' in Lowell, Massachusetts, a Greek named Iakovos," who through what the writer called his hypocritical, Tartuffe-like conduct won the affection of the parish before he troubled its peace. Koutsogiannopoulos described the same arrival plainly. "Around the year 1906 we were perhaps a thousand, perhaps not, because many had started work in the villages," he recalled. "Then a Greek priest by the name of Iakovos came through. We kept him, rented a hall on Notre Dame Street, and were content with him. He had a fine voice and a good bearing. More than a year passed before it came to light who he was."

He proved to be an impostor who had never been ordained. "One day we lost the priest, and we lost the sacred vessels as well, the Holy Gospel among them," Koutsogiannopoulos testified, naming the very crosses and chalice the community had bought with its own money in 1903. The man had borrowed substantial sums from a number of Greeks and had fled to Liverpool, England, carrying the church's vessels, its Gospel and its chalice. The pioneers reported the theft to the nearest police station, and within a month word came back that the Liverpool police had met the fugitive at the dockside, placed him the same day aboard a ship bound for Canada, and ordered him handed to the Montreal authorities on arrival. He bowed his head when the men he had robbed entered the police office, and when asked to account for himself he answered only that the devil had put him up to what he had done. He returned the sacred vessels to the community's administration and was deported from Canada at the Greeks' request. The borrowed money was never recovered.

With the impostor gone, the community's purpose held firm. In October 1906 the Holy Synod of Greece sent Archimandrite Agathodoros Papageorgopoulos, who reached Montreal on Oct. 25 and became the first priest of the first Greek Orthodox community in Canada. The earliest liturgies were sung in rented halls on Notre Dame and Saint Catherine streets, the latter near the Anglican church of St. James, which served the young community until the end of 1910. The Greeks secured a lot for their own sanctuary in 1908 and received their provincial charter in May 1909, and Father Papageorgopoulos travelled the cities of Eastern Canada to gather the donations the work would require.

The building rose quickly once the ground was theirs. On May 5, 1910, the foundation stone was laid on the lot purchased at 753 Saint Lawrence Boulevard, and a little over seven months later, on Dec. 10, 1910, the church was consecrated as the Evangelismos tis Theotokou, the Annunciation of the Mother of God, with its first Divine Liturgy. It was the first Greek Orthodox church built in Canada. By the community's own reckoning the land and the building together cost about $25,000, a considerable outlay for so small a colony, and the furnishing and adornment of the interior were completed gradually from the offerings of the faithful. The photograph that accompanies the original feature shows that interior as it stood in 1910, its sanctuary newly appointed, a record of what a people of modest means had built within a few years of organizing.

For the Greeks of Montreal the Evangelismos became the centre of religious and social life, the place where envoys of the Greek government and, during the war years that followed, members of the Greek royal family would stand at the door after the liturgy and greet the whole congregation by hand.

The community's ambitions reached at once from the altar to the classroom. In the same year the church opened, the Greeks founded the Platon school, the first Greek school in Canada and in all of North America, housed at the start within the new church building on Saint Lawrence Boulevard between Prince Arthur and Milton streets. It began with about 30 pupils across four grades, taught in Greek, French and English and following the program of the city's public schools, with John Didaskalou, of the province of Corinthia, remembered as its first teacher of Greek. This chapter of the series draws on the community's own chroniclers, George D. Vlassis and Georgios Vasilakis, and on the journalistic references of Takis Petritis. In 1911 the community bought a three-storey house at 753 Clark Street, directly behind the church, and moved the school into its own quarters.

The next issue of Greek Times takes up the Platon school, its growth and its first teachers.

Greek-Canadian executive helps steer Montreal's push into mining artificial intelligence



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Inside the glass-walled offices of KPI Digital in the Technoparc of Ville Saint-Laurent, staff set aside their morning work on October 14 and gathered among the bookshelves, keepsakes and family photographs of their workplace as Emmanuella Lambropoulos, Member of Parliament for Saint-Laurent, read a federal announcement to the assembled team. The quiet attention in the room reflected the scale of what was at stake, from Canada's national ambitions in artificial intelligence to the rise of a Montreal firm whose software now guides some of the largest mining operations in the world, and to the enduring question of what the technology will mean for workers and businesses.

Lambropoulos used the visit to highlight repayable contributions totalling $300,000 awarded to KPI Digital and AI4Eyes under the Regional Artificial Intelligence Initiative, delivered by Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions. KPI Digital, a consulting firm with 25 years of expertise in data, analytics and artificial intelligence, receives $200,000 to carry out an international marketing strategy for its KPI Mining division, which has developed software that helps mining companies improve their operational performance. AI4Eyes, which has designed a platform for ocular diagnosis and treatment recommendations, receives $100,000 to expand its sales on export markets.

"Whether it be to improve the performance of mining operations or to place AI at the service of visual health, the projects funded today are a testament to the talent, expertise and entrepreneurial spirit that power our city," Lambropoulos said.

The announcement came one day after the Honourable Evan Solomon, Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation, confirmed a $500-million increase over five years for the initiative, bringing its total funding to $700 million nationwide. "The Regional Artificial Intelligence Initiative is AI for All in action, accelerating responsible AI adoption, helping Canadian innovators bring their technologies to market and scale globally, and strengthening the regional ecosystems that turn innovation into economic growth," Solomon said.

For the Greek-Canadian community, the morning carried a double measure of pride. The announcement was delivered by Lambropoulos, herself a daughter of the community, and inside the firm a Greek-Canadian executive is helping guide the company's expansion into one of the world's most demanding industries. Dimitra Kostarides, vice-president of people and culture at KPI Digital, spoke to The Montreal Greek Times in Greek about how the firm applies the technology and what the new support will make possible. "Here at KPI Mining and KPI Digital we certainly use artificial intelligence to help our clients, and also in our own project at KPI Mining, so that we can do things more properly," she said. "I know many people worry that it will change our way of life and change businesses as well. Here we protect our staff and we protect our clients."

She described a philosophy that places people at the centre of the technology. "Working smarter, not harder, is a good phrase," she said. "It helps us operate at a pace we could never have imagined. But we need people to run it in an intelligent and beautiful way."

Kostarides said KPI Mining, launched five years ago, has grown from two employees to 25, building through a collaboration with McGill University a software product now sold to some of the largest mining companies in the world, with partners in 10 countries. "We have created jobs precisely where people worried that jobs would be lost," she said. "The government has been a very good partner for us. It supported us financially, and today we also spoke with Ms. Lambropoulos about further opportunities. Now that the government has announced all these significant investments, we will be able once again to move forward and to help both our firm and our clients."

The funding for the two Saint-Laurent projects was first announced on July 15, 2026, in Trois-Rivières. The Regional Artificial Intelligence Initiative is being implemented by Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions in Quebec until March 31, 2031.



One family's festival keeps a Cretan vow in Park Extension





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The smallest festival of the Greek summer may be the most personal one. In the yard of the Evangelismos tis Theotokou church in Park Extension, behind the tents and the folding tables, an 80-year-old Cretan stood over steaming cauldrons for two days, boiling goat and stirring wedding pilaf exactly as he learned in his village, while his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren served the plates. The festival of Agios Eftychios is organized by a single family, it runs on a promise to a saint, and every dollar it raises is given away.

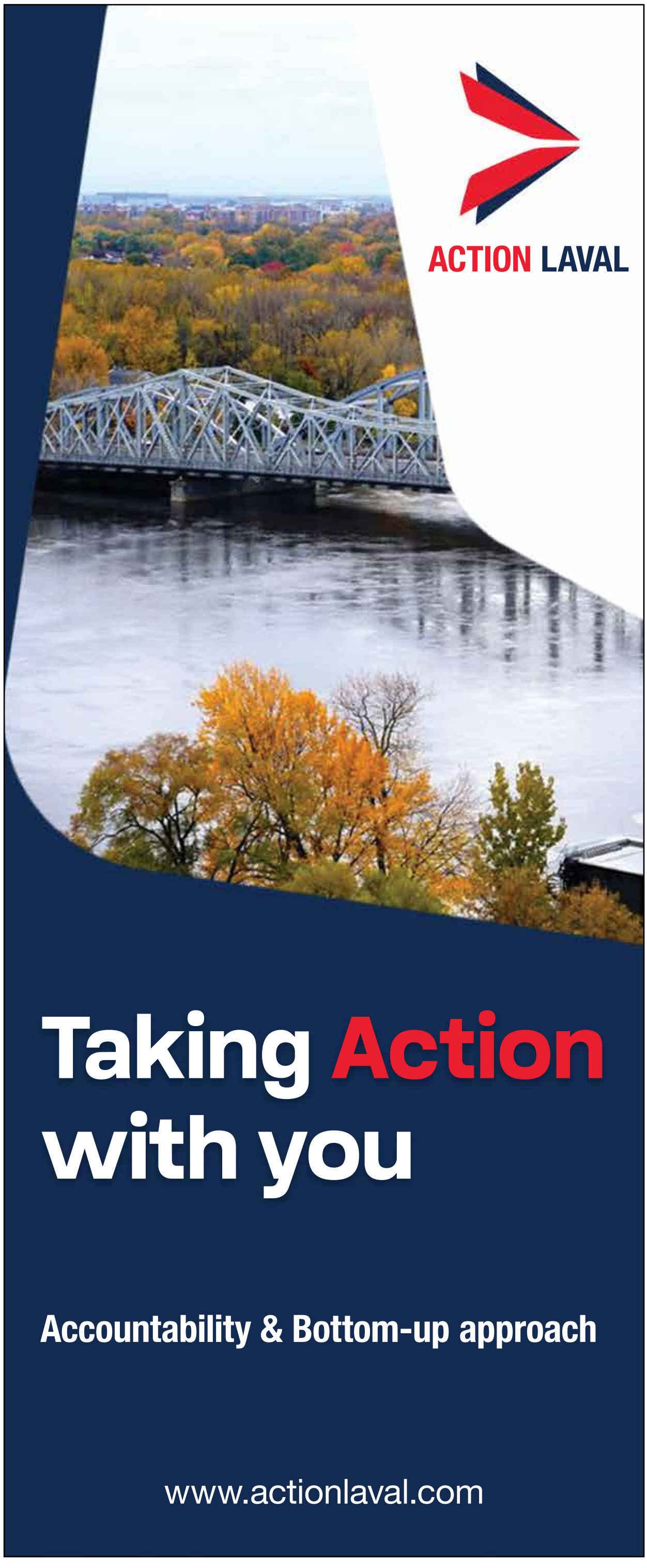
The panigiri, held Saturday, August 22 and Sunday, August 23 at 777 Saint-Roch Street, one week after the Dekapentavgousto, is the work of Eftychios Makrymanolakis, who traces his roots to the village of Prines in Selino, Chania. For more than a decade he has marked the feast of his patron saint with a menu found nowhere else on the Montreal festival circuit: vrasto, the boiled goat of Crete, the gamopilafo wedding pilaf simmered in its broth, and tsigariasto, alongside the familiar souvlakia and sausages, with music. "The goat needs three hours to boil, then straining, scalding, watching, measuring. It is a long process," he said, in an interview with The Montreal Greek Times at the festival. "At the beginning it was difficult, but little by little people came to love it. They wait all year for this day to eat the pilafi."

The festival began as an offering for the small church of Agios Eftychios near his village in Chania. Today the proceeds stay in Montreal. "We give the money here, for charitable causes, for the hospitals and above all for our schools," Makrymanolakis said. "Hellenism needs this, so that we keep our language, our tradition, our faith and our genos from dissolving here in the melting pot of Canada."

The family is the whole workforce, by design. Nine children, among them five daughters, work the tables and the grills, and a long line of grandchildren and great-grandchildren named Eftychis and Eftychia take their turn serving. "We do this every year for the grace of Agios Eftychios, and we want to say a warm thank you from our whole family to everyone who comes and supports us," said his daughter Toula. Apostolis Makrymanolakis, the youngest son, framed the purpose a generation ahead: "We send the money to the church schools here, for the small children, so they do not forget the language, the history and the religion. They need to know where they come from."

The weather gave with one hand and took with the other. Saturday was a fair festival day, and on Sunday heavy rain poured on Park Extension, a pattern Makrymanolakis lamented in a written account of the festival dated August 25, noting that storms have cost the effort a day in recent years. The ledger he published with it is the measure of the family's work: $5,000 to the community's Greek schools, $500 each to the churches of the Evangelismos, the Koimisis, Saint Anne and Holy Wisdom, $500 to Magic Mission, $500 to the Shriners hospital and $1,000 to a Greek student in need, a total of $9,000 given away.

He intends to keep the vow for as long as he stands at the cauldrons. "As long as I live I will do this. There is no way I will stop," he said. "I believe God and Agios Eftychios are beside me." The festival closed the parikia's summer season, and the community calendar turned next to the Montreal Greek Film Festival in October.



Festival by the rapids anchors a growing Greek parish in LaSalle





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By the water's edge at Parc des Rapides, under white tents pitched among the trees, the sounds of a Greek village square carried across LaSalle for three days in mid-July. Dancers in embroidered vests and traditional costume circled the open square hand in hand, smoke rose from long charcoal grills lined with skewers, and families filled rows of tables on the grass from Friday evening until Sunday night. Behind the music and the souvlaki stood the story that gave the weekend its weight, one that continues to unfold this autumn: a small parish growing steadily younger, a volunteer corps that labours for months, and a summer festival that has become one of the surest expressions of Hellenic identity in the southwest of the island of Montreal.

The annual festival of the Saint Dionysios of Aegina parish, held July 10 to 12 with free admission, falls on the second weekend of July each year and exists to sustain the church itself. "Every dollar we collect from this festival comes directly to the church, and we have great need. We are a small church here on the edge of Montreal, in LaSalle," said Father Spyridon, the parish priest, speaking in Greek for the interview. Five years into his ministry there, he described a congregation in visible renewal. Services, sermons and the liturgy are offered in both Greek and English, and the response has followed. "The children have answered with great zeal and love. We can say that about 50 per cent of the congregation now is young people under 40, and families," he said. The parish also runs a youth group on Monday evenings along with catechism and Bible study classes during the week.

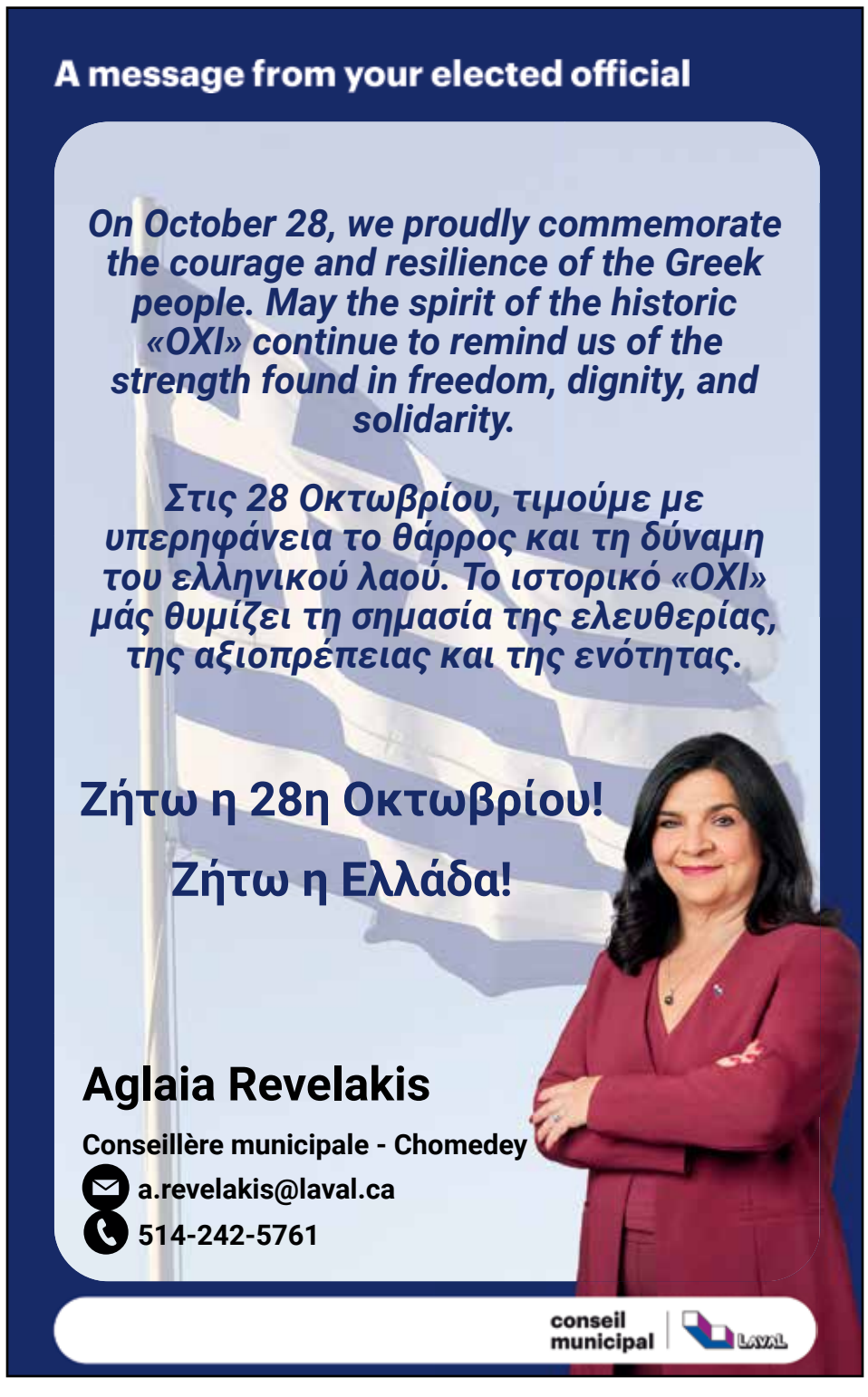
Longtime parishioners measure the change against decades. "I have been close to this church for 40 years. I have never seen so many children," said Kostas, who served 15 years as parish president and now sits as vice-president. At the grills, where volunteers had passed the 600 souvlaki mark by Saturday, the marinade remains a secret entrusted to a single parishioner who prepares it behind a locked door. The tzatziki, salads and lemon and oil dressing are all made on site by volunteers, among them a griller of Zakynthian origin who has stood at the spits for 19 years.

Parish president Dimitri Giannenas, in his fifth year leading the council, said preparations begin six months ahead, with work every month from January. Asked for the souvlaki recipe, he named a different ingredient. "The recipe is love. The volunteers who work so hard, for months, and I mean months, to prepare it," he said. "I am glad to help my community. I am doing something bigger than myself." He said the park setting, with its lawns and the river in front, draws Greeks from across the Montreal region along with friends of Italian, English and French background who come for the pastries, the souvlaki and the dancing.

The weekend also drew figures from the wider diaspora. "We must always support Hellenism wherever we find ourselves," said Halatsis, a former president of the Hellenic Congress of Canada, who congratulated the president and council on the organization. Father Andreas, who served the parish for many years, returned among the faithful, and Kyriakos Polymenakos, president of the regional council of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, attended as a guest, noting a summer circuit that continued with the community's own festivals in Laval and Park Extension in August.

The next edition at Parc des Rapides will mark the festival's 45th year. Giannenas said the council begins organizing it in October.





Hellenic Flame festival fills Saint-Roch Street for the Dekapentavgousto



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photo: Harry Barba

For two August evenings, Saint-Roch Street belonged to the parikia again. Traffic gave way to long rows of banquet tables running down the middle of the road, the smoke of the grills drifted past the sign of the Afroditi bakery, and under the slender spire of the Evangelismos tis Theotokou church, three generations danced on the asphalt where Greek Montreal first put down roots. The festival carried more than nostalgia for the old neighbourhood. It bound a street party to one of the holiest days of Orthodoxy, showcased a volunteer corps renewed by the young, and closed the summer season of a community marking 120 years.

Officially named La Flamme Hellénique, the Hellenic Flame, the festival of the Regional Council of Montreal of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal was held August 14 and 15 in the forecourt of the church at 777 Saint-Roch Street and along the street itself. It is the community's panigiri of the Panagia, timed to the Dekapentavgousto, the August 15 feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos. On the eve of the feast, vespers and the procession of the icon were held at the church, and the celebration continued the next day through the final night of the community's summer festival calendar.

"Today we celebrate one of the most important feasts of Orthodoxy, the Dormition of the Theotokos," said Sotirios Antypas, president of the Hellenic Congress of Quebec, in an interview with The Montreal Greek Times at the festival. "May all who celebrate have blessed years, and may we have the health, the strength and the blessing of our Panagia."

The work behind the two days fell to roughly 40 volunteers, from the grillers and the kitchen crews to the young members of the Greek Roots group who moved through the crowd in their blue shirts. "Organizing a festival is exhausting, but at the same time it offers great satisfaction," said Kyriakos Polymenakos, president of the regional council. "There is the preparation, the work, and then the joy of seeing families and friends meet, laugh, dance and eat together."

The roll call of that work ran deep. The community singled out the Greek Roots youth under Giorgos Andreopoulos, the crews at the grills and in the kitchen, the volunteers who staffed the cash desks through both days, the Filoptochos ladies' auxiliary and the youth of the church, along with members of the Regional Council of Montreal and a large contingent from the Regional Council of the South Shore who crossed the river to stand beside the organizers. Special recognition went to George Tsantrizos, Kyriakos Polymenakos and Christos Petsinis, who worked endless hours in the preparation and the running of the festival.

Speaking with this newspaper earlier in the summer, Polymenakos explained why the festival stays rooted to the church block rather than moving to a larger site such as Jarry Park, for which permits were sought without success. "We hold the traditional festival to honour our churches, because everyone who comes to the panigiri also goes into the church and lights a candle," he said, noting that the Filoptochos sells loukoumades and the church youth run their own stands. "It is not only what the festival itself raises. Many others connected to it are helped as well."

For Basile Angelopoulos, president of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, the evening confirmed a year of growing momentum. "Once again we are breaking records. Look how much of the world is here tonight, and above all, look how many young people are embracing their culture," he said. "The volunteers are the ones who, in essence, built this community. Those of us who enjoy a festival like this rarely grasp how much work and organization it demands. Enormous sacrifices are made, and I thank everyone who contributed to this great success."

George Tsantrizos, executive director of the community, saw in the crowded street a statement about the place of Hellenism in the city. "Once again this year, our annual festival gathered the Hellenism of Montreal here in Park Extension," he said. "It is an evening that shows one more time how much Hellenism means here in Montreal, and above all here in Park Extension. We are very proud that we were able to organize this festival again this year, to celebrate and to feast on this great day of the Panagia."

Elected officials from all three levels of government walked the street. Marjorie Michel, member of Parliament for Papineau, the riding that includes the neighbourhood, attended the festival for the first time and promised to come dressed for the occasion next year. Michelle Setlakwe, member of the National Assembly for Mont-Royal-Outremont, brought greetings on behalf of the Quebec government and praised a community "so well established" in Montreal and so open to the rest of the city. City councillor Effie Giannou, born in Greece, came with council colleagues from across Montreal, and Mary Deros, who served Parc-Extension as city councillor for 27 years, received the welcome of a woman of the house.

The festival has also become a homecoming. Though much of the community long ago dispersed toward Laval, the South Shore and the suburbs, the feast of the Panagia pulls its children back to the old quarter each August. Sona Lakhoyan Olivier, member of the National Assembly for Chomedey, grew up in the neighbourhood, where her brother played hockey at the Howie Morenz arena and her summers were spent in Jarry Park. "This is where I was born," she said. "When I come here, I come home."

Eleni Bakopanos, the former member of Parliament who has attended the festival since 1992, turned her thanks to the people behind the tables. "Nothing happens without the volunteers, with the hours they put in and the heat they endure," she said. "May the Panagia bring us strength and health, because that is what matters most, and may we all be well again next year."

The grace of the Panagia was the night's refrain, offered from the stage by Deros to "all of Hellenism, everywhere in the world." The Hellenic Flame closed on the night of August 15 as the last festival of the community's summer season.

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To inform our newsroom in advance, send e-mail to: **editor@greektimes.ca**

Record crowds and hard lessons at the Laval summer festival



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photo: HCGM

On the grounds of the Holy Cross church on Chemin du Souvenir, the line at the gate stretched down the sidewalk long before the first clarinet taxim of the evening, and inside, under the tents, the voice of Efi Thodi carried over thousands of heads while lamb and whole pigs turned on the spits behind the grills. For three days in early July, in the year the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal marks 120 years since its founding, the festival of Laval gave the parikia one of the largest Greek gatherings the region has seen. The record attendance, the generosity of the sponsors and the striking presence of the young generation told one part of the story. The strain that success placed on safety planning and crowd behaviour, examined later in this report, told the rest.

A record summer for the community

The summer festival of the Regional Council of Laval of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal ran from Friday, July 3 to Sunday, July 5 at the Holy Cross church, 4865 Chemin du Souvenir. Admission was five dollars, children 12 and under entered free, and the gates stayed open until 11 p.m. each night. After days of punishing heat and humidity, the weather broke in time for the weekend, and the crowds followed. Organizers counted roughly 2,000 admissions on Friday evening, 4,500 adult tickets on Saturday and 3,000 on Sunday, for an estimated 12,000 visitors over the three days once free children's admissions are included, according to figures cited by Kyriakos Polymenakos, president of the community's Montreal regional council. The community's own bulletin called it a record for the institution.

"The first night was something incredible. We had never seen such a Friday at a festival," said Katherine Hulis, president of the Laval regional council, speaking on the second evening. "We are truly blessed. The weather over these three days has been wonderful, and we are so grateful to everyone."

Behind the tills and the grills stood an economy of pure donation. The Georges butcher shop on Liège Street in Park Extension gave 10,000 souvlakia, enough for all three days. The roast pigs turned for six hours over the coals, lamb cooked on the spit, and the breads, the Canada Day cake and the sweets came from the Ambrosia bakery of Laval. Grillers stood over the fire through afternoons when the heat off the coals matched the heat of the sun. "We grill and we get grilled," one of them laughed, estimating between 3,000 and 4,000 souvlakia served by Saturday evening. Aglaia Revelakis, city councillor for Chomedey for 13 years and formerly secretary general of the community, put the human arithmetic plainly: "A festival cannot be carried by five or six people. Look around and everyone you see is a volunteer, more than 300 of them. Without volunteers there are no festivals."

Efi Thodi, three nights on stage

The artistic heart of the weekend came from Greece. Efi Thodi, among the most recognizable voices of the Greek dimotiko tragoudi, performed all three nights with clarinetist Stelios Kalompatsios and bandleader Giannis Fousteris, joined by local musicians and by the dance troupes of the parikia. On the Friday she sang for two and a half hours without a break.

In an interview with The Montreal Greek Times during the festival, Thodi recalled that her career abroad began in this city. "My first concert outside Greece was here in Laval. That was my first contact with the diaspora," she said, before listing the stations of four decades on the road: the United States, Germany, Australia, England, France. Asked what she feels when diaspora audiences weep and dance in front of her, she answered without ornament. "I feel Greek, I am Greek, and I love Greece and the Greeks. I am happy because I can offer people this joy. Singing is my soul. I live to sing." Her message at the end of the conversation was addressed to the whole parikia: "I thank you from my heart, I love you, and I will always be close to you."

120 years and a Canada Day cake

The Saturday of the festival doubled as a delayed Canada Day celebration, with the cutting of the traditional cake before elected officials from every level of government and the thousands on the grounds. "We are celebrating 120 years of the community and, of course, Canada Day," said Paris Petrou, head of public relations for the community, crediting the regional council and the volunteers for months of work.

Sona Lakhoyan Olivier, member of the National Assembly for Chomedey back in July, moved through the crowd with evident enjoyment. "I love this festival because it is so much fun. There is food, and everyone is here," she said, noting how many of her constituents of all backgrounds attend. "Every reason to gather is a good reason."

For Basile Angelopoulos, president of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, the view from the stage was the answer to every question about the community's future. "When Hellenism celebrates, there are no limits. Everywhere I look I see a sea of people," he said. He reserved his strongest words for the Friday night crowd, which he estimated was 90 per cent youth. "That let me sleep easily. The future awaits us, and our future is bright."

Where the planning fell short

Honest reporting requires the other side of the ledger, because the same success exposed serious gaps in safety planning. By this newspaper's direct observation, the main tents were filled well beyond comfortable movement, with chairs packed so tightly that passing between rows was a struggle, and with none of the measures that fire prevention standards and the Régie du bâtiment du Québec require at such capacities, such as an alarm and public address system and wide, clear aisles. The fenced site operated with a single gate serving as both entrance and exit, where three exits would be expected, and with no counting of entries and exits, the exact number of people inside at any moment was unknown. Estimates on the grounds put the crowd at roughly double the permitted capacity.

The Laval police intervened on the busiest night and presented organizers with a stark choice: shut the festival down, or continue under the condition that anyone who stepped outside would be barred from returning. The condition was never announced to the public, and the consequences multiplied at the gate. Families were separated. The minor son of a community board member stepped out and could not rejoin his family. Revelakis herself escorted an elderly woman to a waiting car and was refused re-entry. The producer of the community's television coverage,and publisher of this newspaper Dimitri Papadopoulos whose crew and broadcast equipment remained inside, was blocked on returning from the sidewalk and in the end negotiated a security escort simply to pack up his cameras and leave.

A second failure was the absence of crowd control by security at the stage. When the folklore troupes danced, spectators walked onto the floor to film them. When Thodi appeared on a riser barely half a metre high, some 30 people pressed against it with phones raised, children on shoulders, blocking the view of thousands of seated guests and pushing dancers toward the tables and tent cables.



Research gives the phenomenon little justification. Psychologist Linda Henkel of Fairfield University has documented a photo-taking impairment effect, in which reaching for the camera weakens the memory of the event itself, and later studies found that filming in order to share diminishes the filmer's own enjoyment. A 2024 industry survey found a majority of young concertgoers now film rather than simply watch. Performers and festivals have begun to respond, with artists such as Jack White and Bob Dylan sealing phones in locked pouches at the door and other events marking designated filming zones away from sightlines. Barriers, a raised stage and a few stewards would have spared both the audience and the performers in Laval.

The festival closed its final night on Sunday, July 5 at 11 p.m., and the community's summer calendar continued with the festival of Park Extension on August 15 and 16.

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