

Hoops for Hope: AHEPA Prepares for Second "Tournament that Saves Lives"

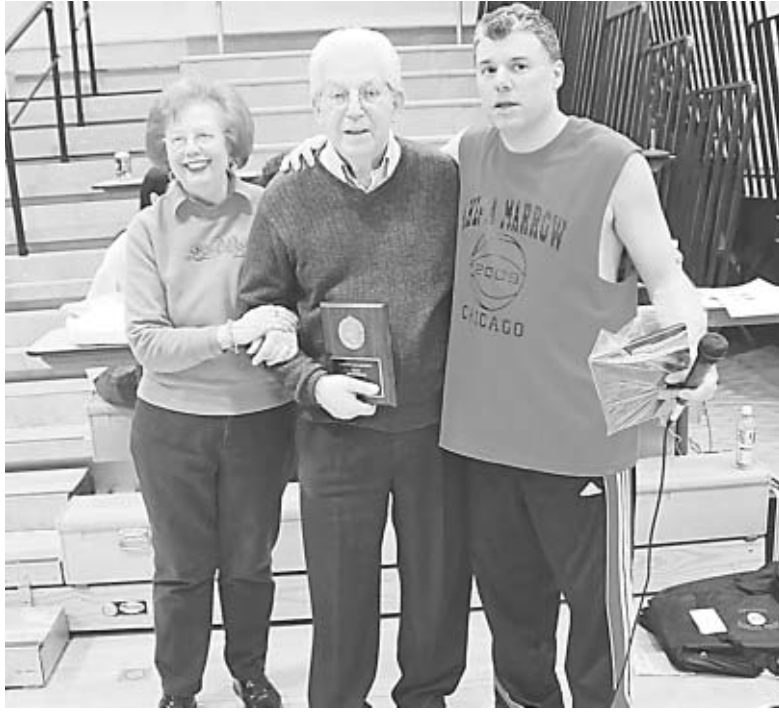
By Eleni Kostopoulos

The National Herald Staff Writer

NEW YORK – Anyone who enjoys playing or watching sports knows the rush that accompanies a competitive spirit, the satisfaction that arises from a victory. But in late winter, a basketball tournament in Chicago will serve as more than a mere competition - it will offer the opportunity to help save lives. From March 10 – 14, the AHEPA National Invitational Basketball Tournament will host its second annual AHEPA Marrow Donor Registry.

Sophia Venetos, a tournament organizer, told The National Herald that the contestants will be Eastern Orthodox Christian teams, of various nationalities and from all over the United States and Canada who will compete for an excellent cause.

"The AHEPA Marrow Donor Registry's mission is to add persons of Mediterranean descent into our database of prospective donors; the best chance for a leukemia patient is from a family member, secondly from relatives, and then from their ethnic group," said Venetos. "Our efforts have grown the registry from 6,000 donors to almost 16,000. Because of these efforts we can proudly say that four of our donors have successfully donated their marrow, and we are directly responsible in helping save these lives. If we can save just one life, everything we have done is worth it. Our tournament motto is 'A Tournament That Saves Lives.' The tournament's goals are to promote education, to raise awareness of the marrow transplant process, to recruit eligible donors and to serve



Chairman John Venetos (right) honoring George Lekas at the 2009 AHEPA National Invitational Basketball Tournament in Chicago.

as a national fundraising event."

Venetos' father, Dr. John Venetos, took over the registry in March 2006 when his best friend and coach Steve Pappas was suffering from recurrent Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma and was in dire need of a transplant.

"We took over the registry and began a crusade to fight the fight of finding a match for Steve," said Venetos. "Unfortunately, Steve passed away, and in his memory we continue to fight the fight for all those that need a match. In 2008, we did over 100 drives for a young

woman from South Bend, Indiana, and we were successful in finding a match for her. She actually was an inspiration to all by being at the tournament last year and volunteering. We also spent all last year trying to find a match for a young married Filipino man with three young girls. Unfortunately, he just passed away before Christmas."

The AHEPA tournament is organized to help educate the public on the importance of joining the registry, so that they can possibly be a match and save a life. According to Venetos, they encourage players,

coaches and spectators to join the registry during the tournament.

"We are willing to sponsor out-of-town teams in order to encourage them to participate, and attend, and also hopefully join the registry," she said. Last year, we had five divisions, including the Men's Division, which had 32 teams. This year we have seven divisions, and are expecting 40 Men's teams, and overall over 80-100 teams, hopefully making this one of the largest Pan-Orthodox tournaments in North America. The money that we raise during the tournament helps cover the cost of testing individuals who join the registry. We can now also have individuals join the registry online by going to our web site at www.ahepamarrow.org.

"We are presently doing drives to help find a match for George, a Greek man from Washington D.C., who is 65 years old and has Leukemia. He is in dire need of a transplant, but so far, no match has been found for him. We also recently conducted a drive at the Greek embassy for him."

The need for more sponsors, more donations, more teams, and more individuals to join continues to be urgent. Several divisions will be set up according to age: Senior Men's (45+), Women's, Boys High School, Boys 15 and Under, Grammar School and Biddy. A three-point shooting contest will also be held, in which the proceeds are donated to a worthwhile Hellenic cause. Venetos said that last year, the funds were donated to Niko Bezanis, a boy from Palos Hills who had a diving accident that left him a paraplegic.

"We will also begin a Scholarship Fund in the coming years, for any Greek individual or a player in our tournament," said Venetos. "Last year, [more than] 60 teams participated and almost 100 new donors joined the registry. Because of how great of a response we received, we decided to expand the tournament this year and add two new divisions: Men's Senior (over 45 years old) and Biddy (4th, 5th and 6th graders). We are expecting to have between 80-100 teams participating this year."

To sign up or find out more

about the AHEPA Marrow Donor Registry and Tournament, visit www.ahepamarrow.org and go to the tournament tab.

There you can find information on how to participate and the team packet, sponsorship information, recruitment of volunteer info, travel (airlines) info and hotel info. You can also call

Chairman Dr. John Venetos at his home: (847) 679-1113 or office: (773) 989-6262.

Contact Eleni at EleniK@thenationalherald.com.



Last year's first place winners in the young men's division of the AHEPA tournament. They won a trophy and perhaps helped save a life

N.Y. Federation of Hellenic Societies Extends Thanks to Parade Supporter N. Bouras

By Stavros Marmarinos

Special to The National Herald

NEW YORK - Nicholas Bouras, well known philanthropist and steel manufacturing baron, knows his priorities. An Archon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for over 30 years who has donated millions of dollars to the Church and the Greek American community, Mr. Bouras quietly asked all his guests - a delegation from the Federation of Hellenic Societies of Greater New York - to join in prayer before cutting the traditional New Year's vasilopita cake at his central corporate offices in Summit, N.J. on Wednesday, January 13. Everyone stood, with the exception of the elderly Mr. Bouras, who, although unable to stand, crossed himself with due reverence from his seat, while his financial adviser William Crane, led the prayer.

The delegation, made up of FHSGNY board members, made the trip to Summit to personally thank Mr. Bouras for his continued support. Mr. Bouras belongs to a select group of donors, who have each contributed the handsome sum of \$30,000 annually for the past three years to cover the expenses of providing live television coverage of New York's Greek Independence Day Parade on Fifth Avenue. FHSGNY President Demetrius Kalamaras offered Mr. Bouras a portrait depicting a scene from the Greek Parade as a token of the Federation's appreciation for his unwavering support.

"The Greek Parade on Fifth Avenue is a wonderful thing, and I hope that it will continue for many years to come," Mr. Bouras told The National Herald.

During his meeting with the Federation board members, Mr. Bouras took the time to ask each of them their name and place of origin in Greece. Evidently pleased by their visit, Mr. Bouras thanked the delegation for their gifts and wished them many blessings for the new year.

A friendly conversation followed between Mr. Kalamaras and Mr. Bouras, where the former filled him in on the particulars behind organizing and carrying out America's largest Greek Independence Day Parade. "We spoke for a short while. Due to the state of his health, he was not able to speak loud enough to address us all at once," Mr. Kalamaras noted.

But he expressed the excitement he feels about the Greek Parade, calling it a wonderful thing. He stressed to me how proud he was of Greeks in this country and his own Greek heritage, and he encouraged us to continue on our mission with courage. He also urged us to do whatever we can on our part for the good of Hellenism," Mr. Kalamaras added.

Giving Mr. Bouras a run down of the ins and outs of the FHSGNY - the organizing body of the Greek Parade in NY - Mr. Kalamaras touched on plans to add another floor to the Stathakion Center in Astoria, where the Federation is located, and to better utilize the building's space. He also discussed a proposal to set up a museum dedicated to Greek immigrants in the Stathakion Center, featuring historic archives that will tell the story of Greek immigrants and their lives in their vast new home in the United States.

"He listened attentively to me, being that his parents and relatives



Nicholas Bouras has been instrumental in annual parade efforts.

also passed through Ellis Island when they first arrived in the U.S.," Mr. Kalamaras said. "In fact, that is where they shortened their last name, which was originally Bourantonis."

Nicholas J. Bouras was born in Pontiac, Michigan to parents who hailed from Arcadia in the Peloponnese. In 1928, his father owned four automobiles for his enterprise. In the years that followed, the family business was nearly ruined, as their store burned in a fire. Mr. Bouras moved to Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois in 1955, and started working for United States Steel Corporation - the largest steel manufacturer in the country - in 1940.

Mr. Bouras also distinguished himself for his patriotism. Following the outbreak of WWII, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1942 and served three years - eighteen months in combat. He was stationed in the European theater of operations, where he flew forty-four combat missions in B-26 and

A-26 medium bombers as a lead bombardier and navigator until the end of the war in Europe. He was discharged with the rank of major, and was awarded the distinguished Flying Cross, eight air medals, and five battle stars.

Following the end of WWII and his return to the U.S., Mr. Bouras was earning a monthly salary of \$600 as an army officer - a good wage in that era. Ultimately, despite the large pay cut, he decided to return to his old job at United States Steel Corp, where he stayed until 1960, working in manufacturing and sales. During his career there, he took on jobs for his company in Minnesota, New Jersey, and other states.

Mr. Bouras eventually left U.S. Steel to start up his own business in the steel construction field with his wife, Anna K. Bouras. By the late 1990's, Mr. Bouras built up his company - Bouras Industries, Inc. - into five operating companies, with four manufacturing operations in three states - New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, employing approximately 600 people. One of his biggest accounts was the photo and imaging giant Kodak, which yielded his company annual earnings of \$8 million.

A few years ago, Mr. Bouras sold three of his four manufacturing operations, holding on to the one based in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Mr. Bouras told FHSGNY 1st Vice President Christos Vournas that he grew up in Chicago, where his father, who immigrated to the U.S. in 1890, worked. Mr. Vournas, who also hails from Arcadia and is a past Supreme President of the Pan-Arcadian Federation, noted that most Greek immigrants from Arcadia reside in Chicago, where they enjoy professional success. The Pan-Arcadian Federation's headquarters are also situated in the Midwestern metropolis.

Mr. Bouras is an exceptional man and great patriot - even though he is second generation," Mr. Vournas said. His parents endowed him with the Greek identity

he possesses to this day, and he is also a very faithful and dedicated member of the Church. He always speaks enthusiastically of the Church and the Archbishop. I noticed that one thing he would ask everyone he was speaking with was which parish they belonged to. Religion plays a very important role in Mr. Bouras' life and he has shown this in practice on many occasions." All of the members of the Federation visiting that day were quick to notice their host's call to prayer.

Respect for tradition is another aspect of Mr. Bouras' personality that does not go unnoticed. That explains why he so carefully put away the lucky coin in the vasilopita which he found, instructing his secretary to place it in his office for

safe keeping and good luck.

Bouras Industries, located in Summit, N.J., is based in a three-story building that has an area of 130,000 square feet, and is one of the area's most attractive and impressive structures. Formerly known as the Kemper Building when it was built in 1958, the Bouras Building was completely renovated just prior to the new millennium.

Nicholas J. Bouras is a Vice-Commander of the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and founder of the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox church in Westfield, N.J., as well as many other charitable organizations. Mr. Bouras has been widely recognized for his philanthropic work by both Greek and

American organizations.

In addition to his substantial philanthropy geared towards church and community organizations, Mr. Bouras is a patron of the arts. In fact, he houses exhibitions at his galleries in the Bouras Building, featuring works of aspiring as well as recognized artists, including many Greek Americans. Earlier this month, he unveiled an exhibition featuring the artwork of the Kiriakatis family, encompassing three generations of artwork.

Interested members of the community can visit Bouras Galleries, located at 25 De Forest Ave. in Summit, N.J. Admission is free and open to the public, and visits can be scheduled by calling (908) 277-6054.

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