

COMMUNITY

Pontian Greek Society Sponsors Dan Georgakas Lecture

"One of Our Duties as Hellenes and Americans is to Set the Record Straight."

BY HARRIETTE CONDES-ZERVAKIS

On Saturday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, the Pontian Greek Society of Chicago sponsored a lecture by Professor Dan Georgakas titled "The Smyrna Death March of 1922" at the Duke Realty Corporation Auditorium in Rosemont, Illinois.

Each May the Pontian Greek Society hosts events to commemorate the Greek genocide of 1914-1923 and to honor the memories of the 353,000 Pontian Greeks who perished during this period.

Following a social segment with abundant complimentary refreshments and snacks, the audience was welcomed by Pontian Greek Society Officer Thomas Mantzakides and President Anastasia Skoupas. During her remarks, Ms. Skoupas quoted award-winning author Thea Halo (Not Even My Name) who has stated that it is a "moral act" to keep the memories of our history and ancestors alive.

Before the introduction of the featured speaker, Professor Dan



From left, Thomas Mantzakides, Savvas Koktzooglou, Knarik Meneshian (Armenian), Prof. Dan Georgakas, Helen Talia (Assyrian), Robert Kaprelian (Armenian) and George Mavropoulos

tered Smyrna in May of 1919, they found a city that was more wealthy and sophisticated than any city in Greece at that time. Aristides Sterghiades became the Greek administrator for the area and when some Greek soldiers attacked Turkish civilians, the soldiers were put on trial and some were later executed. In this manner, Venizelos demonstrated to the Allies that Greece would be even-handed and tolerant of minorities.

Yet in 1920, the nationalism and fear of the Turks was stoked when the Greek army "cleaned up" Turkish villages around Smyrna and various crimes against civilians were reported. Also during 1920, elections were held in Greece and Venizelos lost, while royalists won. Many of the generals and officers in Asia Minor were replaced by officers who had royalist sympathies, but were not necessarily outstanding military men.

The war-weary Greek soldiers had been fighting for ten years, but the officers decided on the strategy of going further into the interior of Anatolia in order to fight Kemal's army before it became larger, more organized, and more threatening. However, Greece's allies had never offered support for the Greek army to go into eastern Anatolia. As the Greek army progressed deeper into the interior, there were fewer civilians of Greek origin and the army encountered a larger and more anti-Greek, Turkish population that was happy to harass and attack them. The front also became longer and Greek supply lines were repeatedly attacked by Turkish irregulars.

On August 26, 1922, Turkish leader Mustapha Kemal Ataturk launched a serious and successful counter-attack. After their many triumphs, the Greek troops found themselves retreating rapidly and the Hellenic civilians found themselves suddenly unprotected. Civilians had to leave their homes and "run" as well. Thus, within a few days, over a hundred thousand people found themselves on the docks of Smyrna, hoping to find a way out of Asia Minor in order to save their lives.

Kemal Ataturk arrived in Smyrna on September 10, 1922, and although a previous proclamation had stated that all civilians would be safe, on September 12, an announcement was made that any "non Turk" still in Smyrna at the end of a month would be taken "into the interior" of Anatolia. Being part of a march "into the interior" meant almost certain death.

Within another day, the city of Smyrna started to burn and after several days only the Turkish quarter of the city had survived the conflagration.

Georgakas noted that the slogan of the Turkish nationalists who were led by Ataturk was "Turkey for the Turks," which implied that Christians and people of other faiths were not welcome and, in fact, many were massacred. He contrasted this with the Egyptian nationalist movement during the 1950's which also used the slogan of "Egypt for the Egyptians" but led to a bloodless, non-violent exodus of many minorities such as the Greek Christians.

Before Smyrna burned, the surviving Greek troops had been evacuated by the Greek Navy. Many Europeans had also left. Then for 10 days, no ship in the harbor would take anyone aboard, and the hungry and miserable refugees waited on the docks. There was one exception. The captain of a Japanese cargo ship emptied the cargo in order to take on human beings and transport them to Piraeus. "I know that ship existed," said Georgakas, "because my mother and uncle were saved by that ship."

Finally, on September 19, American Asa Jennings, jump-started the evacuation of the Greek refugees as he arranged for Greek ships, protected by American navy ships, to evacuate those who were waiting in terror. The Greek ships ultimately transported over 200,000 people from Smyrna to Greece and approximately another 40,000 refugees were taken by British and American ships. Fishermen from the nearby Greek islands would also take a few people at a time.

"This was the greatest naval evacuation of civilians in history," said Georgakas.

Tragically, as many as 50,000 Greek and Armenian men could not leave as the Turkish authorities had forbidden the evacuation of "any male of fighting age." That meant all able bodied-men, who could be as young as 14. The harbor of Smyrna became choked with the floating dead bodies of men who had tried to swim to ships, but were turned away or beaten back by sailors on those ships.

Regarding these lost men, Professor Georgakas quoted American consul George Horton who said, "These were mostly peaceful farmers of Asia Minor who were often not even in sympathy with the Royalists."

The detention and murders of the males and other helpless civilians were not carried out by irregulars. George Horton wrote, "Turkish massacres are always committed with official sanctions." The Turkish government had given the order for the elimination of the Greek males and other civilians.

Males who were kept behind were rounded up and marched "into the interior." One column would include 5,000 men and approximately 500 would survive the march to the "destination" that was usually unknown. Of the 500 who survived the march, 100 would survive the conditions in the interior and would possibly be exchanged later for Turkish prisoners.

Why were the men detained and gradually eliminated? Not only would there be fewer Greek men to threaten Turkey in the future, but also depriving families of their fathers, brothers, and sons meant that these families would be a tremendous burden to the Greek economy, as the main breadwinners would not be there to work and support the women and children.

Professor Georgakas noted that the assaults on Hellenism have continued to this day. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate is threatened and "The current Patriarch may be the last one to sit in Con-

stantinople."

In 1923, based on the Treaty of Lausanne, the 270,000 Greek Orthodox Christians who were living in Istanbul (Constantinople) were allowed to remain in the city. "As of last month, there were about 1,500 left," stated Professor Georgakas.

This is in contrast to the 130,000 Turkish civilians who were allowed to stay in the Greek territory of Thrace, have flourished, and even elect members from their Muslim community into the Greek Parliament. "No Greek, Armenian, or Jew has been elected to office in the Turkish Republic," said Georgakas.

Georgakas asked the audience not to blame today's Turkish civilians for these historical wrongs, but to hold the Turkish government accountable. The Turkish government not only continues to deny that the massacres of Greeks, Armenians, and Assyrians ever occurred, but also to imprison Turkish journalists and intellectuals who want to write the truth about what really happened during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Turkey.

"Acknowledging and discussing the past allows everyone to move forward."

"Speak as Americans," continued Georgakas. Though most of our fellow Americans are without knowledge of this history, they are concerned with how Christians are currently treated in Muslim nations and do believe in the importance of tolerance for all faiths.

The lively question and answer session that followed the lecture indicated how important this topic was to the audience and how much the audience valued the opinions of the speaker.

Among Professor Georgakas' recommendations were to contact our congressional representatives and to talk to their aides. "Turkish lobbyists approach congressional aides. The aides share the information and sometimes this is the only information the congressmen have on these issues."

He also suggested circulating petitions in support of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at gatherings such as summer church festivals and then forwarding the petitions to congressional representatives and other government officials. "That's easy and inexpensive," Georgakas said.

Additionally Georgakas cited an exemplary group of people for praise. "There is a surprising number of Greek Jews in New York who have been a very positive influence in pushing Greek issues," exclaimed Georgakas.

Finally, teachers and parents alike are reminded that they may go to the Pontian Greek Society website [www.pontiangreeks.org](http://www.pontiangreeks.org) to view the first edition of the teaching unit on the genocide of the Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire/Modern Turkey.

This is a critical time and involvement from a larger number of community members is necessary.

We carry the responsibility to preserve and to share our history with others and with future generations. The time to act is now.

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Event to Raise Funds for Child's Play's 'Global Energy –the Musical'

CHICAGO—A special event will take place on June 16 at the Microsoft Center at the AON Building in Chicago. The fête will raise money for Child's Play Touring Theatre's upcoming new production, "Global Energy – the Musical."

The Microsoft Center will host Child's Play for the event. Founded in 1978 by June Panagakos Podagrosi and her late husband Victor, Child's Play Touring Theatre is a unique institution celebrating and cultivating the creativity and imagination of children. The not-for-profit group was the first

ly." This is a stepping stone to the new Creative Connections program, where kids can Skype with other kids and organizations around the globe. "We've started a dialog, with children in Korea, Africa and other places. We're compiling input from kids around the globe. Part of this new set is to make the kids voices and ideas as part of the scenery. We're working on getting footage of them to integrate into it, to hear the ideas right from the children. I've wanted to do something like this for a long time."



company to realize the value of children's own writing and exclusively perform stories and poems written by young authors. Through their programs, they've served more than four million children, educators and adults. Additionally, they've performed the original works of more than 15,000 young authors. This summer they will introduce summer camps at their studio.

"Global Energy – the Musical" is the group's latest endeavor, designed to teach children to be kind to Mother Earth. "Our company has been traveling around the country – we're in New York and New Jersey right now – to get kids to write stories about being green, and how they can help with the global energy situation," June explained. "the kids' art, stories and ideas may seem like might seem outlandish now, but these could be future initiatives and solutions we need to help the situation. We let their voices be heard on the subject."

The show entails a virtual set design, which is a departure from their typical theatrical sets and props. "The show will be installed at children's museums. The first will be at Stepping Stones Childrens Museum in Norwalk, Connecticut, where it's been commissioned. Once it's installed, we can teach it to the local talent, who can then work with the children direct-

The June 16 event will be an "adults only" event due to the venue. Special guests include Alexi Giannoulas, and State Representative (39th District) Toni Berrios.

There will also be a presentation of the Victor Award, created to honor the memory of the late co-founder. It is awarded locally each year to individuals and companies who have shown a strong commitment to Child's Play and to working with the arts. This year's recipient is CBS2 news anchor Walter Jacobson.

Tickets are \$50 per person for general admission, and include live music, cocktails and heavy hors d'oeuvres, silent auction and tours of the Microsoft Center. VIP tickets are \$150 and include a champagne tour with an extended tour of behind-the-scenes work and innovations. There is a special student rate of \$20. Event starts at 5:30 pm. Arrive prior to 6 pm, and parking at the AON Building is \$6. After it will be \$10. For more information, corporate sponsorship info and to RSVP, visit [www.cptt.org](http://www.cptt.org) or call 773.235.8911.

June 14 Audition Call for Greek Play

The Women's Auxiliary of the Greek American Rehabilitation and Care Centre will be sponsoring a benefit performance in early October of the Greek comedy, "Enas Blakas kai Misos" by the famous Greek playwright Dimitrios Psathas and directed by Dr. Maria Boundas Bakalis, playwright and performer. The cast includes characters ranging in age from early twenties to golden agers. Ability to read Greek and speak with fluency is preferred but not required.

Auditions will be held on **Tuesday, June 14, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.** at the hall of St Demetrios Church of Du Page, 893 N. Church Road, Elmhurst, Illinois. For further information please call Maria Eugenis at 847-439-1260.

If you are interested in attending the audition please call and leave your name and phone number at the Curtain Up Acting Studio in Glen Ellyn. The number is **630-469-2099**.

Proceeds from the performance will help fund the needs of the residents of the Greek American Rehabilitation and Care Centre.