

# COMMUNITY/HAPPENINGS

## Hellenic Foundation names new director Exciting re-focus awaits longtime Chicago charity

By **TERRY POULOS**

After a near two-year search and subsequent screening of 15 qualified candidates, Louis G. Apostol, president of the Hellenic Foundation, recently announced the appointment of Christina Sofiakis as its new executive director. A licensed clinical social worker, Sofiakis comes full circle to lead the same organization she once served in the mid-1990's.

A Chicago native, Sofiakis' background is aligned with the Foundation's core and forward-thinking approach. Long a staple of the Greek American community, the Chicago-based charity, founded in the early 1950's by Fr. George Mastrantonis and a group of civic-minded leaders, is coming off the asset sale of its foremost property, the storied Hollywood House high-rise senior and low-income residential facility on Chicago's far north side. Since its inception, the Foundation has been charged with providing such housing along with family and general counseling, specialty drug and alcohol addiction therapies, and associated social services. The charity has long been the beneficiary of the philanthropic efforts of the Kamberos, Gianaras, and Fasseas families and many other benefactors. Now, with the sale of Hollywood House, the Foundation looks to refine and - where sensible - redefine its mission for the 21st century, beginning with a move from housing to concentrating on social services.

"The Foundation is currently reviewing its mission to fully address the social service needs of the community," said Apostol, who added that the Foundation's Board of Directors will be meeting to develop a "strategic plan" for the future that will provide a clear direction for the incoming executive director.

"This is about our vision for the future," said Sofiakis. "We have an ever-changing community. We're not all immigrants anymore. We're becoming a multicultural society and with that come extended families who are immersed in our community but who may not all be of Greek descent. We have unique challenges in counseling, education, and support. I don't know exactly where we're headed but I know the Board will select the path that is most progressive for the community."

Sofiakis is no stranger to the needs of the Greek community and the Hellenic Foundation itself. She was hired as a family therapist at the Foundation's south suburban office in 1996 after completing her master's degree in social work from Loyola University's School of Social Work in 1995. She performed community outreach for the Foundation and "developed and implemented programs that we used in the schools," she said. "We conducted seminars in area Greek churches, educating Sunday school teachers on the effects of divorce, children, and other family-related topics."

In the ensuing decade after her first stint with the Foundation, and while simultaneously raising the first of her two children, Sofiakis was the senior addictions counselor at Grateful House, a residential facility for women in recovery. She supervised the counseling staff and interns and also maintained a caseload and ran therapy and education groups. She somehow also found the time and ener-

gy to establish her widely-known workshop "The Goddess Within," famous for utilizing Greek mythology to counsel women on a myriad of personal issues. Ironically, she co-founded that group with Patti Karahalios Wilson, a childhood friend who also happens to be the previous executive director of the Hellenic Foundation. Wilson resigned from the Foundation due to a move to Oklahoma.

The youngest of five sisters, Sofiakis is the daughter of Athens native Angela Nikolettseas and Chicago-born, Cretan American Alfred Sofiakis. Christina was raised in Chicago's west suburbs and attended Assumption Greek Orthodox Church, where she was involved in AHEPA and was a GOYA officer. She graduated from Assumption's Plato School. Originally "being groomed" to become the lawyer in the family, Christina became interested in social work while studying interpersonal communications at Loyola. That's when she really took a deeper interest in analyzing and observing people's behavior.

"My first job in the field was working at [Des Plaines-based] Maryville Academy [1988-90]," said Christina. "It was a thriving organization and I was a family educator in a residential boys' home. I taught them how to manage in the home and how to live up to one another. I had my nose broken by a boy who threw a broom at me like an arrow. It was basically crisis management."

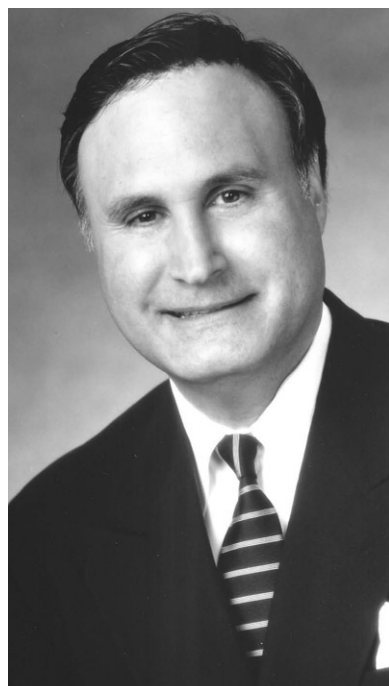
Sofiakis is not averse to great challenges and the Hellenic Foundation is her latest. "I am someone who undertakes great challenges," said Christina. While in her third semester in grad school, and third trimester of pregnancy, she recalled how she "finished my first midterms from the hospital bed after giving birth. I preceded to take on the role of wife and mother while continuing grad school full time and working at the [Cook County] state's attorney's office as support staff and doing data entry."

In 2005, Christina launched Mia magazine, perhaps one of the most ambitious Greek publications in the nation. "It was a grass roots vision, national magazine," she explained. "I was charged with the task of leading a group of people, managing a budget, and performing editorial oversight. All that was leading to this. All the collaborating with Greeks on a national and international level will be incorporated into what I can bring to the table at Hellenic."

"So much of what I've done since I left the Foundation in the 1990's is going to be of great help to the work we're doing," continued Christina. "The seminars, using Greek mythology as a vehicle, the nationwide contacts from the magazine, the ability to frame an issue and communicate a message. All that will come into play in this latest chapter of my life."

After Mia/Enas, Christina took a breather to spend more time with her two children. A chance conversation with Wilson and Angelique Mountanis, the longtime Hellenic Foundation director of social services, led to the two recommending Christina to Apostol. The process was set in motion to review and vet her candidacy before the full Board.

"I can say without reservation that the search committee, comprised of Board members George Aravosis, George Alexopoulos, Jim Soukoulis, acting executive



Louis G. Apostol

director Angelike Mountanis, and myself, as Chairman, is fully confident that Christina has the qualifications and experience to best serve the Foundation with integrity and distinction," said Apostol. "I can speak for the Board in saying we look forward to working with Christina as we move forward to best serve the needs of our community. We'll look to identify qualified individuals who will volunteer their time, talents and resources to help the Foundation achieve its goals and objectives. In addition, we will be working with other community organizations when mutually beneficial."

"The Board is in the process of ordering a full needs assessment and we absolutely want input from our community," emphasized Christina. "Much of that focus will be on providing holistic health and social services using the wisdom of the ancient Greeks."



Christina Sofiakis

We will be empowering our Greek and Greek American community, as well as helping to keep our culture alive. That may mean national exposure, opening it up to anyone in need of our services, or even reaching out with non-traditional delivery mechanisms for services such as the Internet and other forms of media-related communications. Our first efforts, though, will be on community input and building a solid foundation based on what our community needs.

"We're in a good place with the sale of Hollywood House," noted Christina. "We are in a better position to focus on holistic health and social service programs. We need to modernize. Then, we can start growing."

The Hellenic Foundation will be seeking feedback and suggestions from the community. Please check their website for updates and ways you can get involved! Visit [HellenicFoundation.org](http://HellenicFoundation.org).

## House passes Resolution Commemorating 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Daughters of Penelope

WASHINGTON 10/14/2009—The U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Daughters of Penelope (DOP), a premier international women's organization, on Tuesday, Oct. 13, announced Grand President Elaine M. Sampanis.

"We are deeply honored and humbled that the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution commemorating the anniversary of our founding and acknowledging the contributions of Greek-Americans to our society," said Sampanis. "We are grateful to Congresswoman Maloney and Congressman Bilirakis for their support and leadership as well as all the co-sponsors of the legislation."

U.S. Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-14-NY), co-founder and co-chair of the Hellenic Caucus, was the original sponsor of the legislation, H.Res.209, which was introduced March 4, 2009. With the assistance of Rep. Maloney and Hellenic Caucus Co-Chair U.S. Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-9-FL), the legislation passed with 53 bipartisan co-sponsors.



Grand President Elaine M. Sampanis.

Sampanis added, "Our members are excited and thrilled. Passage of this resolution could not have been possible without their civic involvement as well as the vision set forth by Past Grand Presidents Karen Stamatziades and Barbara Stavis Wolf."

A senate version of the resolution, S.Res.117, currently rests with the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. It was introduced by U.S. Sen. Olympia J. Snowe (R-ME) and co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ).

## Vasili and Demetra Gaitanos to perform at the Yiayia & Papou Dinner Dance Benefit presented by the Greek American Rehabilitation and Care Centre

The Greek American Rehabilitation & Care Centre will host a Yiayia and Papou Dinner Dance "Generations Coming Together" on Friday, Oct. 30. This event promises to be an evening full of excitement for the entire family. Special guest performers will be Vasili and Demetra Gaitanos who will perform many of your "old-time" favorites in addition to popular songs of today. Also, for your listening and dancing pleasure, Sounds of Greece will entertain us with music from the 30's to the present day. Children's entertainment will include a balloon artist, magic show and face painting.

A dedication of distinction will be presented at this event for three honorable and loyal women of the community; Mrs. Bette Brown, Mrs. Cleo Maragos and Mrs. Helen Furla. These ladies have worked endlessly in raising awareness for the needs of our home and our residents.

This event has been established to help support the Care Centre which first opened their doors in March of 2002. The Care Centre was established to fulfill a void in the Greek American community, a place where our elderly could receive quality care with

love, respect, honor and dignity. Our home consists of long-term and short-term residents. Our long-term facility cares for residents that are elderly, chronically ill or have memory loss. Private insurance and Medicare cover a small number of these individuals. However, many of our residents (62%) are on Medicaid, which unfortunately does not cover all expenses involved in their care. The Greek American Rehabilitation and Care Centre welcomes with open arms many individuals despite their financial needs. In order for us to continue quality care for everyone, we must continue to reach out to the community as a means to make up the difference in cost for each resident.

The festivities begin at 6 pm with cocktails and appetizers and dinner following at 7 pm. Dancing and entertainment will begin at 8:30 p.m. The cost is \$75 per person and \$35 for children 12 and under.

Put on your dancing shoes and come enjoy a festive evening of entertainment as we celebrate our families. For information or to purchase tickets, call the Greek American Rehabilitation and Care Centre committee office at (847) 465-1323.



## Reception for senate candidacy

Businessman Alex Kountoures (pictured at left) and Illinois Treasurer Alexi Giannoulis (right) applauded a comment by an attendee at a fundraiser for Giannoulis' U.S. Senate candidacy. The event was held September 29 at Chromecraft, a wholesale office furniture showroom operated by Kountoures and located at the Merchandise Mart in downtown Chicago. Reception co-hosts were Kountoures along with Louis G. Apostol (pictured center in background), Executive Director of the Illinois Property Tax Appeal Board and President of the Hellenic Foundation in Chicago, and Alex Pissios, president of the soon-to-be opened Coinespace Chicago film staging company. Giannoulis (D-Chicago) addressed issues of importance to Illinois voters and updated supporters on his campaign's latest efforts to capture the seat previously held by U.S. President Barack Obama, a political associate and friend of Giannoulis. For more information, visit [AlexiForIllinois.com](http://AlexiForIllinois.com).

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