

Building Bridges between Greece and Diaspora

By Constantine S. Sirigos
TNH Staff Writer

NEW YORK – Not everyone ends up in the field they first fall in love with, but some childhood interests bolster chances of success in any profession by fostering teamwork and discipline. Yanna Darilis, for years a popular TV host in Greece and now the President of New Greek TV (NGTV), was an athlete from a young age and her experiences served her well.

Energy and seriousness are there too, now as then. Regarding the origins of the power to charm she picked up along the way as a fashion model and television host, one can inquire with her parents.

In August, 2012, the late Demetris Kastanas who was a Greek-American TV pioneer, sold his TV program, National Greek Television to a group of Greek-Americans. Darilis was one of the driving forces.

"I heard it was for sale and spoke to friends about it. Andrew Latos, and our beloved Peter Latos who passed away," and others, including George Stephanopoulos, the entertainment attorney and film producer who handled the acquisition, got together and decided "lets buy the channel and continue this."

Calling Kastanas a legend, she said "he did a wonderful job helping to keep Hellenism strong in the United States," and NGTV wants to continue bringing in quality programs from Greece, but they also prioritize creating local programming for the community in Greek and to reach out in English to the new generations.

She and the new owners are working as a team to take a community institution to the next level.

It is a challenging endeavor. The community is a complex demographic – Darilis agrees there are many varieties of Greek-Americans – and the language question poses programming challenges.

Creativity and vision will be needed, and that is on her resume too. Darilis is one of the few female hosts who became an executive producer in Greece.

In many ways, her upbringing was unremarkable – except perhaps in what matters most. "I grew up in a big family full of love. My parents are wonderful human beings – Nitsa and Costa. It was a traditional Greek home," she said. Her mother's mother Evangelia was there too and she has two younger sisters, Lisa and Angie, and an older brother Andreas.

"They raised us with the Greek spirit, in the community," said the woman who grew up in Jamaica Estates and Bayside, and earned degrees from Queens College, where she has taught, and Empire State University.

She had a balanced upbringing, with both Greek and "American" friends, spending time with



Yanna Darilis went to Greece to be a high school teacher and coach and ended up one its favorite TV hosts. She continues to build bridges to the homeland as President of NGTV.

friends in Astoria during college.

Her childhood was shaped more by the athletic world than the Greek-American community, and that's what propelled her to Greece at the age of 24.

Darilis was brought over to Greece to be a middle and high school physical education teacher and basketball coach at the American Community School – she had done that previously at St. Demetrios in Astoria and St. Francis Prep.

In 1994 she was jet-skiing in Greece "and Antenna TV found me – I didn't even know who they were." Antenna was a media pioneer in Greece, among the first privately owned channels.

Vasilis Tsvilikas the actor and Antenna's host was at the beach that day with the producers and saw her.

TNH asked, "Did they just look up and see this blonde streak across the water?" "Yes!" she said.

Darilis said, "They invited me to the studio but I didn't want a career in television." She told them "I'm a coach and teacher," and they replied "you can always teach, but you can't always be on television."

She called her practical electrical engineer dad for advice and after getting the O.K. she thought she would try it out for a year.

HELLO GREECE – HELLO?

When she first arrived, from a very sheltered Greek-American home, it was very hard for her to understand the Greek mentality. "Living in Greece, with a completely different mindset and way

of doing things, was a culture shock for me," she said.

Most of her friends in the U.S. "back in the day were getting married right out of school and having children, and I wasn't ready to do that."

"Did I want a career in television – no it happened completely by accident. Do I want a family – yes, it just hasn't happened for me yet."

She took the Antenna job. Being introduced as a fitness expert and doing the news in English for Antenna Satellite, Greek fluency was not necessary at first, but she worked hard to develop it.

Darilis was thrilled to convey to the world "the persons that were making a difference" and "all the things that were happening in Greece" that the diaspora was not aware of.

By the time she got to Star Channel she was doing an array of things: fitness modeling, fashion modeling on runways and in catalogs, but she fell in love with presenting the news. "It was a life-changing experience."

Seven years down the line, a well-established TV host and discovering she enjoyed the creative dimension of television production; Darilis wanted a stronger foundation for her work. She went back to college and got a degree in film and television from New York College in Athens, Greece. She had great professors, including film maker Panatelas Vulgarism.

That was followed by what she called an amazing experi-

ence: hosting Hellenic Weekly, the first English language magazine show in Greece airing on ERT Satellite. She is proud of the 70 travel pieces she wrote, directed and hosted that were essentially mini documentaries.

KISSED BY THE GODS

She was also selected to co-host the opening and closing ceremonies of the Athens Olympics. "It was a great honor...I spoke in Greek, English and a little bit of French."

Darilis said the ancients said Olympic Games participants were kissed by the gods. As a host in 2004, "I was kissed by the gods." She also was thrilled "to be able to meet and work with a lot of wonderful and talented people, including Yianni Angelopoulou-Daskalakis."

She also wrote an exercise book in Greece titled "Agapitos to Soma Sass – Love Your Body," because she says that's "people have to learn to appreciate themselves and what God has given them."

YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN, BUT THERE'S A PRICE

"Once you go abroad to live, you feel like you are now torn. You do not know where you belong," she told TNH. She said one wonders, "Do I belong to Greece or do I belong in America – I'm right smack in the middle."

In 2005 she felt it was time to come home. "My family was here, I'm a Greek-American, though I say now that I am a Greek from America because I've changed. Living in Greece and travelling around Europe has changed me as a person in general."

"I feel it is important to continue working for Hellenism on all levels and among the new generations," she said, adding that her Orthodox faith and spirituality are also important to her.

After ERT Satellite, she began to think that she can do that kind of program in the States for Greek-Americans, and she helped make it happen with NGTV, which is on Channel 545 Time-Warner Cable

They are in the process of expanding to other platforms like Dish and Verizon but Darilis noted that subscribers must contact those companies and request NGTV – "That's the best way to help us."

NGTV has news from Greece all day but there is also a Greek language newscast that presents the news from Greece, American national and local news and community news. There is a medical program in Greek called "Sto Vima Tou Ippokratou – In the Steps of Hippocrates" in Greek hosted Dr. Konstantinos Plestis of Lenox Hill hospital and a law program in Greek and English hosted by Andrew Latos.

They are also getting requests for a Greek news program in English, which they are developing.

She is thrilled with the staff, which includes Dimitrios Fillipides, who does general reporting and hosts "Ora tou Politi – the Citizen's Hour."

Torn between presenting the show in Greek or English, they decided to use both on their new one and a half hour-long morning show, Kalimera USA that airs every Friday at 10 AM and is rerun on Saturday at 10 AM.

They are in the final stages of developing a website, newgreektelevision.com, which will premier in September. It will have a web channel on it featuring all their programs, but their cable contract does not allow them to do live streaming.

GNTV's mission is to unite Greece and the United States and connect with the new generation of viewers, whom they invite to become direct participants. Darilis wants programs and coverage to extend to the community's youth programs such as the Joy and GOYA chapters of parishes across the country.

"We want the new generations on television...Send us your videos. We would love to feature them on the website," she said.

They are trying to provide what people are asking for. Some viewers want them to continue to present program from multiple Greek channels, but the licensing agreement doesn't permit that. She also noted that the economic crisis has reduced the number of new programs and series being produced, but they have an agreement with SKY, which they are excited about.

Darilis is currently writing a fitness book in English called Forever Young. She told TNH that in her down time she paints, enjoys film, theater, museums, live music, and travelling. Sounds like there is not much down in her down time either.

She lives in Manhattan but delights in nature, and loves reading, including traditional newspapers. "I'm a hard copy girl. I love to sit down with my paper and a cup of coffee over the weekend in Central Park and go through the Times – and The National Herald."

She also considers promoting and advertising Greece a hobby. "I feel we are all responsible to represent Greece."

GOINGS ON...

■ FAITH SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE EXTENDED TO AUGUST 12.

NEW YORK – Faith: An Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism has extended the application deadline for the "Faith Scholarships for Academic Excellence" until August 12, 2013. The merit-based scholarships are available to seniors graduating from public, parochial and private high schools across the country for academic excellence. For information and application materials visit: www.faihtendowment.org or contact: Peggy Sotirhos: 212-644-6960; peggy@faihtendowment.org.

■ JULY 13 – NOVEMBER 2

TARPON SPRINGS, FL - Night in the Islands also will be offered Saturdays, Aug. 3, Sep. 7, Oct. 5, and Nov. 2 from 6-11 PM the City of Tarpon Springs will present Night in the Islands – a free event on the world famous Sponge Docks. Enjoy Greek music, dancing, and dining! And we will offer an hour of free Greek dance lessons by the Levendia Dance Troupe from 6-7 PM. The event featuring live music by Ellada, an exciting Greek band composed of three of the most accomplished Greek musicians in the state. Ellada will perform nisiotika, the lively traditional music of the Greek islands, as well as old and new Greek favorites. Ellada includes Leonidas Zafirris, bouzouki; Elias Poulos, vocals; and Dino Theofilos, keyboard. The festival is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

■ AUGUST 15-18

SOUTHAMPTON, NY – His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios will officiate at the Archieratical Divine Liturgy for the Thyraxinia – The Opening of the Doors – of the new sanctuary of The Greek Orthodox Church of the Hamptons – Dormition of the Virgin Mary-Kimisis tis Theotokou, and the parish's feast day on Thursday, Aug. 15. Orthros at 8:30AM and Divine Liturgy at 10AM. 111 St. Andrew's Rd. Southampton, NY. Vespers will be celebrated Wednesday evening at 7PM with a reception after the service hosted by the Philoptochos. For information call 631-283-6169, or email to info@kimi-sishampton.org.

SOUTHAMPTON, NY – The Greek Orthodox Church of the Hamptons – Dormition of the Virgin Mary-Kimisis tis Theotokou invites you to a special luncheon with Archbishop Demetrios which will be held after the Archieratical Divine Liturgy on Thursday, Aug. 15 at Namos restaurant; 136 Main St, Southampton, NY. Phone: 631-287-5500. \$75 per adult. \$25 children under 12. Reservations must be made with the Church Office at 631-283-6169.

ST. CLAIR SHORES - Assumption's GreekFest Is Back! Aug. 15-18. 10,000 people are expected to experience a taste of Greece at Assumption Greek Orthodox Church and there is something for everyone. From traditional Greek homemade food and pastries to live music and dancing, this Festival will be one of the best parts of the summer. Festival-goers will see traditional Greek costumes from many regions of Greece. Hours: August 15-17 11 AM to 11 PM; August 18, 11 AM to 8 PM.

■ AUGUST 22-25

GRAND RAPIDS, MI – The Church of the Holy Trinity hosts its Yassou Greek Festival August 23-25. We are thrilled to bring Grand Rapids an event celebrating the culture and traditions of the Greek Orthodox people. We look forward to sharing with you our music, dances, gifts and OF COURSE our FOOD! Visit yassoufest.com.

PORT JEFFERSON, NY – The Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption presents its annual Greek Festival, August 22-25. This festival is a community event put together by the families of The Assumption commu-

nity and we invite you to join us in the festivities. For over 38 years now, the Greek festival has entertained the people of Port Jefferson and others from neighboring towns with glorious displays of fireworks, musical sounds, and authentic tastes. This 4 day event will feature such culinary delights as gyros, pastitsio, moussaka, souvlaki, spanakopita & tyropita and much more. We look forward to your participation in our Annual Greek Festival/Raffle. Come see a spectacular fireworks show on Friday and Saturday Aug 23rd and 24th! Hours: Thursday, August 22 – 5 – 10 PM, Friday, August 23, 5 – 11 PM, Saturday Aug. 24, 1–11 PM, Sunday, Aug. 25, 1–10 PM. Where: Parish Grounds, 430 Sheep Pasture Road in Port Jefferson. Directions: LIE Exit 64 (Route 112). Go North to Port Jefferson (pass Rt. 83, pass Rt. 347) Go over Railroad tracks. 1st traffic light after RR tracks – a free event on the world famous Sponge Docks. Follow Sheep Pasture Road to the STOP sign - make a LEFT and then a RIGHT (You are still on Sheep Pasture Road). After next STOP sign, you will see the Church on the LEFT hand side... For more information call 631-473-0894. Admission: \$2.00, free under 18.

■ SEPTEMBER 16

ROSLYN, NY – The Hellenic American Networking Group invites you to their next gathering at Limani Restaurant, 1043 Northern Boulevard, Roslyn, NY on Monday, Sep. 16. There will be a cash bar and Limani will once again graciously provide their delicious appetizers. The mission of this organization is to create an environment that facilitates meaningful business connections with fellow Hellenes. It's about unifying the Hellenic professionals and the Hellenic entrepreneurs, bringing together our like-minded community to create a platform for the growth and advancement of Hellenes.

■ OCTOBER 3

MANHATTAN – Please join us at the Inaugural Banquet for The Hellenic Initiative on Thursday, Oct. 3 at 583 Park Avenue in Manhattan. "Investing in the Future of Greece" featuring President Bill Clinton will honor three outstanding individuals for their service to people of Greece and all funds raised through the banquet will support programs to support recovery and renewal in Greece. George Stephanopoulos will be the Master of Ceremonies. The honorees include Andreas Dracopoulos on behalf of The Stavros Niarchos Foundation; Muhtar Kent, chairman and CEO of The Coca Cola Company; and Andrew N. Liveris, chairman and CEO of The Dow Chemical Company. We are delighted to celebrate their longstanding commitment and many contributions to Greece, especially in response to the economic crisis. John Catsimatidis, Dennis Mehiel, George Stamas, Greece at Assumption Greek Orthodox Church and there is something for everyone. From traditional Greek homemade food and pastries to live music and dancing, this Festival will be one of the best parts of the summer. Festival-goers will see traditional Greek costumes from many regions of Greece. Hours: August 15-17 11 AM to 11 PM; August 18, 11 AM to 8 PM.

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