

John Psiharis, *Working to Preserve Our Heritage: The Incredible Legacy of Greek-American Community Services: Hellenism in the Heartland*. Greek American Press: Chicago, 2023. Pages i - xviii, 1-462, index 463-482.

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Hellenism in the Heartland: Working to Preserve Our Heritage: The Incredible Legacy of Greek-American Community Services provides a captivating exploration of the Greek-American Community Services (GACS) program in Chicago, tracing its founding in 1982 to its profound impact until 2002. Through meticulous research and firsthand accounts, author John Psiharis presents a detailed historical account of GACS's evolution, highlighting its transformative effects on many lives.

Psiharis, a co-founder of GACS, served as its president and executive director from its inception until 2002. He was also deeply involved in the Greek American Nursing Home Committee, contributing significantly until 2006. Dr. Elaine Thomopoulos, another key figure, played a vital role in the book's creation, offering invaluable contributions of photos, documents, ephemera, and editing advice. Her involvement as a co-founder, vice president, and administrator of GACS from 1982 to 1990 underscores the book's depth and authenticity.

The narrative is enriched by a personal collection of photos, documents, and ephemera related to GACS, offering readers a visual connection to the organization's history. These materials not only illustrate key moments in GACS's journey but also provide context and depth to the storytelling. Psiharis's dedication to preserving and sharing these stories is evident in his attention to detail and thoughtful curation of materials, underscoring his commitment to ensuring that the legacy of GACS is not forgotten.

The book is structured into five parts, each offering a unique perspective on the founding and impact of the Greek-American Community Services (GACS) in Chicago. In Part One, the author delves into the origins of GACS, providing a detailed account of pivotal meetings in 1982. These gatherings brought together a small but determined group of Greek Americans who shared a common concern for the well-being of the community's

elder adults. The founding of GACS emerged as a natural response to these challenges, driven by the passion and determination of those early pioneers. Their aim was to create an organization that would operate exclusively for charitable purposes, providing social services and innovative cultural programs, as well as establishing the first Greek American nursing home in the Midwest and the second in the nation.

At this point, it is important to mention that a few years before GACS became a reality in Chicago, another organization was founded in Queens, NY, in 1972 to address the growing needs of the Greek community. During the 1960s, immigration from Greece was soaring, and many Greeks settled in Astoria, creating a substantial demand for social services to help them acclimate to life in America. Recognizing these needs, the Hellenic American Neighbourhood Action Committee (HANAC) was established. With the establishment of its first office in 1972, HANAC quickly identified the need for social services for the elderly and English language learning for new immigrants. Today, HANAC has grown into a citywide social service organization, serving 30,000 NYC residents annually and managing 650 senior affordable housing units throughout Queens. HANAC continues its mission to provide services to all in need without discrimination and to work closely with city, state, and federal governments for the betterment of the community.

In the Second Part of the book, the author provides a deep dive into the history and activities of GACS, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of the organization's mission and impact. This section explores the wide array of services and programs that GACS offered over the years, showcasing its diverse initiatives. From organizing cultural events and educational programs to providing essential social services and fostering community-building activities, GACS became a central pillar in preserving and promoting Greek heritage while also meeting the evolving needs of the community. Moreover, the narrative illustrates GACS's transformative influence, emphasizing its pivotal role in fostering interethnic understanding. GACS organized multicultural festivals that celebrated the traditions of various ethnic groups, bringing together diverse communities to share their cultural heritage. Additionally, they collaborated with other ethnic organizations on joint community service projects, creating a platform for dialogue and mutual support. Through these efforts, GACS helped build bridges between different cultural groups, promoting a sense of unity and collective identity.

In Part Three of the book, readers gain profound insights into the individuals who played pivotal roles in GACS's journey. This part brings to life the stories of those who worked tirelessly to ensure the success and longevity of GACS. Through a rich tapestry of personal anecdotes and interviews, the authors showcase their deep-seated passion and commitment to preserving their cultural identity. This comprehensive approach not only highlights the contributions of various community members but also provides readers with an understanding of the human side of GACS.

In Part Four, readers are presented with a detailed and insightful timeline of events and activities that unfolded between 1982 and 2002. This section offers a comprehensive overview of GACS's evolution, highlighting key milestones and achievements during this period. By presenting this chronological history, the authors not only document the growth of GACS but also underscore its impact on the Greek-American community in Chicago. Readers can witness firsthand how GACS adapted to the community's changing needs, expanding its reach and influence over the years. The inclusion of visuals further enhances the reader's understanding of GACS's journey from its inception to 2002.

Part 5 of the book sheds light on GACS's role in founding the Coalition of Limited English-Speaking Elderly (CLESE), underscoring its commitment to serving the needs of limited English-speaking elderly individuals. This section underscores GACS's dedication to community service and fostering interethnic understanding. Through a detailed narrative, readers gain insight into CLESE's mission and goals, which revolve around advocating for and providing technical assistance to limited English-speaking individuals, ensuring they have access to vital personal services. For instance, CLESE launched programs to help elderly immigrants navigate healthcare systems, offering translation services during medical appointments and assistance with understanding medication instructions. They also organized workshops on accessing social security benefits and provided interpreters for legal matters.

Hellenism in the Heartland: Working to Preserve Our Heritage: The Incredible Legacy of Greek-American Community Services provides an insightful exploration of the resilience, community spirit, and cultural preservation efforts of the Greek-American Community Services (GACS) in Chicago. The book pays tribute to those who dedicated themselves to building and sustaining GACS, ensuring that their stories and contributions are remembered and celebrated. It takes readers on a journey through the rich tapestry of Chicago's Greek-American history, highlighting the story of community resilience and cultural heritage preservation. *Hellenism in the Heartland* is not just a historical account but also a testament to the enduring spirit of philotimo and philoxenia that inspires communities worldwide. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of Chicago's Greek community and the remarkable story of the GACS.

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