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Hellenic Dancers of NJ Celebrate 50th Anniversary Gala Over 70 Dancers performed for a Sold-out Audience



Edison, NJ – The Hellenic Dancers of NJ (HDNJ) performed for a sold-out audience at its 50th Anniversary Gala Saturday night, February 3, 2024. The celebration brought together over 70 current and alumni dancers at the Pines Manor in Edison, NJ. Several of the original dancers also performed, with many more alumni dancers as part of the 500+ audience. Live music was provided by Endasi Greek band. All proceeds from the event will support HDNJ in preserving the folk-dance customs of Greece, and perpetuating Greek heritage in America. Funding from the event will also support the troupe’s 2024 – 2025 touring schedule. HDNJ is funded in part by Monmouth Arts, a partner of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and the Monmouth County Board of County Commissioners.

“We were blessed to have had a wonderful event, due to the hard work and diligence of our dedicated Board of Directors, Gala committee, artistic committee, and wardrobe team,” said Edmund Haliotis, HDNJ Board President and alumnus. “However, I would be remiss to not mention that most, if not all of those I just mentioned had a personal connection to our founders, Father James Chakalos, and Presbytera Eleni Chakalos. We all felt the love, pride, and passion they had for this

organization, and their heritage. We all consider ourselves blessed to have had them touch our lives.”

The dancers performed three segments. The first was Peloponniso, with a focus on Arkadia and Lakonia, in honor of founder Eleni Chakalos’ Maniot heritage. The second featured the alumni dancers with a Pan-Hellenic suit that reached from Pontos, to the many Greek islands, to Epiros. The third focused on the region of Macedonia with the current troupe performing dances from Florina, Kastoria and Kilkis. All 70 dancers began the performance together with Hasaposervikos and finished with Koulouriotikos from Megara.

“Celebrating our 50th anniversary is no small feat, and it is one that is a testament to all of the dancers, volunteers, organizers, and supporters over the years. The current Hellenic Dancers embraced this anniversary through two region-based suites: Lakonia and Arkadia to honor our founder Eleni Chakalos and as well as a suite from Macedonia. The dancers impressed the crowd by performing the entirety of both suites to the fantastic live music of Endasi. All dancers, beginners, veterans, and instructors alike, experienced the electrifying energy in the room, which has motivated and inspired us to continue our passion of perpetuating Hellenic folk traditions in NJ for another 50 years,” stated Nikos Vosinas, HDNJ Artistic Director and dancer.

Fr. Jim and Presvytera Eleni Chakalos founded the non-profit at St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Asbury Park, NJ, in 1972, with just 12 dancers. Since then over 2000 dancers have learned and performed with the group. HDNJ has amassed a repertoire of over 350 Greek folk dances from every corner of the Greek world including Macedonia, Thrace, Thessaly, Crete, the various island groups, the Republic of Cyprus, and Pontos, Ikonion and Cappadocia (found in current day Turkey). Combined with regional music and dress, as well as the enthusiasm of the dancers, an HDNJ performance is something not to be missed. The 50th Anniversary Gala is a testament to the important place that the Hellenic Dancers of NJ hold in preserving and performing Greek Folk dance customs in America, and the strength and joy of the Greek American community in New Jersey.

HDNJ is nationally recognized for its presentation of Greek folk dance traditions and has performed at a number of local and national events including: Dukakis Presidential Rally, Inaugural Festivities for former President Ronald Reagan, Statue of Liberty Weekend Grand Finale, 20/20 ABC Television Program, Queens College of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies Benefit, O. Elytis Chair of Modern Greek Studies at Rutgers University Benefit, the NJ State Ethnic and Diversity Festival, for Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew upon his first official visit to New Jersey, and

Greek Heritage Day with the Metrostars. Members of the troupe participated in the Closing Ceremonies of the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece and at the 2006 Centennial Epiphany celebrations in Tarpon Springs, FL. HDNJ is also a founding member organization of the Federation of Hellenic American Organizations of New Jersey.

Photos: MichaelChris Creative LLC/Michael Christodoulakis

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