

## **Mrs Efrosini Stefanou-Haag reflects on her career as Head of St Spyridon College**



Greek philosopher Aristotle said that 'those who educate children well are more to be honoured than they who produce them; for these only gave them life, those the art of living well.'

This quote finds a context after our conversation with Mrs Efrosini Stefanou-Haag.

A mentor to students and teachers alike, a dedicated educator and great leader, Mrs Stefanou-Haag retired last week from her position as Head of St Spyridon College after nearly two decades of service, passing the baton to the new Head of College Mrs Amelia Katsogiannis.

During her tenure, Stefanou-Haag, produced four five-year Strategic Plans which resulted to the College being ranked in the top 100 schools of NSW at the HSC exams, coming 62nd out of 811 schools in 2016.



Despite her commitments, she found the time to reply to The Greek Herald's questions about her career, the memories she will take with her and the crucial role of the youth for the future of Australia's Greek Community.

Q: Mrs Stefanou-Haag, after almost two decades of service you retired from the position of Head of St Spyridon College. How do you feel?

A: I feel at peace, for two reasons.

First, is that Archbishop Makarios, has thankfully demonstrated his love for young people and his commitment to the future of Greek Orthodox schools in Australia.

Second is that the Board of St Spyridon Parish has appointed Mrs Amelia Katsogiannis, as the new Head of College. She is an outstanding educator, and she has the respect and trust of our parents and students. So the future is in excellent hands, and on leaving, this means everything to me.

I also feel deep sense of gratitude that together with Father Steven Scoutas, our Parish Priest who is also the founder of the College, all the Board members and our teachers, we have provided to our students a strong sense of belonging, and a strong sense of identity, on the foundations of Greek Orthodox faith and Hellenic ideals. This has been a privilege.

Together with our parents we have seen our students take their place in the world with confidence and success-across every area of endeavour-from professors, teachers, doctors, business, lawyers, politicians -our alumni are influencing every area of the Australian society. And I am very proud that over 100 of our students

are the children of Alumni.

I am really going to miss this place.



Q: What are the fondest memories you will take with you from your teaching career?

A: There are so many...

Watching the children saying prayers in Greek during Assembly, our deep and meaningful discussions with senior students about poetry and literature, the Primary students sitting me down to admire their bookwork, crying with laughter at performances of comedies like 'Despinis 39 Chronon' or 'Ta Kitrina Gantia', the musical showcases, the P&F Spring Fairs and Mothers' Day dinners.

A Treasured memory, is the Year 12 students gleaming with happiness as they celebrate their successes in the HSC. Our Divine Liturgy Services, and the 25th March celebrations. Just walking around the school, and seeing the exuberance and energy of our young people .

It is all part of the same experience.

Q: Talk to us about your achievements and the difficulties you faced during the years.

A: The difficulties and the achievements go together - nothing worthwhile is

achieved without sacrifice.

The role of the Head is to take a school forward, and to do this, they have to take people with them. Everyone is called upon to change, to change their perceptions and their way of seeing their immediate world. This is not easy, especially as what you promise at the end of the rainbow, cannot even be imagined when you first describe it. It has to unfold. This is the nature of the job.

But as I said before, I have been blessed with my co-workers -they placed their trust in me and supported me.

As a result, we have increased our enrolments, improved our students' academic results, added to the subjects choices and sports offerings, built a strong sense of pride in the school's uniform.

We are recognised as a school of quality by the Independent School sector and our teachers provided educational leadership to teachers across New South Wales. Our latest exciting event, is the opening of our Kinder Minus 1 class in 2021.



Q: What are some of the things that we -parents and members of the wider community- do not understand about educators?

A: Parents rightly focus on their own children- the teacher has to focus on every child and on all groups of children. This means teachers are managing diverse

expectations and perceptions of parents and the community at large.

Educators live with a high degree of public accountability. This requires them to plan, program, research, monitor and evaluate. They are responsible not just for academic outcomes but the care and well-being of each child. It is very complex work, whose results may not be seen until many years after the child has left the educators' care.

Parents cannot be expected to understand the work of educators, but they can be expected to respect and support it. I believe the majority of parents across school do so, particularly now, following the pressures that were forced on families and nations during the COVID pandemic.

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Q: This year has been a challenging one for everyone in the community, but we saw how resilient students and teachers proved to be. What has this year taught you?

A: What I learned is that 'Ο kalos o kapetanios, stin fourtouna fainetai' (σ.σ Ο Καλός ο Καπετάνιος στηφουρτούνα φαίνεται). We have weathered the storm that hit us when we were in uncharted waters.

Through all this, it is our faith in God that sustained us all. Our students strengthened their resilience, because we as teachers and parents, made sure they knew they were loved and cared for.

Every action we took, every decision we made was measured and weighed against what they needed to stay focussed and healthy. In the final analysis, we all had to learn to trust the experts, follow the rules and pray for the best.



Q: How important is the role of the youth for the future of Australia's Greek Community and what are some of the challenges they are confronted with?

A: Our young people are critical for the future of our community, our church, this nation, and this planet. Their challenge is a very serious one. To clean up the mess those past generations have created for them. Their burden is no less critical than to save the world-to save humanity.

To find ways to create peace when they witness war in all areas of life-to go beyond the platitudes that divide us and to unite to solve pressing problems-the environment, the ubiquitous presence of digital communications, the attack on our faith and our core values - just to name a few such problems.

Concluding our interview, Mrs Stefanou-Haag thanked us for our "sustained focus on the future of our Greek Orthodox community in Australia". But we, community media, exist to tell the stories of inspirational people like her and those of the young Greek Australians, who she has nurtured.

\*The Greek Herald team would like to thank Mrs Efrosini Stefanou-Haag for her service and wishes her a happy and lengthy retirement.



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