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EV teens celebrate Greek heritage in festive way

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East Valley teenagers Makayla Kantarze and Christopher Bafaloukos are staying in step with ancient Greek traditions.

The two will dance during the annual Taste of Greece Festival Oct. 5–7 at St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church in Chandler.

Serving the community for 31 years, St. Katherine is led by Father Phillip Armstrong.

During the three-day event, the church campus is a mini Greek village with authentic foods, live music, costumed folk dancing, dance workshops, a Kids Fun Zone and an “agora” or marketplace, including arts and crafts, imports, jewelry, CDs, books and icons. On Sunday, a \$1,000 raffle winner will be drawn.

Makayla, 15, of Gilbert’s Highland High School, and Chandler resident Christopher, a 16-year-old student at Perry High, will be among a number of parishioners who will showcase dances from Greece.

They include the Syrtos, a traditional 12-step dance for celebrations and festivals; the Ikartiotiko, from the island of Ikaria; the Zembekiko, a men’s dance that showcases many tricks; and the Malevisiotiko from Crete.

Dancing since she was 3, Makayla practices twice a week from July to February with her high-school-age dance team, Dynamiki, or “Stronger Together,” as they prepare for the Faith, Dance and Fellowship Greek dance competition.

“We perform in front of thousands of people doing what we love and, of course, have some fun at the Glendi’s afterwards, which is a huge get-together of all the dancers, directors and families



(Courtesy of St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church) Makayla Kantarze of Gilbert and Christopher Bafaloukos of Chandler are among the dancers who will be showing off native dances during the Taste of Greece Festival at St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church in Chandler.

just dancing all night,” she said.

Through the church, she helps direct

a toddlers dancing group, preschool to third grade.

“They are the cutest. I teach them how to Greek dance and perform at our festival, and they are definitely a crowd pleaser,” added Makayla, who also participates in Greek Orthodox Youth of America and Maids of Athena, a national organization of women for which she is the chapter secretary.

Christopher first danced the Greek Festival at age 3.

“I love the traditional costumes and dances from all regions of Greece,” he said, noting that he also participates in the FDF each year in California. “This is such an amazing event to be a part of. We enjoy the music and dance competition along with sharing our heritage and faith with thousands of other Greek Or-

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thodox.”

Dynamiki did not place at FDF this year, but the event is as much about relationships as it is about dancing.

“It’s about my love for Greek dance, and it’s about making friendships and memories that will last forever with others who share your culture, heritage and faith,” Christopher said.

Dancing isn’t the only attraction at A Taste of Greece.

Attendees will also enjoy great food, such as dolmathes, grapevine leaves stuffed with ground beef, seasoned rice and herbs; spanakopita, thin filo dough filled with spinach and cheeses; pastichio, Greek lasagna, baked macaroni and ground beef covered in béchamel sauce; and pork souvlaki, cubed pork marinated in oil, lemon juice and oregano, skewered, grilled and served on pita bread.

Members of St. Katherine begin preparing home-made pastries days before the event. These include popular baklava, filo dough filled with nuts and spices; kourabiedes, rich, shortbread-like cookies covered with powdered sugar; loukoumathes, pastry puffs sweetened with honey and sprinkled with cinnamon; and other traditional Greek foods, all avail-



(Courtesy of St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church) Colorful native dancing is just one of the highlights of the Taste of Greece Festival at St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church in Chandler this weekend.

able for take home.

Makayla is particularly proud of grandfather Harry Kantarze — known as “King of the Lamb Shanks.” The Gilbert resident was the president of the congregation for nine years.

Christopher recently traveled with his grandfather to his native Greek isle of Andros, where he ate traditional foods, danced the traditional island dance, listened to his family’s stories and visited the Acropolis and other ancient ruins as well as churches and monasteries.

His parents, Lisa and Nick, are leaders of GOYA, which he has been associated

with since the seventh grade. The group does community service such as Project Mexico and St. Innocent Orphanage, Chandler Christian Community Center, St. Vincent de Paul and Feed my Starving Children.

Assisting the Arizona Ladies of Philoptochos Chapters, the family also volunteers with and raises money for Kids ‘n’ Cancer Camp Agape.

Christopher is also involved with the Taste of Greece Festival in other ways besides dancing: He volunteers in a food booth, performing with the dance groups, helping with set-up and clean-

up and also instructing the youngest dance group.

“The festival is a very busy time for our church community, but I love how we are able to come together and give others a chance to see and learn about our heritage and taste some wonderful food at the same time,” he said.

Added Makayla: “A Taste of Greece is a great way for me to help carry on the traditions of my ancestors, which my papou and yiayia, my grandmother, have passed down to me and keep the Greek culture alive in my family.”

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IF YOU GO

What: A Taste of Greece Festival
Where: St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church, 2716 N. Dobson Road, Chandler.
When: Oct. 5, 5–10 p.m.; Oct. 6, 11 a.m.–10 p.m.; and Oct. 7, 11 a.m.–7 p.m.
Tickets: \$5, children under 12 free. Get a free admission when you buy a ticket at alasteofgreeceaz.com.
Info: Parking and a shuttle bus will be available at Seton High School, 1150 N. Dobson Road, just north of Ray Road. Limited handicapped parking is available on the church grounds. Proceeds benefit St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church.