

## GREEKS AROUND THE US

## Be Great Foundation for Children Visits Chicago

By Anthe Mitrakos

CHICAGO, IL – Inspired by the life of one very little but courageous being, the Be Great Alexander's Foundation for Children last month hosted its first Chicago fundraiser raising some \$8,000 for clinical research. About 100 individuals gathered on a Wrigleyville rooftop to mingle and watch a Chicago Cubs baseball game all in support of a worthy cause.

The Be Great Foundation was born of the story of Alexander James Plotas, who passed away in September of 2011 at 13 months, due to respiratory complications from a severe form of immune deficiency after a successful bone marrow transplant.

"My son was only 13 months old and he lived six months of his life in a hospital but he overcame things that would have been catastrophic for any adult," said Alison Plotas, co-founder of the Be Great Foundation. "His will to fight helped us persevere and move forward. He had the gift of being a child waking up each day happy without expectations of how his day would turn out."

The Rockville, MD-based foundation's mission enables advancements in curative treatments for children with immune deficiency by supporting improvements in bone marrow transplantation, medical equipment, and education programs for parents.

Immune deficiency affects as many as 1 million Americans and 10 million people worldwide, while one in every 33,000 newborns is estimated to have Severe Combined Immune Deficiency (SCID). Proper newborn screening is crucial for affected infants since their condition is not evident at birth. Unless diagnosed and corrected with early treatment, this disease is fatal, as affected infants succumb to opportunistic infections before their first or second birthdays.

"As parents, the number one thing you want when your child is sick is to know what's wrong and how to treat it. You want every answer one minute faster than everyone else. You want your child to be well. That's all you want," Plotas said. "Our goal is to obtain medical answers faster and to get children with immune deficiencies diagnosed sooner so that they have a chance to live a healthy life. Every child deserves to be healthy and the chance to be great," she added.

Be Great was launched just 7 weeks after Alexander's early passing, and while he was just over a year old at the time, his legacy lives on in the foundation's accomplishments.

In just two years after establishment, the foundation raised over \$100,000 for various med-



ABOVE: The Plotas family of the Be Great Foundation hosts a Chicago fundraiser in July to raise funds for clinical research. Pictured: Panagiotis, Constantine Ariston, Alison, and Ariana Plotas. RIGHT: The Be Great Foundation for Children was established in memory of Alexander Plotas who passed away at the age of 13 months from immune deficiency-related complications in 2011.

ical programs combating SCID. These include the goal of raising \$5 million to build the Center for Diagnostic Immunology and Transplantation at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC; providing cord blood donation kits to expectant parents; delivering bone marrow transplant family orientations; and creating programs to fast track diagnosis following positive newborn screening for SCID.

"In just 2 1/2 years of being a foundation, we've increased awareness of immune deficiency and established the Center for Diagnostic Immunology and Transplantation," Plotas said. "I'm incredibly proud of the work we are doing," she added. SCID has in recent years gained more national attention, and in June, the state of Illinois added SCID testing to newborn screening, bringing the total number of states screening for his deadly disease up to 21.

The Be Great Foundation raises funds to support families facing SCID by hosting a number of events and activities including an annual Seek and Find public outreach, charity walks, and privately hosted Eat and Be Great home dinner parties across the country. The heartwarming response received from generous contributors, supporters, and partners since the foundation's inception in



2011 is a testament to Alexander's life.

A smiley and determined boy with angelic blonde hair and welcoming blue eyes, Alexander has today through his journey, helped other sick children and their parents who are going through difficult medical situations.

"There's a reason we were on this unexpected journey with him...there was a reason he was our son and we were his parents and after going through our unexpected journey together we knew that there were many other families that could benefit from Alexander's journey," Plotas said.

Though Alexander's journey included many infection-related obstacles and over 160 hospital days, he remained cheerful. And while he didn't have words yet, Alexander inspired those around him to face challenges and enjoy life.

In his mother's words, Alexander's message to the world is this:

"Smile a lot. Be happy. Don't complain. Take it as it comes.

It's a beautiful day every day. Press forward and stay calm.

Remain hopeful and trust that things will work out.

Look into my eyes and see that I am NOT afraid.

Take courage from me and be strong.

Things may get darker before the light shines through.

Enjoy each day without expectation.

Smile a lot. Be happy."

-Alexander

A fourth-generation Chicagoan who studied abroad in Greece, fell in love with the culture, and attended Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral on LaSalle Blvd., Plotas lives in Rockville with her husband, Panagiotis, and their two children, eight-year-old Ariana Christina, and one-year-old Constantine Ariston.

"Alexander's legacy and his reach even three years after leaving us continues," Plotas said. "It's incredible. My heart smiles and I find renewed strength on the difficult days," she added. Alexander would have turned four years old on July 29th. After a successful fundraising event, the foundation plans to be back in Chicago in the near future. To learn more about the Be Great Alexander's Foundation for Children, visit [begreatfoundation.org](http://begreatfoundation.org).

## GOINGS ON...

## ■ THRU NOV 1

TARPON SPRINGS, FL – Night in the Islands returns to the world-famous Sponge Docks of Tarpon Springs for 2014! Saturdays, 6-11PM, May 3, Jun. 7, Jul. 12, Aug. 2, Sept. 6, Oct. 4, and Nov. 1. A free event of 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 festival is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Come join us for authentic island fun in the warm Florida sun and mark your calendar and make this a regular destination! And if you're just in town for a week or two, make sure to mark your calendar as you will not want to miss this! Tarpon Springs is a unique Greek experience in the United States, one unlike any other Greek community. Come be part of this one-of-a-kind American experience that will make you feel as if, truly, you are back in the homeland!

## ■ JULY 28 - AUGUST 2

MANHATTAN – New York Euripides Summer Festival 2014 presents Andromache, an American Thyme Theatre Free Euripides Summer Series production. East River Park Amphitheatre: Monday, Jul. 28 and Tuesday, Jul. 29 at 6PM (FDR Drive overpass - Grand Street exit - Betw. Cherry St. & Jackson St.); Jackie Robinson Park Bandshell: Wednesday, Jul. 30 and Thursday, Jul. 31 at 6PM (85 Broadhurst Avenue - at 148th St.); The Glicker-Milstein Theatre, Columbia University: Saturday, Aug. 2 at 8PM (3009 Broadway - at 118th Street - Diana Center Building - Lower Level). Reservations are not required but recommended for Aug. 2. Andromache on [www.SmartTix.com](http://www.SmartTix.com) or call 1-212-868-4444 [www.AmericanThymeTheatre.yolasite.com](http://www.AmericanThymeTheatre.yolasite.com).

## ■ AUGUST 16-17

WINCHESTER CITY, VA – Yasou! The annual Winchester Greek Festival in 2014 will take place on August 16 & 17. Join us in celebrating our Feast Day, the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. Observe our proud Greek culture and traditions. Sample our legendary Greek culinary fare. And experience our renown Greek music and dance. Become Greek for a day... Truly great fun for the whole family! Come hungry... A large selection of tasty Greek food is offered. From the kitchen, we offer baked entries which includes Athenian Chicken, Moussaka, Pastitsio, and Spanakopita. From the spits, we offer Gyros, Souvlaki, and Roasted Lamb. And from our bakers, we offer an assortment of delicious sweets and pastries that will satisfy any sweet tooth. Check out our menu webpage for a complete listing with descriptions. Want to learn more about our faith? Informal guided tours of the church are offered by our clergy. Questions about our faith and traditions are welcome. Also, the Parish Store will be open offering religious items and reading material of the Orthodox faith. Other retail vendors will also be set-up displaying their various items for purchase. Admission is free and ample free parking is available. Admission Fee: Free Parking & Admission, Food & Drink for purchase. Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church 1700 Amherst Street in Winchester. Saturday, Aug. 16, 2014 11AM-7PM and Sunday, Aug. 17 12Noon-7PM. Church Phone: (540) 667-1416 Church Email [dormition@verizon.net](mailto:dormition@verizon.net) Festival Website [dormition.va.goarch.org/greek-festival](http://dormition.va.goarch.org/greek-festival). About our Parish: he Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church in Winchester was originally founded by a small group of Greek Americans, but today the parish aptly reflects the American experience and comprises approximately 100 families representing several different Ethnic groups, all witnessing to the Good News of

Jesus Christ, striving to reflect His love, and living according to the ancient Christian principles and disciplines of the Orthodox Christian Church.

## ■ AUGUST 17-19

ANCHORAGE, AK – The 20th Annual Alaska Greek Festival takes place from August 17 to 19 at the Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church, 2800 O'Malley Road in Anchorage. Come enjoy the tastes, smells, sights, and sounds of Greece! Events & Activities a tour of the nearly-completed new Church, including lessons on the history, traditions, and worship of the Greek Orthodox faith. A cooking demonstration by Laurie Constantino – how to make baklava and dolmades. Dancing groups performing traditional Greek dances, dressed in authentic regional costumes. In addition to the food and drinks on hand, there is an array of imported Greek cheeses, olives, olive oil, grape leaves, halva, pasta, herbs, cookies and candy. The hot summers in the Continental United States is the perfect time to take a trip and cool off in beautiful Alaska. And when you do, please remember to visit us, as it will be a unique experience: Hellenism, Alaska-style!

## ■ AUGUST 29 – SEPTEMBER 1

COLUMBUS, OH – Live like a Greek for an entire long weekend! Experience the culture and ancestry of Greece and our Orthodox Christian faith! Be part of this year's annual Greek festival (our 42nd!) at the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral, 555 N. High Street (Goodale Boulevard at High Street) in Columbus. Friday, Aug. 29 through Monday, Sept. 1. Come and connect with heritage and traditions that are centuries old, but still contemporary in their focus. Our Cathedral tours will inspire you, the Orthodox Christian Bookstore will educate you, the food and drink will entice you and the hospitality will overwhelm you. Stop by the shops, enjoy the music and dancing, visit the exhibits and enjoy the wonderful Greek pastries. (614) 224-9020 or visit our website: [www.greek-cathedral.com](http://www.greek-cathedral.com). We look forward to seeing you there!

## ■ NOVEMBER 9

MANHATTAN – St. Michael's Home is pleased to announce that our 2014 Annual Name Day Gala will be held on Sunday, Nov. 9 at the Metropolitan Club, 1 East 60th Street in Manhattan. In conjunction with the Gala, St. Michael's honors a distinguished member of the Greek Orthodox Community who embodies and promotes the finer qualities and traditions of our Faith and heritage. This year's recipient of the 2014 Archangel Michael Award is Mr. Stephen Cherpelis. Mr. Cherpelis has given tirelessly to the Greek Orthodox Community as an Archon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1st Vice President of the Archdiocesan Cathedral of Holy Trinity, devoted member of St. Nicholas Church of Flushing where he was instrumental in the building of the expanded community center and school, Vice Chair of the New York Diocesan Council, member of Leadership 100, and a major contributor and fundraising chairman of the Ronald McDonald House. For more information please contact us by phone at (914)-476-3374, by email at [development@stmichaelshome.org](mailto:development@stmichaelshome.org) or visit our website at <http://www.stmichaelshome.org/what-our-residents-do/gala/>.

## ■ NOTE TO OUR READERS

This calendar of events section is a complimentary service to the Greek American community. All parishes, organizations and institutions are encouraged to e-mail their information regarding the event 3-4 weeks ahead of time, and no later than Monday of the week before the event, to [english.edition@thenationalherald.com](mailto:english.edition@thenationalherald.com)

## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Do you find that you are eating out more, less, or about the same this summer as you have done during previous summers?

Please email your response to [scaros@thenationalherald.com](mailto:scaros@thenationalherald.com)

We may publish some responses as Letters to the Editor in a future issue.



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