

Leros provides refuge to migrants

The eastern Aegean island of Leros has received an estimated 3,500 would-be migrants from neighboring Turkey this year, according to authorities, who say they continue to offer hospitality and care to the exhausted visitors despite the drain on their resources.

Some 250 immigrants have arrived on the island over the past two weeks alone. Last week, four arrived by jet ski.

But even as authorities on other Aegean islands like Patmos block their ports to the influx of immigrants, locals on Leros appear to be unfazed.

The local coast guard and Orthodox Church continue to do their best to rescue and tend for migrants arriving on their shores. Even businessmen have joined in the humanitarian effort. One hotelier has been offering temporary refuge for immigrants in his rooms for more than a year. "I was a migrant in the USA for 35 years," said Fotis Filakouris, who runs the Ara hotel. "I know what it means to be an immigrant and that's why I don't call them illegal immigrants," he said. Filakouris says he is not receiving European Union

funding for the service he offers to the Europe-bound migrants. Recently he received state compensation for expenses he incurred last year. "They won't change my good intentions, I am borrowing money from my brother to pay my bills," Filakouris said, adding that he had taken on an Afghan boy to help him with odd jobs in the hotel. He said that some locals criticize his actions. "It upsets me that they don't feel any sense of social obligation to support these people," he said.

The local church has set aside the

ground floor of the local old people's home for migrants, cleaned twice a week by members of the congregation. Most migrants arriving on the island are taken there. Those who do not fit there are transferred to two makeshift hostels. But there are concerns about what happens to these migrants when they are transferred to Athens. According to sources, when 80 migrant mothers with their children were transferred from Leros to Piraeus about a month ago, there was no one waiting to collect them.



Thousands to return fire aid

More than 11,000 residents of Ileia, in the Peloponnese, have been sent notification letters by the Economy and Finance Ministry that inform them that they have to return the 3,000 euros in cash they each received in aid payments in the wake of last year's devastating forest fires.

It emerged yesterday that the ministry is asking some 11,500 people to return money because it believes that they have not produced the paperwork necessary to prove that the state handout was warranted. The move represents something of a public relations disaster for the government, which quickly set up a system free of red tape to distribute financial aid to people in the fire-stricken areas. Opposition parties accused the government at the time of using the scheme to "buy" the votes of locals in the weeks before the September 16 general election. The ministry's letters have caused anger among many residents, who now must return the money they claimed more than a year ago.

Antikythera

Mechanism exhibition

The first specialized exhibition focusing on the controversial Antikythera Mechanism opens Wednesday at the Ionian Centre for Scientific Studies in Plaka, downtown Athens, in cooperation with the team of scientists studying the device.

The visitors of the exhibition, that will run until December 14, 2008, will learn about unknown applications of the Mechanism in ancient Greek calendars, the study of the movement of the Sun and the Moon, and eclipse prediction.

The exhibition is held under the auspices of the ministry of culture and in cooperation with the National Archaeological Museum of Athens where the Antikythera Mechanism is housed.

The Antikythera mechanism is believed to be an ancient mechanical calculator (also described as a



"mechanical computer") designed to calculate astronomical positions.

It was discovered in the Antikythera wreck off the Greek island of Antikythera, between Kythera and Crete, and has been dated to about 150-100 BC. Technological artifacts of similar complexity appeared a thousand years later.

Sometime before Easter 1900,

Elias Stadiatis, a Greek sponge diver, discovered the wreck of an ancient cargo ship off Antikythera Island at a depth of 42 m (138 ft). Sponge divers retrieved several statues and other artifacts from the site.

The mechanism itself was discovered on May 17, 1901, when archaeologist Valerios Stais noticed that a piece of rock recovered from the site had a gear wheel embedded in it. Examination revealed that the "rock" was in fact a heavily encrusted and corroded mechanism that had survived the shipwreck in three main parts and dozens of smaller fragments.

The device itself was surprisingly thin, about 33 cm (13 in) high, 17 cm (6.7 in) wide, and 9 cm (3.5 in) thick, made of bronze and originally mounted in a wooden frame. It was inscribed with a text of over 2,000 characters, many of which have only just recently been deciphered.

End of road for gang that stole millions

A gang that carried out at least six armed robberies on banks, post offices and businesses in Athens and stole between 2 and 3 million euros over the last year has been caught, police said yesterday. Four Georgian nationals, aged 21 to 33, and a 30-year-old Greek have been arrested. Officers are still looking for the alleged ringleader, a Greek who is thought to be in Russia, as well as seven other suspects. The gang, often disguised as policemen, went after big targets and its biggest hauls were during a raid on a cigarette wholesaler in Koropi, east of Athens, last November, when they came away with 725,650 in cash and one on a security van that yielded 730,000 euros in April. Officers found an automatic weapon, several handguns, a police uniform and two stolen motorcycles when they raided the men's homes.