

Opa! It's a smash hit

THE gods were watching over the city as the Gold Coast became the 'Greek Coast' for the day. Although the clouds were hovering, the weather was near perfect as almost 20,000 turned out in support of the 9th annual Greek Festival at Evandale Park -- and some even said it was better than the Brisbane Festival.

Councillor Susie Douglas officially opened the event in the traditional fashion by smashing plates and acknowledging the weeks of preparation put in by the 2500-strong Greek community.

People from as far as New Zealand and right across the country turned out in support.

Mayor Ron Clarke announced the Gold Coast was to be known as the 'Greek Coast' and said it was great to see so many sharing their origins with the community.

Opposition leader and Surfers Paradise MP John-Paul Langbroek also supported the event, saying: "We are proud we have a community like the Greek community.

"They really typify what multi-culturalism is all about," he said.

Festival organisers Helen Raptis and Sandra Voukelatos said the crowd was one of the best in the event's history.

"It's such a huge turnout this year," said Mrs Raptis.

"We were washed out last year with the rain and the council wouldn't let us on but this year we had no problem because the rain has stayed away.

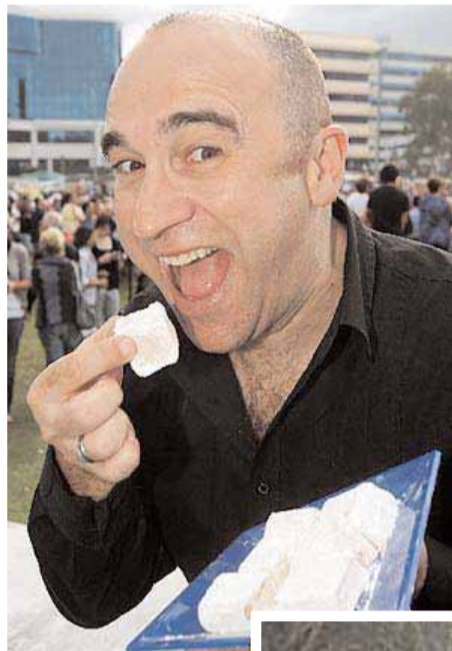
"I am so delighted the city has come together to support us."

Although the gate entry was \$5, families arrived in their thousands to sample the delights of the Greek cuisine and enjoy a taste of Greek culture.

"It's been really appealing for the families and it's great to see so many people sitting on the grass enjoying the day," said Mrs Raptis.

"There's really been something for everyone from the foodies to those looking for a bit of entertainment.

"It's really good to see so many littlies



George Kapiniaris -- best known for his stint on television comedy Acropolis Now -- performed a comedy act and played with the band before hosting the loukoumia (turkish delight) eating contest.

"This is just awesome," he said.

"It is the first time I have been here but I reckon it is better than the Brisbane Festival.

"There's such a strong turnout and it's great to see not only the Greek community, but the community as a whole get behind something like this."

More than 1.3 tonnes of octopus, 12,000 souvlakia, about 20,000 honey puffs, along with hundreds of kilos of calamari and 500kg of haloumi cheese were devoured at the festival.

RIGHT: Archie Procopiou cooked up traditional souvlakia all day.
Photographer : Brendan Radke



out there and watch them experience a culture they are not used to seeing."

Special guest



TOP: St Anna's dancers entertain the crowds.

LEFT: Festival organisers Helen Raptis, Sandra Voukelatos and Rebecca Cominos.

BOTTOM LEFT: Jim Raptis sits with Father Romanos Stergiou at the official opening of the festival.

BOTTOM: Gold Coast councillor Susie Douglas smashes plates to mark the opening of the festival.



Stephanie Fardoulys and James Fardoulys, of Brisbane.



Panayiota Demetre hands down her loukoumades recipe to her daughters, Suzy Demetre and Helen Demetre, of Brisbane.

