

Old school Greek artisan

Kon (Kosmas) Rekaris at the age of 77 is one of the few remaining artisans in the shoemaking trade.

From inception up until the setting up process, how did you start your business?

I arrived in Australia on board the ship Aurelia on July 21 1959. My brother Vasilis and my sister were already here.

The next day I went to work at my brother's cobbler shop that was on Exhibition St.

After about one month I started working at a car factory but at the same time I would help my brother at his shop when I would take off from work.

Very soon with the help of my brother I opened up a small shop in Coburg.

In about a year's time my parents came from Greece and my father took over the shop as he was the true artisan.

I was helping him with the clients until noon and afterwards I would work my shift at the factory.

Finally, in 1963 we moved to the then Collins Place (currently Exhibition St.) and for the last 46 years I've been operating my store at 7 Exhibition St.

Did your Greek Australian background help you or impede you during your early days?

My coming to Australia was more of a positive experience. I was poised to work hard and succeed.

My customers were from all walks of life, from the

Victorian Premier Sir Henry Bolte to a street cleaner. But they all treated me with respect.

With the Greek community I lost touch for a number of years due to my busy workload, however, that didn't stop me from professing my Greek identity.

You've been operating your store in the CBD and especially in the Greek precinct for over 50 years; can you tell us about the past and the present?

Well the main difference between then and now is that back then we were cheerful and carefree; we were happy with just a few things whereas nowadays we want it all and still it's not enough.

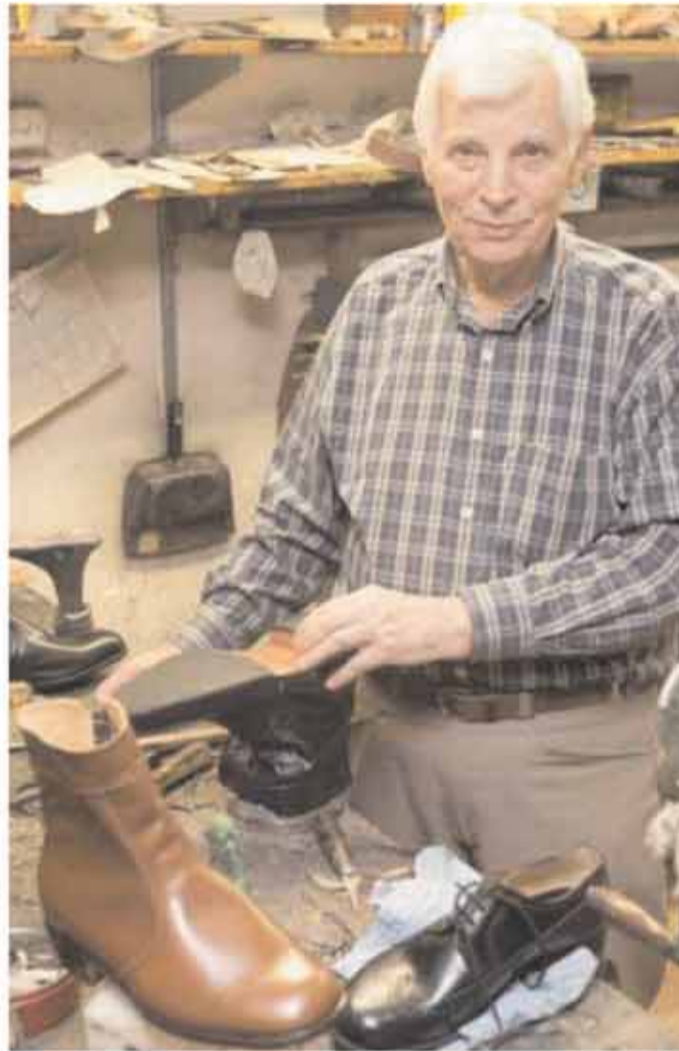
Back then a family would be sufficed living in one room, now we want just one room to place our TV in it.

How is business currently?

Business has been and still is very satisfactory. And my customers are quite impressed when they hear that I even receive orders from as far as London.

Arguably very few craftsmen such as you remain in Melbourne and in Australia. What does the future hold for your business?

Nowadays, we have lost our patience and we want everything done immediately.



At the age of 77 Kon Rekaris is still going strong as one of the few remaining artisans making hand made shoes at his store in the CBD.

In the old days for someone to learn the trade they had to work as an apprentice for many years, most of which without pay. And this is how I learnt the trade next to my father.

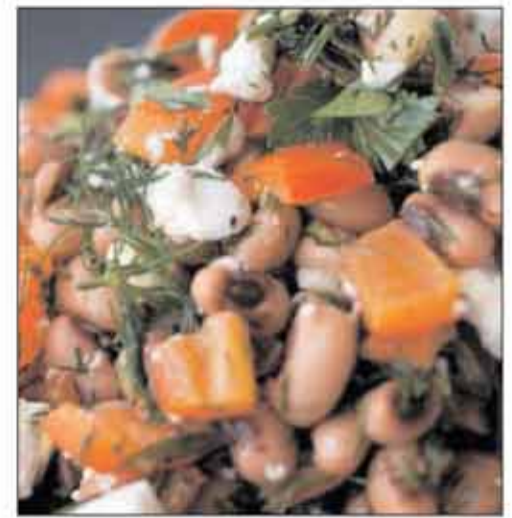
Now people want to see what they can gain instead of what they can offer.

There are very few

remaining shoemakers who possess the traditional skills of the trade and who are trying to maintain the trade.

Most of the people are content with the quick, easy and hasty solution.

Article from Neos Kosmos English Edition.



Greek Black-Eyed Peas Salad

Black-eyed peas may not be part of the Greek New Year's tradition, as they are in the American South, but this recipe still makes a great, light dish.

- 1 1/2 cups black-eyed peas, washed and picked over
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt to taste
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 2 plump garlic cloves, green shoots removed, minced
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds, lightly crushed in a mortar
- 1 red onion, halved and sliced (optional)
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh dill
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta

1. Place the beans in a pot with the bay leaf and cover with water by 2 to 3 inches. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, add salt to taste and simmer gently until peas are tender but not mushy, about 45 to 50 minutes. Drain through a colander set over a bowl. Transfer the black-eyed peas to a salad bowl.
2. Meanwhile, heat a medium skillet over medium-high heat, and add 1 tablespoon of the oil. When it is hot, add the red pepper and cook, stirring often, until just crisp-tender, about 2 to 3 minutes. Add the garlic and cumin seeds, and stir together for another minute or two until the garlic is fragrant. Remove from the heat and toss with the black-eyed peas. Toss with the vinegar, remaining olive oil, 1/4 cup of the bean broth, and salt and pepper to taste. Cool to room temperature.
3. If using the red onion, place it in a bowl, cover with cold water, and soak for 5 to 10 minutes. Drain and rinse. Add to the salad along with the dill and parsley. Toss well. Sprinkle the feta over the top, and serve.

Yield: Serves four to six.

Advance preparation: You can make the dish through step 2 up to three days before you wish to serve. Keep well covered in the refrigerator. Proceed with step 3 shortly before serving.

Article from The New York Times

Dragon's Cave in Kastoria opens to visitors

The Dragon's Cave in Kastoria, northwestern Greece, a site of exceptional natural beauty and boasting one of the most sophisticated air recycling and climate maintenance systems, is open to the public after a two-year project



to make the site accessible to visitors, with the formal inauguration taking place on Tuesday. The opening to the cave, which is situated close to Lake Kastoria and was discovered in 1940 by three local residents, has the shape of a dragon's mouth, thus the name.

According to local legends, a dragon guarded the cave and spurted flames from its mouth when anyone dared to approach it. Tourist corridors have been constructed, while stalactite- and stalagmite-friendly lighting has been installed, and measures have also been taken to protect the cave's rare flora. It is the only Cave in Greece with fresh-water lakes, given the proximity of Lake Kastoria.

Bones of cave bears have been discovered in the cave, dating back 10,000 years.

There are an estimated 10,000 recorded caves throughout Greece, and the Dragon's Cave is now among the country's 12 caves open to visitors. The Greek caves that are currently open to visitors are Petralona Cave in Halkidiki, Perama Cave in Ioannina, Alistrati Cave in Serres, Dyros Cave, Mara Cave in Drama, Dikteou Androu Cave in Crete, Mellisanthi Cave in Cephalonia, Pramaton Cave in Ioannina, Aghios Georgios Cave in Kilkis, Sykia Cave in Chios, Katsias Cave in Tripolis, and Vathi Cave.