



Speak up ... Evangelia Balayannis is set to represent her school in Canberra. Photo: Fiona Morris

Political debate good for the constitution

EVANGELIA BALAYANNIS hadn't really thought about a career in politics but after attending the State Constitutional Convention for schools in November last year, the year 12 student from St Spyridon College has had a taste of the power that comes with walking the hallowed halls of parliament.

Balayannis so impressed her 70 fellow delegates at the State Convention that she was chosen by secret ballot to represent NSW in the National Schools Constitutional Convention in Canberra next month.

More than 120 students from government, independent and Catholic schools from around Australia, including metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas, will attend this year's convention.

Balayannis, 17, is the only representative from her school in Malabar who will attend the annual event and one of just 30 students from NSW selected by their peers to discuss and debate constitutional issues.

The aim of the convention is to promote understanding among young Australians

about our constitution and government. Balayannis says the state convention was a great experience, particularly as she hadn't done school debating before. She is also interested in studying law at university.

The topics students discussed at the State Convention were the division of power between the states and the Commonwealth and who should be a head of state and what power they should hold.

"We got to debate topics that I am really interested in and see what other people's views were," she says. "It is interesting to see on which things we agreed and disagreed."

"We also had to write a one-page letter about one of the topics to show that we had some sort of understanding about its background. We go to Canberra for three days in March and the NSW team will be debating against the other states about different constitutional issues."

The main debate will be on whether Australia should become a republic.

Keeli Cambourne



New childcare centre playground opens

Member for Marrickville Carmel Tebbutt today joined the local children to celebrate the opening of the new outdoor playground at the Greek Orthodox Community Childcare Centre in Petersham.

Ms Tebbutt said the Greek Orthodox Community Childcare Centre successfully applied for \$50,930 for the project under the NSW Government's Community Building Partnership Program. "The playground is an integral part of the childcare centre and will provide a fun and safe space for local children."

"It will be used by the children aged 0-2 who attend the centre and come from all over the Inner West." The \$50,930 grant is providing new playground equipment, new artificial grass, an extension of the protective shade structure and new sand pits.

Ms Tebbutt said the new playground is a shining example of what can be achieved for the community when governments recognise the value of investing in local organisations.

"We asked the community for their input on what projects should get funding from the NSW Government's Community Building Partnership Program and the playground upgrade was highlighted as an important priority," Ms Tebbutt said. "The Greek Orthodox Community Childcare Centre, established in 1979, is operated by the Greek Orthodox Community of NSW - one of the strongest community organisations in Marrickville. "It's important we continue to support organisations which provide assistance to the people who need it the most."

"The Greek Orthodox Childcare Community centre caters for 58 children from all walks of life, many of them from non-English speaking families or disadvantaged backgrounds. "By providing funding support, we can help organisations like the Greek Orthodox Community of NSW keep costs down, ensuring that quality services are available to families at an affordable cost."

In addition to the childcare centre, the Greek Orthodox Community of NSW operates language schools, an aged care hostel, women's auxiliary and youth committee.

EAT OUT best




Perfectly cooked and priced: Eleni's @ Civic offers top Greek cuisine, (above) chef Peter Conistis, (below) meatballs, (inset) feta terrine Pictures: John Fotliadis



restaurant

ELENI'S @ CIVIC
 Cnr Pitt and Goulburn Sts, City; 8080 7013
 Open: Daily for lunch; dinner Monday-Friday
 Food: Greek
 Drink: Licensed
 Expect to pay: \$24 (two courses)
 Vibe: There's no ambience sitting near the ground floor bar but come for quality food at minuscule prices
 Access: Short walk from Central and Town Hall stations; near Goulburn St parking station

Don't be deterred by appearances as the food makes this Sydney's best-value Greek eatery.

Conistis' mother, Eleni, has retired, but the menu is "inspired by her cooking".

"I have plans for another restaurant later but right now I'm enjoying doing this in the spirit of Eleni," he says.

From nine small mezes plates two of us shared Dodoni feta terrine (\$11), keftedes (\$12) and dolmathakia (\$8.50). The hearty oblong-shaped serve of this famous feta from northern Greece acquired zing from a drizzle of pinenut and currant dressing. Keftedes, eight tangy lamb meatballs, came with a pot of house-made roasted tomato sauce, while the dolmathakia - eight stuffed vine leaves - had a dash of preserved lemon. The vine leaves were a standout, especially at about a dollar apiece.

All six mains are \$15 and we shared moussaka, the restaurant's signature dish, and lamb shank, slow-roasted for nine hours. No wonder the moussaka is Eleni's flagship. Dismiss all recollections of stodgy, tomatoey versions and tuck

into this hearty offering of layered minced lamb, eggplant and potato. The shank itself was modest in size but big on flavour and rested on a generous serve of tomato-tinged orzo, pasta shaped like grains of rice.

Conistis is a dab hand with desserts but we were too full to test his chocolate and hazelnut baklava, served with poached figs (\$8). Pity, as in 2000 another of his sweets creations, baked nougat tart with orange blossom custard, candied pistachios and Iranian fairy floss, was named dessert dish of the year by a leading fashion/travel magazine.

A pleasant Mornington Peninsula pinot noir was \$42 and two knockout, traditional Greek coffees \$4 a cup.

The menu has just been tweaked with new mains including twice-roasted chicken and slow-cooked lamb shoulder but prices remain at \$15.

Verdict: Fresh, tasty and perfectly cooked food from a master of Greek cuisine. And for an almost embarrassingly tiny cost.

Jeff Collerson