

communities. Please tell us more about this!

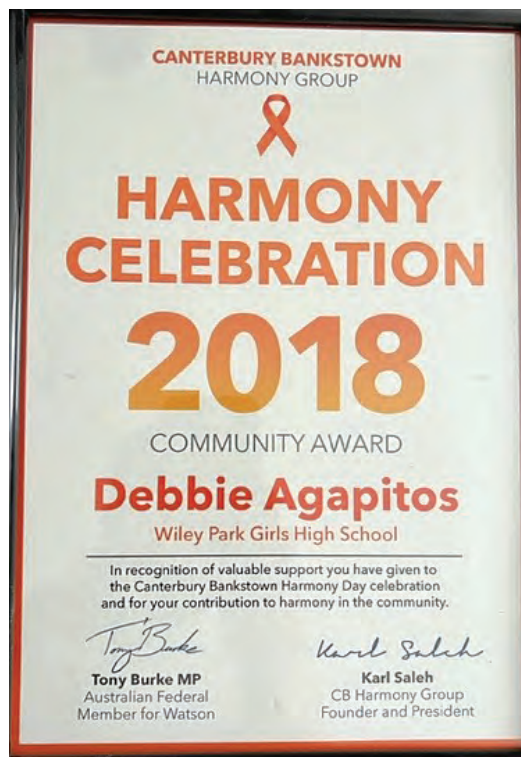
Yes, that is true. My overarching aim as an educational leader has always been about community links with students, with teachers and with families across NSW. These links have included the former NSW State Governor Dame Marie Bashir, the Honourable Federal MP Tony Burke, the State MP Jihad Dib and Archaeologist Dr Jim Bowler who discovered "Mungo Man. I actually met Dr Bowler through the City Country Alliance "Mungo Youth Project". On this site in Lake Mungo dynamic connections between Wiley Park Girls High School staff student and parents were created strengthening the self-image of our own heritage, diversity, religion and cultural traditions. I also invited SBS presenter Maeve O'Meara to the school to launch a student/staff/parent community cookbook created by staff with the school's journalist team. That was a memorable moment for my students and their families! It was about valuing their backgrounds and traditions! I initiated many co-curriculum programs bringing the community into the life of the school.

Ms Agapitos, what does your Greek heritage mean to you and how did that contribute to the person or educator you have been?

I believe Greekness is centred around family, respect, trust, integrity and honesty. I was strongly influenced by my parents Andrew and Nina Stergoulis and grandparents, Despina and Evangelos Stergoulis and Michael and Jasmin (Mitsa) Nicholas. They demonstrated the true value of "philotimo" (φιλότιμο = the value of showing worthiness of who you are in helping others) considering and respecting others. They were visionary and extraordinary in their achievements. I am so proud to say that my children Katherine and Malcolm uphold our strong Greek heritage, making significant contributions



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to the community and through their career achievements as an international lawyer and dental practitioner respectively.

So, your Greek heritage has been a major factor, you say, Ms Agapitos?

Indeed! As stated before, my Greekness was instilled in me by my parents and grandparents. Can I tell you that my grandfather, Michael Nicholas (Hatziyiannakis) was the founder of the Greek Orthodox Church in Darwin? He was the President of the Greek Orthodox Community, and he commissioned the building of the first Greek Orthodox Church in Darwin. Michael promoted the Greek Orthodox faith laying the foundation stone of the church named in honour of his father, Nicholas Hatziyiannakis. The Greek Orthodox Church there is "St Nicholas" with the then Archbishop Theophylactos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia. Let me reveal to you that it was actually the Archbishop who introduced my father, Andrew, to my mother, Nina! Michael assisted many of the newly arrived Greek immigrants from Kalymnos seeking employment by successfully guaranteeing them work and housing in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. He was a huge support to this community. My father, Andrew Stergoulis was a man of integrity and a successful businessman. Born in Sydney in 1928, he was a true gentleman and really presented to us the strong value of tradition, Greek heritage and the importance of education, particularly Mathematics. His words of wisdom were to "always try your best" and respect everyone! Sadly, Dad passed away in 1995 at the age of 66 years but his values are upheld within our family and continue this day to his grandchildren. My mother, Chrysaphina (Nina) Stergoulis who was born in Perth in 1936 is such a huge inspiration to us all. Such a beautiful gracious woman and well respected by us all. She has largely contributed to the Greek Community through her involvement in the Castellorizian Ladies Auxiliary, Greek Young Matrons and St George Greek Orthodox Church committee. Mum has inspired our family demonstrating life learning. She to this day, now in her 80s continues to learn languages – she can read

and write fluently in Greek and Italian!

Your Greekness has had a major bearing on who you are! Have you visited our homeland, Greece?

Indeed, I have. I visited both places that have formed my Hellenic heritage, that is Kastellorizo and the Peloponnesian village of Zatouna this year with my family. I loved my journeys to Greece as these give me pride each time I go and further strengthen my Greek spirit and love for Hellenism and Hellenic values.

What has been your message to your teachers, to your staff throughout your leadership?

To us Greek-Australians, education is about respect and trust. I have always said that it is vital we get to know our students well, to know their learning and to understand their hearts, because once we do that, we can then capture their hearts. I was always wanting to empower my teachers to get to understand their students all the time, so this becomes a sustained model. Education is all about relationships with people, our students and having trust with them. Humility and "philotimo" go hand in hand. It is about supporting people. My message to all educators is to try find the strengths in others so they themselves can reach their potential so they can find their own success.

Ms Agapitos, what is life after 40 years of dedication to education like now that you have retired?

Dimitri, for me learning is forever, and I will never stop learning. It is lifelong. My students will continue learning just like my own children. I have been involved in different aspects in our Greek community and society in general, for example in raising funds for the restoration of our Greek Orthodox Church of St Sophia at Darlinghurst in conjunction with the Greek Orthodox Community of Sydney and NSW. At this point in time, I am working part time and enjoying a new career in serving the community for the Australian government.

What is your final message to all and especially other Greek-Australian educators, Ms Agapitos?

My message is that the celebration of our achievements at our schools are underpinned by the strength and inclusion of our communities!

Ms Agapitos, we thank you greatly for taking time to talk to us and providing us with an insight into your educational life as well as your Greek heritage. We wish you all the best in your retirement and any other challenges you have taken up maintaining the same spirit to contribute to our society!

Thank you, Dimitri, and a thank you to "Ο ΚΟΣΜΟΣ" Greek newspaper for the opportunity they gave me! I am humbled and I wish your readers and the Greek community «Χαρούμενα Χριστούγεννα και μία καλή χρονιά το 2023 με υγεία, αγάπη, ειρήνη, ευημερία και πρόοδο σε όλους. Χρόνια Πολλά!»