

P NORTHWEST PASSAGES

THE PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NORTHWEST WASHINGTON

SEPTEMBER 23, 2009 ■ PAGE 19

Festival is labor of love, heritage for Greek women

By **LINDA LOMBARDI**
Current Correspondent

The line snaked around the church courtyard and out to the parking lot on Saturday evening as patrons waited to order food at the Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church festival. Many return every year, but few probably have any idea what it takes to mount the three-day festival that has been a fixture at the 16th Street church for 49 years.

On a morning before the festival, two women punching at a big ball of dough in the church basement are wearing blue aprons bearing the motto "It's Chic to be Greek." This morning, though, it is hard work to be Greek, at least if you're one of the dozen or so women gathered to make pastry.

The women of the women's auxiliary have been gathering since June to prepare one menu item per week, and today's assignment is diples, a fried pastry coated in honey. The morning began with 15 dozen eggs mixed with enough flour to make a dough of the proper texture, and this large bowl is only one of several. The others are out in the church hall, where dough is being cut into balls and patted down, then taken to a pasta machine to be rolled thin.

Two of the machines are electric, but Dina Papoulias says she



likes to use the one you crank by hand, and after 38 years of making diples, she's had plenty of time to decide her preference. After four passes through the machine, the strip of dough is almost paper-thin and at least 4 feet long.

Suzi Raptis takes it, drapes it over two hands held in the air, and spreads it out on a well-floured table, where another woman uses the width of her hand



Bill Petros/The Current

Dina Papoulias, top, was one of about a dozen women who baked for hours in preparation for last weekend's Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church festival. The group makes everything from scratch: "We've used the same recipes for over 40 years — we've cultivated them to where we think they're perfect," said festival coordinator Andrew Recachinas.



to measure where to cut it into squares. Raptis is helping out for the first time. When her family

made diples at home, "my mother would say 'Honey, look,' but I wouldn't pay attention," so now she's learning how.

The square sheets of dough, about the size of a paperback

book, are next laid out on trays and rolled back to the small kitchen, where three women are elbow-to-elbow at the stove. Dropped into hot oil, the pastry quickly becomes covered with little bubbles, and

See **Festival**/Page 26

Spanish classes for toddlers? Si!

By **STEPHANIE KANOWITZ**
Current Correspondent

You could teach a child that the Spanish word for "red" is "rojo" by using flashcards and repetition. Or an actor dressed as a 16th-century Spanish artist could point out the red in one of his most famous works while telling the artist's life story.

Pilar O'Leary and Alexandra Migoya prefer the second approach — experiential learning. That's why they started Isabella & Ferdinand, a Spanish language immersion program for children ages 1 through 9.

Wait. Spanish lessons for a 12-month-old?

Research shows that it's much easier for children to become fluent in a language when they begin learning it early, explained O'Leary, a Palisades resident who is fluent in English, French, Italian and Spanish.

"It comes much more viscerally to them,"



Courtesy of Pilar O'Leary

Alexandra Migoya, left, and Pilar O'Leary are launching a Spanish language school in Northwest offering experiential learning.

she said. "They don't have to think about it. They're not translating."

See **Isabella**/Page 22

HOME & GARDEN

Aid and save with local startup group

By **CHRIS BARYLICK**
Current Correspondent

Your folks always used to remind you to turn out the lights when you left a room. Now you can get discounts and deals for doing so.

Local startup firm Earth Aid introduced a first-of-its-kind energy-savings reward program at an event on the Georgetown waterfront this month. The company runs a Web site where residents can save toward special offers at local businesses by going greener in their daily lives.



Chris Baryllick/The Current

Council members pose with Earth Aid CEO Ben Bixby and Agraria owner Dan Simons.

The premise is relatively simple: Create an account at earthaid.net, enter your current utility information, and the site begins to track your energy use while creating a base-

line for comparison based on your past use (such as gas, water and electric bills). Subscribers then receive points that can then be used to get discounts or deals at approximately 30 local businesses including Treet online bakery, Love Cafe coffee shop and Balance yoga

studio.

Representatives from participating businesses as well as D.C. Council Chairman See **Earth Aid**/Page 22

ISABELLA

From Page 19

But the vocabulary lists of a traditional language class are lost on such little learners. And, as it turns out, they aren't the most effective learning tool for kids of any age. For better comprehension, get comprehensive, say Migoya and O'Leary, friends since attending Georgetown University's law school together in 1993.

They structured the Isabella & Ferdinand classes, which will kick off Oct. 5 in the top two floors of a town house at 5117 MacArthur Blvd. NW in the Palisades, based on the idea that culture provides the best context for learning language. The Baby Barcelona (for ages 12 to 24 months) and Olé and Play (for 2 to 3 years) classes emulate Mommy and Me groups. Parents accompany their children as they learn the basics — the alphabet, numbers and colors — via music, singing and dancing. Older children study vocabulary sets, but they also get to dress up and act out what they learn about Spanish history, literature and music.

For instance, "if they're learning about colors in Spanish, they'll learn it through studying about [Diego] Velázquez, who was a very important painter," said O'Leary, a former lawyer, investment banker and not-for-profit executive. "They will learn of course how to say red in Spanish, how to say blue, but

they'll do it by looking at a reproduction of 'Las Meninas,' one of the most important paintings by Velázquez."

Taking advantage of local Spanish cultural resources, Isabella & Ferdinand partnered with the Embassy of Spain, GALA Hispanic Theatre and the Spanish department at Georgetown. As a result, during this inaugural fall session, students will get a private guided tour of the exhibition "The Art of Power: Royal Armor and Portraits From Imperial Spain" at the National Gallery of Art and take a trip to see the Washington Ballet's performance of "Don Quixote."

Classes are offered weekdays and Saturdays in 10-week fall, winter and spring sessions and full academic year options. Tuition depends on age and attendance. For instance, attending Baby Barcelona classes once a week for one session costs \$350, while the cost of sending an older student three times a week for the full year runs \$2,495.

The program's six instructors are all native Spanish speakers and will teach the King's Spanish, "which, to us, means teaching the very best level of Spanish," O'Leary said. "There are all sorts of dialectical differences from country to country in Latin America. Our focus is to really teach a very standard Spanish."

Spanish is an important language to learn, the program's founders say. It is the second most used language in the United States;

in D.C., 8 percent of the population speaks it, according to the U.S. Census.

Then again, Migoya, the daughter of a Dominican mother and Spanish father, and O'Leary, whose mother is from Colombia, could be a bit biased. They were raised bilingually and want to pass that tradition on to their daughters. That goal led them to search for extracurricular options in D.C. Although schools start foreign language instruction in the fourth grade, that wasn't enough, O'Leary said.

"Initially we had thought we would just get together a group of parents like ourselves to organize a language study group ... and we found a huge need and a huge desire for a more established program like this in the Washington, D.C., area. So, we decided to take on the challenge," she said.

One instructor, Sofia Ortiz, a Puerto Rican native who grew up in Mexico, has been teaching Spanish culture as a volunteer in D.C. elementary schools. "I think what Isabella & Ferdinand is offering apart from other schools in the area is such a wide visual input — visual, musical, tactile," she said. "The classroom environment will be relaxed and happy but challenging at the same time. And I think that's why I like it so much. It's going to be challenging, and it's going to be great."

Registration is open until Sept. 30. Visit isabellaandferdinand.com for more information or to sign up.

EARTH AID

From Page 19

Vincent Gray, at-large Council member Phil Mendelson and Ward 3 Council member Mary Cheh joined the company in announcing the new site during a Sept. 8 event at Agraria, one of the program participants.

Gray called the effort a "fantastic idea," while Mendelson said it's a "two-fer" that promotes both energy efficiency as well as business involvement in encouraging environmental conservation. Cheh said the Earth Aid plan is a "concrete manifestation" of partnership between business and green interests.

From a business perspective, the program might have a fair amount to offer. Theresa Luongo Pinnelli, chief sweetness officer of Treet online bakery, delivery and catering service (treetshop.com) said the program is a great way to attract attention to her business and might prove to be a good ad model for online firms such as hers. As for the profits, she'll have to wait and see.

"I'm excited for people to come visit my site and excited to be associated with Earth Aid, as it's close to my business mantra," said Pinnelli. "It's a wonderful way to join the community with small businesses and do something environmentally responsible. This is kind of everybody patting each

"It's a wonderful way to join the community with small businesses and do something environmentally responsible."

— Theresa Luongo Pinnelli
of Treet online bakery

other's back."

Local attorney Julie A. Locascio, who spoke on behalf of the D.C. chapter of Sierra Club, said Earth Aid is an interesting "carrot approach" for newcomers to environmental conservation. She said she was impressed that the idea had drawn so much D.C. Council support. But Locascio also noted that Earth Aid could have been more upfront about the fact that the firm will be making money by selling carbon credits from the residents' savings to companies that want to buy them.

Moving beyond D.C., Earth Aid has announced plans to expand to Hawaii as well as other "enthusiastic cities and rural areas," according to founder and chief executive officer Ben Bixby. Bixby said that more than 1,000 D.C. residents had signed up on the Earth Aid Web site by the morning of the launch and that the company is currently in discussion with more utility companies and local businesses looking to come on board.

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