

Two cultures, one community

What a day!

The Margate Greek Orthodox Church committee had decided to organise a feast on the 19th of August this year. The reason? The feast of Archangel Gabriel that was planned for the 15th of July had to be cancelled because of the World Cup final. So, it was agreed that we should hold this religious festival on the 19th of August instead. But, we wanted to attract and involve the local Westgate community, not just the Greek ours, and therefore, we set the price of the meals at five pounds per person.



Accordingly, twelve hundred and fifty leaflets were prepared, printed, and delivered door to door by our members to all the houses of Westgate on Sea (around our community centre). We went shopping to prepare for the feast, hoping that our home-produced leaflets would be smart enough to entice at least some of our neighbours in Westgate to come to the Mermikides Community Centre and enjoy the “souvlaki” we were preparing.

We didn't know what to expect, we didn't know how much to buy. So, we bought plenty of drinks, meat and salad, and hoped that our expectations would not be dashed! Sunday morning, we started cooking, on a wing and a prayer!



At about 12.30, a steady trickle of people started walking to the centre. But soon the trickle became a torrent! Before we realised it, all the chairs and tables were occupied! The chefs were asking for more of this and more of that! The committee members and the community volunteers were running here and there trying to provide a steady supply of meat and onions, cucumber and tomatoes. Makeshift tables hastily put together, walls and parapets suggested as chairs.



On nearby tables the ladies of the Philoptohos were serving their own sort of Greek culture. “Koupes”, “Lokoumades” and “Pourekia”. Our English friends could not get enough of them. The ladies were the first to sell out completely.



I was hurrying along with a coffee table, hoping it would mollify a family of five, when I heard a loud laugh. I approached to see what was happening. The laughter was coming from a friend of mine. “What is so funny George? I asked”. He pointed to the low wall and a lady that was sitting on it. “I tried to place my plate on the wall so I can eat” he said, “but the lady told me that what remains of the wall is reserved”. I joined George in laughter!



People kept coming. The queue was growing, and the supplies were diminishing. Panic! I rushed to the nearest shop to get some more salad. Lucky I did it when I did, because by the time I returned the lettuce almost run out, but the queue was still as long. People kept coming!



About 3.30pm, I manage to grab my camera to take some pictures. I snapped a couple of shots and to my horror the battery died on me, so I had to revert to my mobile. A few people were still waiting to be served but I could see that we were now out of onions and cucumber and the meat bowl was empty. All we had left was on the grills. Fortunately, it was enough for the folks waiting in the queue. A few skewers were set aside for the volunteers who had no time to eat during the “rush”.

They had served between two hundred and fifty and three hundred people.

Some more people approached the smouldering grills. Sadly, we had to inform them we had run out of everything! “We’ll make sure we get here earlier next time”, most of them said smiling.

I approached some of the people still enjoying their meal. I apologised for not having enough chairs and tables for everyone to sit down and eat properly. They smiled with contentment. “This has been excellent”, they said. “We bet you did not expect so many customers”. I had to admit they were right. “However,”, they said, “tables and chairs do not make people happy. People do! You managed to bring the Westgate community together, two cultures, one community, and that is a dazzling achievement! Well done! You should be proud!”

I thanked them for their compliment and responded to a lady that was desperate to drive away but someone had blocked her exit. I went to have a look. The culprit was me! I was in such a hurry to bring back some salad from the shop earlier, I just left my car in front of hers. I apologised and moved my car.

It was another hour or so before we cleared the chairs, tents and tables and left the community centre. The doubts about the success of the festival long since displaced by the elation of seeing the support and encouragement the local Westgate community had shown us. We are so grateful! And it does inspire us to continue our efforts to finish off the last face of the work needed, so that the Mermikides Community Centre will be available for everyone to patronise and enjoy!

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