



Alexander Payne and Panos Fiorentinos.

Award-Winning Greek-American Director headlines fundraiser for Greek Film Fest Chicago! 2012

By Maria A. Karamitsos

CHICAGO—FilmHellenes, the Chicago-based organization behind Greek Film Fest Chicago! hosted a fundraiser to announce the 2012 festival, this past June 23 at the National

Hellenic Museum. Special guest was Academy Award-winning director and screenwriter Alexander Payne.

Payne addressed the crowd, speaking about his career and the film business. With grace and humor, he answered questions—on everything from George Clooney to his source of inspiration—and gave advice to those interested in

the business. The Omaha, Neb. native, spoke candidly about many subjects. He expressed his delight in viewing the new museum. “I’m so happy to see this museum. How nice that we have this representing our heritage,” Payne said. “It’s a good thing to encourage fellow Greeks to become involved in the arts.”

The director traces his Greek roots to Aigio, Livadia and Syros. He indicated that the family name was changed from Papadopoulos, when his then-20 year-old grandfather wished to escape the discrimination endured by so many Southern Europeans of that time. His mother grew up in Birmingham, Ala., and his father in Omaha. For those getting started, he suggested they avoid

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reading “how-to” books; read many screenplays; memorize great films, shot-by-shot; and to develop a visual sense of story. He encouraged people to work hard, noting that, “the harder I work, the luckier I get.”

For his contributions to the film industry, Payne was presented with the first FilmHellenic Honorary Award. FilmHellenic Co-founder and Chairman Niko Franghias explained the inspiration of the award. “The female Cycladic statuette of 2800 BC, a symbol of fertility and rejuvenation, was used by Alexander in the opening and closing scenes of *SIDEWAYS* (2004) as a prop relevant to the story’s theme and the characters’ quest. Beginning this year, the festival will include the presentation of the FilmHellenic Awards for the films in competition.”

“Instead of recreating the wheel, we thought it would be wonderful if we used the same figurine as our award statuette and thus honor Alexander and his work,” Franghias stated. “I contacted the prestigious Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens to ask for their permission. They were reserved, worrying we might be canceling the aesthetic style and significance of the figurine. It took much work to convince them that respecting the statuette’s beauty and character is important to us. Once they saw the aesthetic concept that our model-maker, Panos Fiorentinos and myself were working on, we wowed them!” The new round base represents one reel of 16mm film and three reels of 35mm film on top of each other. Franghias added, “Separated by transparent rings which, when backlit, reflect the light beautifully (as light is an important component in filmmaking). The reels and the transparent rings are in the size of today’s dominant digital disc. Eventually, to their credit, the Museum of Cycladic Art not only gave us permission to use the figurine and the new base, but agreed to donate five statuettes per year for our FilmHellenic Awards to be given to winning Greek Filmmakers.”

The 2012 Greek Film Fest Chicago! will take place October 4-8, at three locations: National Hellenic Museum, Gene Siskel Center and the Pickwick Theatre. Forty film submissions were received this year, including Greek Film Centre co-productions. Six films were announced in a first film line-up installment. Two more installments will follow during the summer. Updated film listings and synopses will be released soon. www.greekfilmfestchicago.org



The OPA! Center for Meaning Opens its Doors; filmmakers on the scene

SANTA FE—The OPA! Center for Meaning opened its doors on June 2. Founded by Alexander N. Pattakos Ph.D. and his wife, Elaine Dundon, Ph.D., the center is an extension of their “OPA! Way” of life—using the wisdom of the ancient Greeks to help people find greater and deeper meaning in their lives.

The OPA! Center for Meaning is a uniquely-designed & sacred space where individuals and organizations—including major corporations and government agencies from around the world—come to question, discuss, and discover how to “Live & Work with Meaning” by practicing “The OPA! Way!®” “Part traditional Greek village and part ancient Greek temple (where we engage clients in authentic dialogue, the Socratic Method, etc.), we’re committed to enlightening people about what debt they owe to—and what they can learn from—Greece and Greeks, from ancient times to the present day,” Pattakos explained.

Indeed, by conscious design, The OPA! Center forces people to shift their way of thinking about all things Greek.

In addition to the items that come directly from Greece, many design elements in the OPA! Center actually come from the sets of various movie and television programs, including a tree used in the 1987 science fiction action movie, *Predator*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Special guest for the grand opening was author Agapi Stassinopoulos (sister of Arianna Huffington), who among other things introduced her new book, *Unbinding the Heart: A Dose of Greek Wisdom, Generosity, and Unconditional Love*. Stassinopoulos also conducted an intimate book presentation and signing. The invitation-only event included a wide variety of people: representatives from the Santa Fe Greek

community, including Fr. Dimitrios Pappas of St. Elias the Prophet Greek Orthodox Church; representatives from the New Mexico film industry, including the center’s production design team and Nick Maniatis, a Greek-American and director of the New Mexico State Film Office; local political leaders; representatives from local institutions of higher learning; media representatives; business entrepreneurs; friends; colleagues; and others. Pattakos added, “And, of course, there were many folks who, from their phone calls and emails, were there with us “in spirit” from Greece, Canada, USA, and around the world.” The celebration was also highlighted by a television interview conducted on location at The OPA! Center, with the Albuquerque NBC-affiliate station, KOB-TV Channel 4. “Host Irene Estrada and her team were fascinated by the design and energy within The OPA! Center. They all felt like they were in Greece,” Pattakos explained.

This full-day of activities also highlighted the significance of The OPA! Way. They offer services (workshops, retreats, speeches, personal mentoring) and more.

“Our approach is based on insights from the timeless wisdom of the ancient Greek philosophers...,” Pattakos explained. “A key element of our unique approach is the Core of Meaning®. Our research has shown that Meaning is the primary intrinsic motivation of human beings and that it is the foundation and engine for improvements in engagement & resilience, well-being & health, and performance & innovation. Our explicitly meaning-focused approach relies upon both open discussion and authentic dialogue with a unique, powerful, and very meaningful Greek twist!” www.theopaway.com