

## **I. Description of Culture**

### **A. Demographics**

- Between 1890 and 1917 450,000 Greek immigrants arrived in America
- The second largest wave was 160,000 immigrants between 1966 and 1979
- According to the US Census Bureau in 2002, there are 5,423 Greek residents in the state of Maine; which makes up 4% of Maine's population
- Greece is just smaller than Alabama
- Greece's population is 10.6 million people
- Athens is the capitol and the largest city
- The history of Greece begins c.2000-1700 BC
- Bitter feelings against the Turkish people began as a result of the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832)
- Greece is currently a free country

### **B. Foods**

- The most common foods eaten by Greeks are feta cheese, olives, seafood and lamb
- The foremost ingredient of Greek cooking is olive oil
- Greece is one of the largest olive producers in the world and olives are eaten as a side dish before and during meals
- Many Greek dishes such as spanikopita and baklava are constructed with layers of phillo, which are paper thin sheets of dough,
- Greeks often drink ouzo, which is an anise flavored aperitif that is mostly drank with appetizers
- Sharing a meal is the most common Greek social activity

### **C. Dress**

- There is no specific attire required by the Greek culture
- The clothing worn by persons of Greek descent are similar to that of Americans

### **D. Language/Communication**

- Non-verbal communication includes: for "no" a Greek person may tilt the head side to side or backward; for "yes" a Greek person may slightly nod head forward
- Anger, or a threat can be translated thru a pointed finger
- A Greek person smiles when happy but also when angry
- Conversation is often accompanied by the expression of their hands for emphasis
- The language is Greek, but the immigrants learned English in order to prosper in America
- They believe that you can receive the "evil eye" by being complimented
- They ward off the compliment by uttering the phrase *ptou, ptou* which is a verbalizing of spitting to scare away evil spirits

- To avoid giving the evil eye through a compliment, they end the remark with *Na mi se matiaso* which is “Not to eye you”
- They believe that if someone sneezes they are telling the truth or someone is talking about them
- They believe that bragging or predicting a future success will bring misfortune
- Greek American children attend Greek school to learn the language as well as moral, cultural and religious beliefs
- The Orthodox Church in America began to use English in the services in the 1960’s

#### **F. Holidays**

- Holidays involve dancing and music
- All Saints day is the Sunday after the Pentecost and is a celebration of all of the saints. They burn incense and give blessings to the saints to let them know that they are remembered
- They celebrate Name Days which are feast days to celebrate the anniversary of the death of a particular saint. The church will celebrate those that were named after this saint by giving them a red carnation
- They fast for forty days prior to Easter. They do not eat any animal products during this fast. They do eat items such as beans and shrimp. They will roast a lamb on a spit and dye hard boiled eggs red to symbolize the resurrection of Christ
- Christmas is also celebrated

#### **G. Religion**

- The Greek Orthodox Church plays a major role in Greek American life
- Approximately ninety-eight percent of Greeks belong to the Eastern (Greek) Orthodox Church.
- The church began with the descent of the holy spirit to Christ’s twelve apostles fifty days after his resurrection
- Doctrines are beliefs revealed by God as contained in the Bible and are accepted as unchangeable
- Canons are rules that deal with the earthly life of the church to discipline the clergy and the people. Canons can be changed by asking the bishop for an *oikonomia*, which is mercy. For example, a man and a woman with the same godparent are not allowed to marry because they are believed to be related spiritually, but the bishop can grant them mercy to marry
- The purpose of Orthodoxy is to guide the individual to reach theosis, a complete identification with God. This is done by emulating Christ and therefore becoming more like God

#### **H. Family, Relationships and Roles**

- In the Greek culture the household is patriarchal The wife is respected and considered a strong person in the family structure

- The older Greek population value education, tradition, religion and family
- Children regard elders as aunts (*thea*) and uncles (*theo*), whether they are blood relatives or not
- Compatriots are members of the same village that are treated like relatives because they support one another
- Children are expected to care for their elders through the aging process
- Greek people greet family with a hug and a kiss, unfamiliar people with a handshake
- Young men will greet other men not by a hand shake but by a slap on each other's back or arm at shoulder level

#### **I. Concept of Work/Play**

- Greek people tend to have a strong work ethic. Many immigrants became entrepreneurs with their children working for them in order to instill the work ethic in them
- Enjoy folk music and dancing
- Most church parishes sponsor a Greek festival at least once a year for the public to enjoy their food, dance and browse Greek arts and crafts

#### **J. Health and Wellness**

- The current symbol of the medical profession comes from the staff of Asclepius, the god of medicine, with a magic serpent coiled around it.
- In the Greek culture if a person does not get well in a reasonable period of time and there is not a readily seen cause of illness the family may suspect some spiritual foul play. The above mentioned "evil eye" is a superstition resulting from a person getting ill as a result of another person's jealousy. It is considered unconscious evil. The solution would be to break matchsticks and drop them into a cup with oil. Each matchstick represents a person the envied was in the presence of recently. Whatever matchstick floats would be lead to the person to be exorcised
- A home remedy for a minor bruise or scrape would be to crush an onion, run down the street at full moon and throw it over his/her shoulder to ease the pain
- They would also rub onions or garlic over warts as another home remedy

#### **K. Barriers to Health Care**

- Because of the similar expectations of health care between American and Greek cultures there are no barriers to health care

#### **L. Suggestions for Health Care Providers**

- If offered food or drink by a patient who is Greek, they may be insulted if the food is not taken
- Upon entering a hospital room of a Greek patient, the patient will be kind to the healthcare provider, as they feel that the person could be a god in disguise

- A translator may be necessary if the clients do not speak English
- Greek people take their religion very seriously and may not take mind altering medication or undergo any medical procedure that is morally and ethically against the Orthodox religion
- Due to their beliefs, their first choice may be to try holistic remedies and then opt for conventional medications.
- It should be considered that forty days prior to Easter they do not eat food from an animal.

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# The Greek Culture

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