

## **The Greek Community of Tarpon Springs Traditional Greek Culture**

In Greece, the mountains and sea created barriers so that villages and towns, islands and provinces developed distinctive forms of traditional culture. Both in Greece and in Tarpon Springs, there is an ongoing process in which certain cultural elements are preserved while others are replaced or altered in response to new conditions.

### **Domestic Life**

Domestic arts express the individual's artistic talents while fulfilling the basic needs of family and community. Inside the house, the aesthetic arrangement and display of objects is one way in which values are expressed. Objects displayed may reflect historic Greek village life, religion, or national identity.

Outside, families often utilize plants for cooking, decorative, and ritual purposes similar to those in Greece. They frequently plant lemon, mandarin and other fruit trees, as well as basil and rosemary. Potted plants may include common Mediterranean flowers such as geraniums, carnations, and roses.

### **Foodways**

Everyday and holiday foods are served in households and a limited variety are made publicly available through special events or restaurants. Yet many community foodways remain relatively unknown. For example, some residents prepare regional foods such as the delicious Easter bread called *eftazimo* [ef-TAH-zee-moh] from the Dodecanese Islands of Greece. Made in observance of God's command to Moses to prepare unleavened bread for the flight to Israel, the name refers to kneading the dough seven times. A few families also build traditional outdoor brick ovens in their backyards.

### **Religious Traditions**

The Greek Orthodox Church plays an important role in Greek communities by sustaining religious traditions. It also provides opportunities for children or for adults entering the church from other communities to learn the language through Greek school and to absorb the culture through participation in church activities.

Many Greek Orthodox arts were developed during the Byzantine Empire. Whether expressed through rituals, iconography, architecture, chanting, or priests' vestments, beauty in the expression of the divine is an important aspect of the religion.

### **Celebrations**

The Greek community celebrates many types of secular and sacred events. One popular local event is Greek Independence Day (March 25), celebrated with a parade and party that include dance groups, children in regional costumes, community organizations, church officials, and dignitaries from Greece.

Tarpon Springs' Epiphany celebration is the largest in the U.S. Epiphany commemorates Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan, when the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. Visitors join residents at a series of events beginning with a service in St. Nicholas Cathedral. Afterwards, a procession to Spring Bayou includes altar boys swinging censers streaming fragrant incense, church officials, children and dance troupes in colorful costumes, city officials, and divers. Thousands watch the priest bless the waters, and then a young woman releases a dove as the priest casts a cross into the

water. About 50 youths dive from a semi-circle of dinghies. When a lucky young man finds the cross, he is carried on his friends' shoulders back to St. Nicholas Cathedral to be blessed. Everyone then attends a celebration with food, dancing and music.

### **Suggested Activities**

1. Have students describe how their homes reflect their ethnic or regional groups.
2. Have students research Greek foodways. Create a menu for a meal and assign students to bring dishes.
3. Have students research the way that Greeks celebrate other cultural holidays, such as name days, Easter, Christmas, *Ochi* [OH-hee] Day, and others.