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## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### National Hellenic Student Association Hosts 25th Bi-Annual Convention, Awards Three Ariston-NHSA Scholars

NEW YORK, New York — Young Hellenes joined the National Hellenic Student Association (NHSA) of North America’s 25<sup>th</sup> bi-annual convention last weekend to rejoice at the organization’s first in-person event in nearly two years. Quite fittingly, the conference’s theme, “It starts with us,” speaks to NHSA’s role in supporting future Hellenic leaders.

The convention “kicked-off” on Friday, November 12<sup>th</sup> at Laterna Estiatorio, where participants enjoyed traditional cuisine and festive dances from diverse areas of Greece. Following was Saturday’s conference, organized by Vice President Georgios Araujo, Regional Director Stephanie Papoutsakis, and Chairman Konstantine Ouranitsas.

Opening remarks were made by the Consul of Greece in New York, Mr. Dimitris Papageorgiou. “Your generation is at a turning point. You have the capacity to do more,” said the Consul. “Every step forward is another step for Greece—another step for Hellenism.”

The conference then continued with panel discussions featuring prominent speakers like Maria Loi, world-renowned Chef and Ambassador of Greek Gastronomy. Chef Loi emphasized the importance of heritage preservation and education on the Mediterranean diet. When asked what hardships, if any, Chef Loi faced as a female in the male-dominated industry, her response, “I don’t see myself as a male or female, I see myself as human,” spoke to her credence in unity amongst Hellenes to promote the culture through tradition, diet, and language preservation. The panel was moderated by Advisory Council Chairman Alexander Thomopoulos.

The following panel featured spirit connoisseurs: Restaurateur and founder of Stray Dog Wild Gin, Mr. Johnny Livanos and U.S. Brand Ambassador of Skinof Mastiha Spirit, Mr. Alexandros Kechagiadakis. Moderated by NHSA Director of Communications Irene Coritsidis, the panelists discussed their path and driving passions to the industry as well as the unique flavors and aromas that distinguish Greek liquor from others. “Bringing spirits, such as Mastiha, to a host is a gesture of hospitality and generosity,” said Mr. Kechagiadakis, highlighting his work’s intertwinement with Greece’s cultural values in honor and appreciation.

“Spirits” remained high when Gus Constantellis, a first-generation Greek American LGBTQ+ stand-up comedian, provided entertainment to the audience. Ranging in common points of

contention from “Greek-Mom” tendencies, immigrant barriers, and personal stories, the audience roared in comedic relief in preparation for the final panel, moderated by NHSA Chairman Konstantine Ouranitsas.

Featuring the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Spokesman, Father Evagoras Constantinides, and Editor and Publisher of the Ethnikos Kirikas and co-Editor and Publisher of The National Herald, Eraklis Diamataris, the panel highlighted the need to create awareness on issues of Hellenism, unite the Greek community and motivate students and young professionals to take action to solve tomorrow’s problems.

“We must not accept complacency,” repeated Father Evagoras in discussing the Greek community’s potential. “Reach out to others, go to events, build your network and your brand. Always expand in all ways.”

In addition to inspirational and diverse speakers, attendees had the opportunity to network with each other creating an even greater social network. Activities further included an interactive icebreaker shortly before lunch, where food and desserts were provided by Bahari and Oasis Café, respectively.

Finally, in partnership with Ariston Foundation, NHSA presented three academic merit-based scholarships of \$1,000 each to students demonstrating academic excellence, leadership and service. This year’s winners were Katerina Dorian, Anna Pierratos and Mia Vardouniotis.

“Our initiative and collaboration with NHSA is a testament to the ability of young professionals and college students to highlight the importance of academic excellence, honoring and motivating our peers with this recognition,” said Ariston Foundation President Vasiliki Mitrakos.

A Greek night was hosted later at Ammos restaurant featuring DJ Serafim. Among other drinks, attendees also enjoyed a special shot of gin from Stray Dog Wild Gin, which is distilled in Northern Greece with a medley of wild Greek Botanicals and a shot of Skinos Mastiha Spirit. The night gave everyone a chance to come together through music and dance after a long time of virtual events that came as a result of the pandemic.