

**Haroon Siddique**

A MARYLEBONE cultural centre wants to prove it is not all Greek to a confused public.

The Hellenic Centre, on Paddington Street, was established as a charity in 1994 to be a home for Greek and Cypriot communities in London.

But it wants to throw open its doors to neighbouring residents who may think there is nothing for them there.

Director Agatha Kalisperas said: "Although it's a Greek cultural centre it's not just for Greeks."

"We have been here for 10 years but not as many people know us as we want to."

"We do have a very rich cultural programme but we need to attract more people and the way to do that is to show how the cultures crossover."

The centre was started with financial assistance from the Greek and Cypriot governments but is now mainly self-funded.

Cash is raised from membership fees and hiring out the historic building to companies and for weddings.

There are around 1,000 individual members and 40 corporate members and the majority of cultural events are free.

The centre still receives some cash from the Greek and Cypriot governments, typically for specific events, and the National Lottery and Westminster Arts Council also

# Greeks bear cultural gifts for all community

## Hellenic Centre wants more people to use its facilities

provide grants.

Activities include lectures on Greek culture, art exhibitions, poetry readings and music and drama workshops.

And once a month the centre's bar opens to the public for an evening of drinks and Greek food.

It is raising £80,000 to put on an exhibition in October of ancient Greek embroidery that is currently on at the Victoria and Albert Museum and will be going to Athens in April.

There was a puppet workshop for children recently and tonight

Kathryn Hunter will lead a session for aspiring actors and directors.

Ms Kalisperas said: "It's not Greek, it's just that Kathryn is of Greek origin."

"We will have a big screen for the Eurovision song contest because Greece won, which will be fun, and we had the European football which Greece also won - even though no-one expected it."

PR manager Jane Ronge said: "The puppet show we did was quite typical where we were using very old Greek stories, very different from the UK but in English."

"Through children's activities we are trying to get more contact with the local community. We want people to come in and exchange cultures just by enjoying themselves."

The centre occupies a former Swedish hospital that treated British casualties during the First World War and was later a gymnastics centre for Swedish children.

Ms Kalisperas said: "Even though there is a big Greek community in north London we located centrally because the importance is to have the British community come to us. We want other cultures to come here, we have had ethnic workshops with Jewish and Greek musicians and now we are looking for Indian and Turkish musicians."

For more information visit [www.helleniccentre.org](http://www.helleniccentre.org).



Jane Ronge, left, with Agatha Kalisperas.

## Funeral firm in donation

A FIRM of funeral directors has handed a cheque to a St John's Hospice as part of an initiative to help local organisations.

R. P. Sherry, of Bell Street, Paddington, presented £250 to St John's Hospice in Grove End Road.

Manager Jim Gilbey said: "I am aware budgets are always tight and this kind of donation will help to enhance the quality of life of the residents whilst at St John's Hospice."

## Property chief quits

A PROPERTY boss who helped transform Marylebone High Street into an eclectic mix of fashionable stores has stepped down.

Howard de Walden chief executive Andrew Ashenden will hand over to Toby Shannon. Mr Ashenden will remain on the board as a part time executive director.

Peter Barton, Chairman of Howard de Walden, said: "Andrew Ashenden has been an outstanding chief executive and has overseen the transformation of the company, particularly the development of Marylebone High Street and the Marylebone Village concept."

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