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Leadership 100 Conference Opens
With Addresses on Hellenism and Hellenic Issues

California Governor Sends Message

The Leadership 100 17th Annual Conference opened today at the Desert Springs JW Marriott Resort & Spa in Palm Desert, California with addresses by former Congressman Michael Bilirakis of Florida on advocacy of Hellenic issues in Congress and Ambassador Loucas Tsilas, Executive Director of the Onassis Foundation (USA), on the importance of Hellenism.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger welcomed the 350 members and guests of the almost 25-year old Greek American philanthropic organization to California, thanking them for the Leadership 100 Award for Achievement and applauding Leadership 100's history of grants in support of Orthodoxy and Hellenism and human need in the U.S. and abroad.

Congressman Michael Bilirakis, who served for 24 years before retiring from Congress in 2006, spoke of the current history of Greeks in America, rising from poverty to exceptional achievement, as just as significant, if not more so, than their ancient heritage. He spoke of the difficulty in getting support in the U.S. Government on such pressing issues as resolution of the division in Cyprus, disputes between Greece and Turkey over the Aegean and opposition to the use of the name "Macedonia" for the Balkan republic bordering Macedonia in Greece. He said this was often due to the ineffectiveness of Greek Americans in pressing these issues with members of Congress across the nation.

Ambassador Tsilas, Executive Director of the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA), and former Ambassador of Greece to the U.S.A., spoke of Hellenism as a civilization and culture with a set of values, principles and ideas that had become integral to world culture, from representative government and the pursuit of excellence to the quest for beauty and truth that led to democracy, art and science. He said those values still are a light to the Greek American Community and Greeks everywhere, as well as a light to the world.

George D. Behrakis, Chairman of Leadership 100, announced that the Archbishop Iakovos Leadership 100 Award for Excellence will be given to two of its most prominent and long-time members, Mr. Theodore P. Angelopoulos and Ambassador Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, for their accomplishments in business, public service and philanthropy. The Award will be presented at the Grand Banquet on Saturday, February 16, 2008. The couple is credited with Athens' successful bid and hosting of the 2004 Olympic Games.

“They did a spectacular job in bringing Greece to the forefront, and I thought it was time to honor them,” said Chairman Behrakis. I'm looking at Greece today, the number of tourists, more than its population, and that's due to what people all over the world saw when the Olympics were held in Athens...and I think this will continue,” he said.

The Award of Excellence recognizes outstanding Greek Orthodox, Greek American, and other outstanding leaders who have excelled in their vocation and are committed to advancing the values of Orthodoxy and Hellenism in their lives and activities. Other recipients have included George J. Tenet, John D. Negroponte, Senators Paul S. Sarbanes and Olympia J. Snowe, Dimitis L. Avramopoulos, Melina Kanakaredes and Rudolph W. Giuliani.

The Leadership 100 17th Annual Conference will convene from February 14 to 17, 2008 and will include the annual meeting of the General Assembly and programs and forums on Church History, Hellenism, business, life-style and the arts, including award-winning actress Jane Seymour, who will address a special program on Saturday, February 16, 2008 on the subject of the autobiographical *Remarkable Changes: Turning Life's Challenges into Opportunities*, which profiled her own and 20 personal stories of others who have experienced positive transformation in the face of life-changing crisis.

The Forum on Hellenism, titled *Presenting Greek Art in America*, is scheduled for Friday, February 15 and will feature Dr. Christine Kondoleon of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Kenneth Dean Shapiro Lapatin of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Leadership 100 is the largest Greek American membership and charitable organization in the United States, holding more than \$84 million in assets. It has distributed more than \$25 million in grants advancing Orthodoxy and Hellenism since its inception in 1984.