

# In the Spotlight: Granola Queen Makoulis

By Angelike Contis

TNH Staff Writer

**NEW YORK** – Athenian Harvest Muesli, anyone? How about some Grecian Grove Granola? These titles say a lot about Hariclia “Anastasia” Makoulis. Her successful family-run, Brooklyn-based Ambrosial Granola (est. 2000) was born of her desire, back in the 1980s, to feed her children cereals that lacked a long list of additives. This nature-loving Northern Greek’s story is full of crunch and nuggets of earth-friendly wisdom.

**TNH:** Tell us about yourself.

**HM:** Tradition and innovation are uniquely combined in my life’s journey. I was lucky enough to live my early and formative years with a loving family within a tightly knit community. Growing up near peach and apple groves and vineyards, I was surrounded by farmers, wine makers and entrepreneurs, positive role models in my upbringing. Inquisitive by nature, I found myself travelling to foreign lands early on through reading. The end of high school in my hometown was the beginning of new experiences in Athens, where I earned a B.A. in Political Science. New York was my second and last stop. We landed as graduate students, with my husband Constantinos. Always interested in social, political and environmental issues, I was a very idealistic young woman.

One Master’s degree in Sociology and another in social research combined with my interest to contribute to the common good helped me develop a career in the non-profit sector, while raising two wonderful children, our son Demetrios and our daughter Lila. Exciting times! Love for authentic wholesome food, a good amount of influence by the whole foods movement, a bit of creativity and our kitchen became the incubator of what was going to come...

**TNH:** How did your start and develop your company?

**HM:** I think of myself as the accidental entrepreneur, even though now it does not look so accidental. Ambrosial Granola started at a turning point of my career, years before the new USDA food pyramid gave whole grains their glory and the organic movement changed from a trend to a way of life.

Curiosity in food and marketing kept me informed and certainly helped take the correct di-



Hariclia “Anastasia” Makoulis with her crunchy wares.

rection right from the beginning. Our Mediterranean diet and my passion for delicious and nutritious food were driving forces. However, nothing would be possible without the strong supportive infrastructure of this country that encourages entrepreneurship. Determination, discipline, passion and family support were also key.

As a small artisanal company, our marketing budget is small. What drives our sales is the high quality of our products. It is rare to find certified organic granola and muesli cereals on store shelves. The USDA Organic seal is our guarantee to our customers that the food is free of chemicals and genetically modified organisms (GMO.) While our products undergo inspections every year, “natural food” claims are unregulated.

Our customers keep coming back for more delicious taste and high nutrition.

**TNH:** Do you have any role models?

**HM:** Yes, my father Constantinos, a hard working entrepreneur, who was able to create a solid small business with honesty, integrity and hard work and my mother Anastasia who, as all Greek mothers, kept the household together with pride and genuine ingenuity. Along with the rest of the country, they survived

the Second World War followed by the Civil War as youngsters and thrived afterwards, relying on the sheer power of will to go forward. And they did!

**TNH:** What is your greatest achievement thus far? What do you hope to achieve in the future?

**HM:** Having been able to raise a beautiful family and, at the same time, fulfilled my educational, professional and – nowadays - my entrepreneurial aspirations. It is a difficult balancing act. However, at the end of the day, the rewards are many and keep you going. I look forward to being able to maintain the same balance and to continue to be motivated to explore the wonders of life with honesty, integrity and authenticity.

**TNH:** What is an issue regarding the Greek community- here or abroad- that concerns you?

**HM:** Diaspora Greeks have built vibrant communities here and abroad. However, according to our grandfather Aesop, “In union there is strength.” I think we need to better understand that collective involvement is an asset that will benefit our communities, families, children and Hellenism at large. We can follow the example of other communities that have been more successful in this area and set the foundations for working towards our shared in-

terests.

**TNH:** What part of Greece are you from? Do you visit often?

**HM:** I was born in Naoussa. My town is located at the foothills of the densely forested Mt. Vermion in the fertile land of central Macedonia. My birthplace is just a short way from The School of Aristotle at Nymphaion of Mieza. There, one of the greatest philosophers of all times taught the ideals of Platonic philosophy to the son of the King of Macedonia Phillip II, Alexander, and the other noble young Macedonians. I visit my hometown almost every year, and every year I become wiser by spending some time close to the people tending the earth, who share their authentic wisdom with me.

**TNH:** What are some upcoming projects/events?

**HM:** We are really excited about starting to communicate with our customers through new social media, like our website’s [www.ambrosialgranola.com](http://www.ambrosialgranola.com) blog. It aims to create a community of similarly-minded people interested in a healthy lifestyle, sustainability and our glorious Mediterranean diet. We also have new products in the works.

**TNH:** Share with us some words of wisdom.

**HM:** Lanza del Vasto provides my signature quote: “Find the shortest, simplest way between the earth, the hands, and the mouth.” This captures very well the old wisdom of using simple, minimally processed, fresh and clean ingredients as much as we can, like our ancestors did. Our daily buying habits are our votes for a healthy future for ourselves, our families and the future of life in our precious blue planet Earth!

**TNH:** Anything else you’d like to add?

**HM:** Our health relies on our eating habits, state of our mind and being active – all areas we can control. It becomes very simple when we follow our common sense and the wisdom of our ancestors and not trends that come and go.

[Angelike.contis@ekirikas.com](mailto:Angelike.contis@ekirikas.com)

If you'd like to nominate a notable member of the Greek American community for “In the Spotlight”, please contact [english.edition@thenationalherald.com](mailto:english.edition@thenationalherald.com) with your suggestions.