



George and Tracy Fronimakis use recipes from George's childhood hometown, Gavalohori, on the Greek island of Crete, at their Tucson restaurant, Fronimo's Greek Café.

(This is another in a series of articles profiling The DesertLeaf's restaurant- and food-related advertisers. This is not a review.)

Tucson sits on approximately the same latitude as the Greek island of Crete. Herbs native to Greece, such as oregano and rosemary, also do well in the Old Pueblo. Both landscapes favor

the colors of rock, sun and sky. Snow is a novelty. These are some of the reasons why Greek restaurateur George Fronimakis loves Tucson.

Some of the reasons Tucson loves Fronimo's: gyros, souvlaki, Athenian chicken, baklava, ouzo.

George Fronimakis was born in the village of Gavalohori, on Crete. He left home at the age of 13 to join the Merchant Marine. Would he allow a

child of his own to do such a thing? "No!" he says. "But back in those days, when you had five or six kids in the family, there wasn't much else you could do."

Fronimakis traveled "everywhere" in the Merchant Marine, learning enough of various languages to get around. His work on the ship involved helping the cook. "It was where I got the baptism in the kitchen," he says.





O's Café

by Linda Brewer

After four years he left the Merchant Marine and began to work in restaurants. He came to the United States, settling first in Salt Lake City. “People from Greece, a lot of them go to other countries to work. The way you start working is to be a dishwasher. You work and learn and you keep thinking and learning and you think, I would like to have my own place,” Fronimakis says. “In those days if you worked

hard, people would help you. American people are polite. They believe in giving you a second chance.” Sixteen years ago George and his wife, Tracy, opened Fronimo’s in Tucson. “It’s a mom-and-pop café,” he says. “But no matter the size of the restaurant, people must get what they want, and they must be respected no matter what they pay. Quality, cleanliness and good service are a must

Desert Gourmet •••••

no matter what.” Fronimo’s uses recipes from George’s childhood home as well as some he learned on the job. “Plus lots of cookbooks,” he says. Tracy Fronimakis decorated Fronimo’s, which is located on Speedway across from the Loft Cinema. The walls are painted the warm colors of a sunny climate. The floors are covered with stone tiles in muted tones. Groups of framed photographs of Greece line the walls. The Minos room, an area set aside for groups, is done in a weathered red with decorative murals. Another large mural of the island of Crete decorates the hallway leading to the back door. An outdoor dining area is located at the rear of the building. There are plenty of booths and comfortable couches for people waiting to be seated or to pick up take-out orders. Greek music plays softly on the sound system, and the wait staff offers customers friendly greetings. Tracy Fronimakis also serves as the catering specialist.

In his many years as a host, George Fronimakis has come to some definite conclusions about how to prepare a good meal. “You must have the right equipment for the job,” he says. For him, this means a large convection oven for roasting chicken and lamb. Ingredients are also supremely important. “New Zealand lamb is best. They eat grass that grows in the salty wind from the sea and the salty flavor goes into their meat. Oregano is the most important herb,” he says. “Oregano’s gotta be there.” Fronimakis uses Greek oregano. “It has the flavor of the soil where it was grown.” Fronimakis buys top-of-the-line kalamata olives, not in bulk but in smaller, select quantities. Fromino’s tzatziki (yogurt and cucumber sauce) is made on the premises, from homemade yogurt. Fronimakis says, “Olive oil is the name of the game. It cleans the veins and keeps you healthy. People on Crete don’t go on diets. They eat a good diet every day and they live long healthy lives.”

Fronimo’s serves imported and domestic beer and Greek wines. Many of the wines come from vineyards where Fronimakis knows the growers. Congenial wait staff play a major role in any restaurant, no matter the size, Fronimakis says. “The same people come in here every day, every week, every month, and we remember them and talk with them. You must know your customers and recognize them and respect them. I thank all my customers.” One of his favorite waiters happens to be his daughter, Katerina,

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To enjoy root vegetables' rich, caramelized flavors, roasting is a preferred cooking method. Peel and cut the roots into uniform pieces, toss with a little olive oil, salt and fresh rosemary. Roast on a flat, rimmed tray at 350 degrees, turning them over once, for about 25 minutes or until cooked through and nicely browned. A sprinkle of balsamic vinegar just before serving will add another layer of flavor. These roasted vegetables at room temperature on top of mixed greens make a hearty salad. Roots can be boiled or steamed, mashed and seasoned with fresh herbs, spices, butter, olive oil or flavored vinegars.

A staple dish at my childhood dinner table was carrots and parsnips boiled together, strained (save the vegetable water to use as stock) and roughly mashed together with butter, salt, pepper and fresh parsley. As we grill all year, use one of those wok-like grill baskets with the holes to toss oil-coated vegetables over the hot coals. Grill or saute sliced fennel bulb to top your hamburger. For a colorful salad, wrap beets in foil with a little onion, oil and rosemary. Bake in the oven until tender, cool, peel, slice and marinate in a little

balsamic vinaigrette. Arrange on a bed of arugula with peeled orange slices, feta cheese and black olives. Healthy french fries are quick and easily made from tubers tossed in oil and roasted in the oven until crisp.

Wonderfully rich soups are made with root vegetables, either alone or by using a mixture of your favorites. Sauté your onions first in a little butter, oil or water to soften them, add your chopped vegetables, seasonings and stock. Puree in a blender for a creamy texture or serve as a hearty meal with crusty bread. No matter how you serve them, add some roots to your meal plan.

DL

Judith Baigent King received her Certified Culinary Professional designation from the International Association of Culinary Professionals. For 16 years, the owner of Culinary Concepts—An Extraordinary Cooking School, here in Tucson, she is also the author of the Culinary Concepts Cookbook. Comments for publication should be addressed to letters@desertleaf.com.

DESERT GOURMET continued

a student at the UA. "She knows how much work it is in the restaurant business," Fronimakis says. "You have to like what you do and keep doing what you like. In the restaurant it's hard work, but I am my own boss."

Fronimo's Greek Café: 3242 E. Speedway Blvd., Tucson

Telephone: 327-8321; Fax: 327-3668

Fronimo's offers *DesertLeaf* readers this recipe:

Spanakopita

Makes one 9" x 13" pan

Ingredients:

Filling

2 10-ounce packages of fresh spinach, washed, dried and chopped

12 green onions, chopped fine

One-half bunch fresh Italian parsley, minced

4 eggs, beaten slightly

One-half pound feta cheese, crumbled fine

One-fourth pound Parmesan cheese, grated

1 pint cottage cheese

One and one-fourth teaspoons dried dill

One-half teaspoon salt

One-half teaspoon white pepper

Crust

12 sheets filo pastry (about one-half pound)

One-half pound butter, melted

Preparation:

Add green onions and parsley to chopped spinach.

In a separate bowl, mix beaten eggs, feta, Parmesan and cottage cheeses, dill, salt and pepper. Pour into spinach mixture. Mix all ingredients well and then squeeze out excess liquid, if necessary.

Brush the bottom of a 9" x 13" baking pan with melted butter (using a pastry brush). Then, brushing each with melted butter, place six sheets of filo in the bottom of the pan. Add the spinach-cheese mixture to the pan. Again buttering between each layer, add six more sheets of filo. (Cut sides if necessary to make edges even.) Butter the top and then score the top layers of filo into squares. If serving as appetizers, score squares again diagonally.

Bake at 375 degrees for about 1 hour (or until mixture no longer jiggles).

Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly before cutting (this will allow the spinach mixture to "set").

DL

Linda Brewer is a local freelance writer. Comments for publication should be addressed to letters@desertleaf.com.

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