

## A VALUED PAST AND A PRESENT SUCCESS Dow CEO Andrew Liveris Meets with Modern Greek Students

“Those having torches will pass them on to others.”  
Plato, *the Republic*



*PART 1: A list of topics Andrew Liveris compiled for his talk delivered to Professor Vassilios Lambropoulos' class on Greek-American Culture (modgreek 318) and members of the Hellenic Student Association on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005 [a couple of topics, such as the role of the Church, as a secular positive force, were expanded upon during the talk extemporaneously and do not appear in the printed version of the talk below.]*

### **Those things that impacted my career and life:**

- 1) Darwin, Australia – Melting Pot – Diversity
- 2) Family and Relationships – support structures, hard work, respect for elders
- 3) Tradition via the church and the religion
  - Respect for history
  - Values } Easter and Christmas
  - Events } Weddings, Christenings and Funerals
- 4) Expression and Emotion – no hidden agendas
- 5) Giving of one-self – role modeling and mentoring  
(Uncle Les when dad passed away)
- 6) Role of the Church

- Religion as an ally, not a dictator
- Owner of the language, culture traditions (responsible for its survival)
- Orthodoxy as a Value System, not a religion alone
- Language as a bearer of tradition.

7) A heritage of merchants, traders and entrepreneurs

8) Philanthropy in Darwin

### **Modern Greece and its relationship to Diaspora: The Chinese Model**

- The good news: Outreach has begun! Has taken a long time.
- Modern Greece lives in the shadow of the triumphs of Ancient Greece.
- Modern Greece needs an identity.
- The Olympics – have they seized the moment or lost the moment?
- A Formula for success
  - Tap the experience of its diaspora (not in a 1-way, but a 2-way dialogue)
  - Think Singapore, not Germany
  - Connectivity – Backons, Near East, Middle East Bridge
- A change in national mindset?  
(Not a manufacturer or Hotel Manager, but a service provider and I. P. Generator)

*PART 2: The following is the talk given by Andrew Liveris on March 17<sup>th</sup>*

#### **The Greek Tradition**

Let me start out by acknowledging something you probably already know, and that is the fact that modern Greeks are not the lineal descendants of Ancient Greece – the people who referred to themselves as the Helens. There is alas, no straight line between say, Pericles and Andrew Liveris.

It took some time for me to get over that when I was in college, but I finally reconciled myself to it, which is about when I decided to become a chemical engineer rather than a classicist (just kidding).

But that doesn't mean modern Greeks do not think and act based on a long cultural tradition. They do, of course. Although these traditions may not go back to Marathon and Thermopylae, they do go back rather a long way, to the foundations of the Byzantine Empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD, which by the 7<sup>th</sup> century was all that was left of the old Roman World, and even that was hard to recognize since its language was Greek, not Latin, and its religion was a distinct form of Christianity known as Greek Orthodoxy. But language, religion and culture are three of the powerful forces that link even those of us who call ourselves the "down under" Greeks to our historical origins.

(When Constantinople fell in 1453, the Greek World was dominated for the next 400 years by the Ottoman Turks, who adopted many of the forms of Byzantine rule in their Empire, leaving

the Greek language and the Orthodox Church relatively untouched among their Greek subjects. Religion and language thus remained the basis for the Greek national identity. Ironically, however, this experience did not include what the ancient Greeks were best known for ... a democratic form of government.)

Fast forward to the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Ottoman Empire was in steep decline, known at the time, of course, as the “sick man of Europe.” The two world wars finally killed the sick man for good, and the modern state of Greece was born. Unfortunately, it was born into the roiling power politics of the “hot war” period, from 1914 to 1945 period, and immediately after, the Cold War, which ended, of course in 1990.

### **The Greek Diaspora and Andrew Liveris**

I am a member in good standing of the great Greek Diaspora, which began dispersing, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, first throughout Europe and then throughout the world, as I say, an Australia of Greek descent.

Most people think of the great wave of Greek immigration coming to America, and a great wave did indeed come to these shores, starting as a trickle between 1873 and 1899 (15,000) and reaching a torrent in the Ellis Island years of 1900 to 1917 (450,000)

Then there was my grandfather.

He was a sailor on a Greek transport ship. It stopped one day, in the port of Darwin, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the north coast of Australia, then a thriving metropolis of about 300 people.



From left to right are Andrew Liveris' father Nicholas, Nicholas' brothers George and Lazarus, and his cousin Peter Taifolos. The picture was taken in Darwin, Australia in 1925.

The rest of the Darwin story:

- My grandfather's impromptu decision to stay
- My mom and dad
- My grandfather's construction business
- My grandfather's untimely death
- The move to Brisbane
- My taking on more familial responsibilities

They say first impressions are the most lasting. Darwin (the city, not the evolutionist) taught me the importance of diversity, not just the word, but the true meaning of it: relating to individuals a members of other cultures; relating to individuals as individuals; that life can turn on a dime, and that you have to make the adjustment when it does.

Now if you think about it, those are what immigrants learn no matter where they go, in fact that's part of the human experience.

They also learn that as adaptable as they must be, they must have a certain constancy, especially when it comes to values.

### **Success and the importance of values**

I remember a Doonesbury cartoon of a few years ago, when the United States – and with it the lens of Gary Trudeau -- was fascinated by the phenomenon of how well Asians were doing in the U.S. education system.

In the comic strip, a typical “middle America” mom and dad are depicted at the front door of their neighbors' house, an Asian family, and they ask the mother and father what “tricks” they were using to get their kids to perform so well in school.

“Tricks?” they said. “Oh. You mean, hard work, sacrifice and playing by the rules?”

“Yeah, that's it,” their neighbors, said, “What's that all about? Can you explain that to us?” ... demonstrating as we have seen repeatedly, that successful immigrants not only adapt to the values of their new culture, but are often the standard bearers, the exemplars of it whether it be American or Australian, or whatever.

My friend, mentor, and predecessor as CEO of Dow, Bill Stavropoulos, another member in good standing of the Greek Diaspora, mentioned one day that a certain political candidate irritated him a bit with his constant refrain of how he was born to an underprivileged background.

Bill, whose dad and mom emigrated from Greece and built a restaurant business on Long Island in New York, said, “He has the story turned around. He may have been poor but he was not underprivileged. He had parents who work hard, instilled a work ethic in him, stressed the value of education and made sacrifices to help him pay for college...that's the most important thing a person can have. He wasn't underprivileged at all. He *was privileged to have parents like that.*”

Thomas Sowell, the academic who has studied immigration, wrote of his findings from a study he did some years ago that surprised many people. Sowell (who is a Black American) was trying to answer the question of why some immigrant groups do better than others. He studied groups of people here in the United States who had emigrated from China. He found a high correlation between success and where the immigrants came from. In other words, people from a particular region, from a particular province, even from a particular village had a very high percentage of success. When Sowell examined the reasons what he found was that the success group had very similar values, including willingness to sacrifice, to work hard, to own a business, to save and not spend, and to work in concert with others, especially with members of their families.

A study in Germany a few years that took place before unification examined the German economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s, the explosion in growth that made Germany at the time the third largest economy in the world. Many of the findings are well known and economically flawless: investment in infrastructure, new plants and equipment, technology, a trained workforce and a strong central bank, but one of the surprises of the study was that a huge portion of the wealth creation of the Wirtschaftwunder [vair shaft vunder] was generated by the German Diaspora, the 10 million who were forcibly expelled by the Soviets from East Prussia, Silesia, Pomeranian and other former German lands—these were people who arrived in West Germany with little more than the clothes on their backs and what they could carry.

### **As a CEO, what I look for in people**

Sometimes people ask me what I look for a person I might hire, or partner with, and I think if I had to pick out one quality, it would be that drive to learn, not matter what your age or circumstance.

It says so much about a person: obviously a thirst for knowledge, for a new and better way, but also a sense of humility. It's an immediate acknowledgement that you are ready and willing to learn from others, which says a lot about a person.

*[Here, Andrew Liveris told the story of Asahi Chemical, and how he learned the importance of building relationships in Asia and the importance to him of the death of his Japanese "successor."]*

### **Modern Greece and the Olympics**

I think that the international community, as well as all the world, had the opportunity, with the opening ceremony and the organization of the Games in general, to see Greece combining high technology with culture and making a mark as a country, which can be creative in a modern environment, not simply as an isolated country with a historical past.

I think the Games definitely had a positive impact on the Greek business picture, with tourism benefiting first of all, as for two weeks Greece had an open window to all the world and billions of people got to know more and see more of the country, its people, its beauties and its history. Dow invited clients from all over the world, to whom we offered our hospitality during the Games, and who had the chance to see Greece as a country where they can combine holiday relaxation with history and culture.

On the behalf of our company, we brought our most important clients in the world to the Olympics, so we had the chance, within the Olympics framework, to discuss ways of expanding our business co-operations. These meetings also gave the opportunity for our clients to know each other better and to communicate in person for future business co-operations, internationally and within Greece.

Moreover, within the *Athens Business Club 2004* activities framework, many executives of our company took part as well as made other business contacts. I believe, though, that with proper preparation from the responsible state institutions, we could have had better results, a preparation which, according to my opinion, was carried out very well by the countries that took over the Olympics in the recent past.

Greece is a small country without important raw materials. This does not mean that there can not be any investment. The country has a geographical advantage among the Balkans and the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, which can provide a significant market scope.

Greeks have a business tradition and are welcome throughout the whole region. This is what we need to take advantage of, in order to become a country providing services in the whole of this geographical area.

There is precedence for small countries, like Singapore or Hong Kong, which managed exactly that, to develop significantly based on services. It first required simplifying the bureaucracy, modernizing the tax system and creating a business friendly environment that can attract many companies. (Look at what Ireland did in just 20 years, from among the poorest of the EU to the richest, on a per capita basis.)

Dow could help by bringing the Greek government or the responsible authorities into contact with the organizations that contributed in the development of these countries (Economical Development Boards) in order to acquire similar experience.

Dow Hellas's presence is significant in several areas and we intend to continue and expand our presence using Lavrio's productive unit, which, noteworthy, is also oriented towards exports. Beyond all that, and having in mind the advantages I mentioned earlier, like

geography and human experience, Greece could become our company's center in the wider geographical region of the Balkans and East Mediterranean.

**What I like about Dow**

I had interviews with a number of companies, and the Dow people were far and away the ones who showed the most interest in me as a person. Here I was a young student, and they were talking about how important it was for Dow to get high-potential young people and give them opportunity at an early age. I remember one company – I won't mention the name, but you'd certainly recognize it – where the main part of the interview was to give me a problem to solve ... *If such-and-such a problem occurred at a plant, how would you solve it?* Now that's not a bad question, but they didn't have anything like the approachability and likeability of the Dow folks. Going into the interviews, Dow was not my first choice; coming out of them, it was absolutely my first choice. The people who interviewed me also made a difference. They were very approachable. Fortunately for me, they made an offer. And Dow turned out to be as advertised. I had a lot of opportunity from the beginning, and there were many people who provided guidance and help. I have had so many mentors in this company; it's really a bit overwhelming sometimes when I think of it.

**Dow has its own Diaspora (some last thoughts)**

4 of 8 top leaders

40% of top 200 leaders

Labor is last true source of competitive advantage

Bringing into Dow talented people

Giving them responsibility

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