

## James P. Sfarnas

Jim Sfarnas was born in 1919 of Greek immigrants in Pittston, Pennsylvania. He served in World War II as a Captain in the Air Force, which garnered him the Distinguished Flying Cross, as well as the Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters and the Asiatic Pacific Service Medal. From his commission touring the nation with the “Cavalcade of Stars” and selling war bonds, to opening the Monaco Fine Dining Restaurant at 54th and Lexington in New York City, his days were inspired by hospitality and a love of people, which continued throughout life.

His passion for the desert, as well as for hunting and fishing, and his dedication to quality family life, drew him to Tucson, Arizona, in the 1950s, together with his wife, Ione. His background in gourmet foods and top tier entertainment served him well, and enabled him to open the famed Saddle and Sirloin Supper Club in the late 1950s. He booked acts like The Platters, Mills Brothers, Nelson Eddy and the original Beverly Hillbillies. In the mid 1960s he went on to become the General Manager of the Old Pueblo Club.

Love of community led to a robust civic life. In 1961 he was the founding president of the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Clinic, which provided medical care to underserved communities in the Tucson area. He was also one of the first and strongest supporters of the Tucson Civil Liberties Committee to end discrimination in restaurants. In addition, he served on the national board of the Asthmatic Foundation, chaired the Tucson Beautiful Committee, was a member of the Airport Authority, and was the Republican candidate for mayor of Tucson in 1961.

James Sfarnas’ passion for his Greek heritage was present throughout his life, and is visible in his service as president of the St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church, as well as in his many awards, including the national Lay Churchman of the Year, and Archon, the highest honor bestowed by the Greek Orthodox Church. He also cared deeply about preserving and promoting Greek language and culture in his community. In 1983, Jim Sfarnas, together with other key Greek community members and University leaders, was instrumental in creating the Hellenic Cultural Foundation, which has since been promoting the study of Greek language, culture, and civilization at the University of Arizona for over 36 years. He was also the first President of the Hellenic Cultural Foundation, and was known to hold elegant Foundation board meetings in his and Ione’s lovely Tucson home back in the mid 1980s.

His granddaughter, Alexis Fasseas, eloquently captures a wonderful image of her grandfather with these words: “James P. Sfarnas lived a life of service while relishing in the joy of every single moment. Committed to community, family and nature, he embodied the virtues of “The Greatest Generation” and the notion of *Carpe Diem*. This life philosophy unfolded from witnessing the best and the worst of humanity. In 54 bombing missions in the South Pacific, he experienced both heroism and the fragility of life. Back home, the tragedy of war was transformed into an awe and appreciation for life. He was the life force of every social occasion, delighting the palate and the heart with good food, joie de vivre and an unparalleled sense of humor.”

In recognition of James Sfarnas’ innumerable contributions to the Tucson community and beyond, and because of his deep dedication to the preservation and promotion of Greek language

and culture, the Hellenic Cultural Foundation is delighted to announce a new scholarship in his honor by a generous donation from his daughter, Paula Fasseas, and her husband Peter Fasseas. The first James P. Sfarnas Hellenic Studies Scholarship will be awarded in the spring of 2021 to deserving University of Arizona students.

The Hellenic Cultural Foundation is extremely grateful to Peter and Paula Fasseas for their generous donation to the UA Foundation to make this scholarship a reality. In this way, James Sfarnas' legacy will live on forever.

