



**AMERICAN TURKISH
ASSOCIATION OF
WASHINGTON DC**

JANUARY 2025

TURKISH FESTIVAL MESMERIZED WASHINGTONIANS

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DC TURKISH FESTIVAL**

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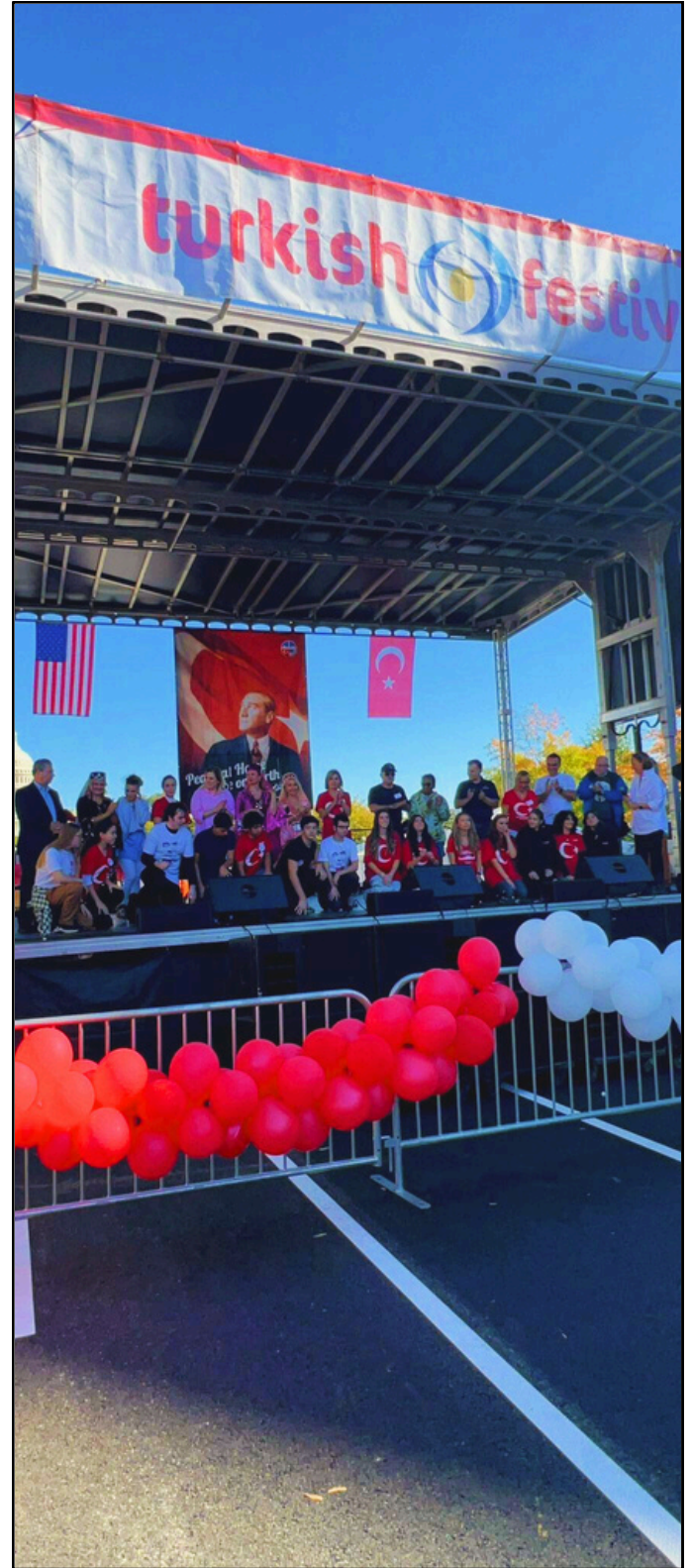
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**AMERICAN TURKISH
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE	03
FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF	05
COMMUNITY NEWS	06
WASHINGTON DC TURKISH FESTIVAL MESMERIZED AGAIN!	15
By Sevtap Schreffler	
<i>INTERVIEW, TUNA YILDIZ</i> BRIDGING CONTINENTS AND INDUSTRIES	22
By Özge Övün-Sert	
<i>INTERVIEW, ADEM KAYA</i> FROM CHAMPION TO ACADEMIC LEADER	28
By Elvan Ramazanoğulları	
IT IS NEYHOM, NOT TURKEY! CURIOUS TALE OF A BIRD'S NAME	31
By Demet Cabbar	
NGO'S ENGAGEMENT AKUT VAKFI	33
By Nasuh Mahruki	
PROGRAMS UPDATE	35
By Selcuk Oflaz / Demet Cabbar	
MASTERCHEF'S JOY OF FOOD <i>Being a Gourmet! & Taste Couch!</i>	36
By Deniz Orhun	





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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Members and Friends,

As we begin 2025, my heart is full of gratitude as I reflect on the amazing journey we've shared over the past year. It's hard to believe that it's been just one year since we revived ATANews, and I am so proud of everything we've accomplished together. This success is all thanks to your unwavering support. A special thank you to our dedicated publishing team, whose hard work has brought this publication to life and kept us connected throughout the year.

2024 has been full of meaningful moments—from memorable cultural events to wonderful celebrations of our heritage. We began the year by celebrating the founding of the Republic of Turkiye with a captivating play by Sunay Akin, followed by a heartfelt dinner for our generous sponsors. In March, we proudly presented Feyza's Kitchen for International Women's Day, and our Atatürk School students brought joy to our National Sovereignty and Children's Day celebration.

Our award-winning festival reached new heights with record attendance. We hosted a 3-day film festival featuring director Reha Erdem's works, with Q&A sessions after each screening. Our annual Republic Day Ball was an unforgettable celebration, and our Turkish Cuisine Week at the Rayburn House Office Building was a resounding success, attended by members of Congress, our Ambassador, and ATA-DC members. We wrapped up the year with a stunning concert in partnership with the DMV Chorus to honor Teachers' Day and the life of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the greatest teacher of all.

One of our most exciting achievements was the purchase of our very own ATA-DC house—a dream 60 years in the making. This space will help us continue growing and offer even more opportunities to connect, celebrate, and build lasting memories together.

As always, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to each of you for being such an integral part of this community. Your support, involvement, and commitment made all the difference, and I am so grateful to have had you by our side. I hope you had a peaceful and joyful holiday season, filled with warmth, love, and happiness. I look forward to the many wonderful moments we will continue to share in the years ahead.

With sincere thanks and warmest wishes,

Sertap Schreffler

PRESIDENT OF ATA-DC



turkish festival

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WHAT OUR SPONSORS SAID

For the past year, Turkish community played an important role in Value Mortgage's growth story. Through Turkish Festival, we were able to foster a new era of brand awareness and we closed out the year by helping 30+ borrowers to fulfill their dream of home ownership. These numbers were only accomplished in less than 7 months with the help of ATADC and the Turkish community's amazing hands on engagement opportunities. This gave us the upper

hand to deliver a high quality, personalized mortgage solutions to our borrowers. We couldn't have been more pleased to contribute to the Turkish Festival by being one of the main sponsors and looking forward to further our engagement with the Turkish community in the coming days and months. I would like to congratulate ATA-DC's leadership and the festival committee to organize such a fantastic festival.

EMRAH DILSIZOGLU, VALUE MORTGAGE

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Hello friends and our esteemed readers,

Welcome back to another edition of ATANews magazine!

As we step into a new year, the promise of fresh beginnings and boundless possibilities fills the air. A profound quote by the founding father of modern Türkiye, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, captures this sentiment perfectly: *"Victory is for those who can say 'Victory is mine.' Success is for those who can begin saying 'I will succeed' and say 'I have succeeded' in the end."* Atatürk's words remind me that the power of transformation lies not in the calendar but within ourselves, in how we choose to perceive and embrace each moment.

Beginning of a new year often inspires resolutions and goals, but it is also a time to reflect on lessons learned and challenges overcome. The past year has tested our resilience in ways we could not have imagined, yet it also illuminated our capacity to adapt, care, and grow. ATA-DC certainly experienced its share of challenges over the past year. We started the year scrambling to secure library rooms for our monthly Board of Directors meetings, but despite obstacles, our resilience never wavered. Then came the transformative milestone: the purchase of the new ATA-DC House! The journey to this achievement was neither easy nor straightforward—it was a tough, winding road that demanded the collective strength and unwavering dedication of 24 extraordinary individuals. Thus, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate each of my fellow board members and the executive committee for their determination and commitment to this matter.

New beginnings are not just about grand changes but also about small, meaningful steps. They are about finding joy in the routine, seeking opportunities in setbacks, and choosing kindness even when the world feels harsh. Remember, in a time of global uncertainty, the act of hope itself becomes revolutionary. It is a commitment to envisioning a better future and working collectively to make it a reality.

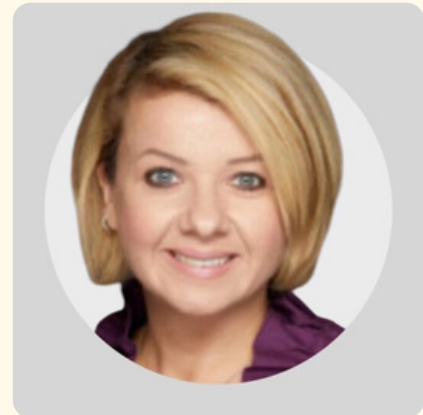
Let us enter this year with an open heart and a renewed sense of purpose. Whether your journey involves personal growth, professional aspirations, or community engagement, remember that each day offers a chance to start anew. As Atatürk's quote suggests, understanding and embracing profound thoughts can unlock the potential for gratitude, fulfillment and victory at the end!

Here's to a year filled with courage, compassion, and the unwavering belief that brighter days lie ahead. Let us write this chapter with hope, and may it be our best yet.

With warm regards and cheers!

Özge Övün-Sert

ATA-DC SECRETARY GENERAL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



LONG-AWAITED ATA-DC HOUSE IS NOW A REALITY!



After six decades of dreaming, planning, and perseverance, ATA-DC has finally its own office space with over 2700 sqft. Conveniently located in Tysons Corner area, the new office space has over 200 parking spots and easy access to major highways and toll roads.

ATA-DC's new home has everything from four classrooms to a spacious kitchen, and a large event area that can accommodate up to 90 people theater-style. President Sevtap Schreffler shared her excitement: "The dream of a permanent home for ATA-DC is now a reality, and with our members' continued support, it will become the heart of our Turkish-American community. It will be designed to host cultural programs, educational workshops, and social gatherings. To help make this vision a reality, please consider making a donation. We need your support more than ever!"



CONCERT ON TEACHERS' DAY BY DMV TURKISH MUSIC ENSEMBLE

On November 24th, the DMV Turkish Music Ensemble, comprised of amateur music enthusiasts, paid tribute to Atatürk with a special concert in collaboration with the ATADC. The event, held in celebration of Teachers' Day, drew a large and enthusiastic crowd to a packed hall.

The concert featured a diverse program of classical songs and speeches honoring Atatürk. Dignitaries from the Turkish and, Azeri Embassies, as well as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus were among the attendees. The event began with the performance of the Turkish and American national anthems, followed by folk songs that were favorites of Atatürk. The second half of the concert showcased selections from Turkish classical music and a captivating Zeybek dance performance.



DARON ACEMOGLU WON THE 2024 NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS

Turkish-American economist and MIT professor Daron Acemoglu won the 2024 Nobel Prize in Economics alongside Simon Johnson and James Robinson for their research on the role of societal institutions in driving a country's prosperity. Acemoglu, co-author of the bestseller *Why Nations Fail* and an expert in various economic fields, explores how weak rule of law and exploitative institutions hinder growth and progress. Since 1993, Acemoglu has been a lecturer at the London School of Economics and an assistant professor, the Pentti Kouri Associate Professor, and professor of economics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

CEREMONIES ON NOVEMBER 10 IN HONOR OF ATATÜRK MEMORIAL DAY



Representatives from the embassies of The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Azerbaijan were present

The Turkish Embassy in Washington, DC, hosted a solemn ceremony on November 10 in honor of Atatürk Memorial Day, marking the 86th anniversary of the passing of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Türkiye. The event took place at the embassy and featured a keynote address by Alpaslan Özerdem, Dean of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at GMU.

Ambassador Sedat Önal delivered a heartfelt speech, emphasizing the significance of the day and Atatürk's enduring legacy. He remarked: "On this meaningful day, we express our deepest gratitude to Atatürk, who dedicated his entire life to the Turkish nation. It is also a time for us to reflect on our current position and the direction we are heading. One of the most remarkable qualities that set Atatürk apart from his contemporaries was his ability to remain current and relevant. Today, Türkiye, upholding Atatürk's legacy, stands as a respected voice in the global arena—a country whose contributions to regional peace and stability are both sought and valued." The ceremony underscored Atatürk's vision and enduring influence, highlighting Türkiye's evolving role on the world stage.

Following the ceremony at the Turkish Embassy chancery, participants gathered for a second commemorative event organized by the Atatürk Society of America (ASA). The memorial took place in front of the statue of Atatürk, providing an additional opportunity to honor his legacy. Attendees paid their respects through speeches, reflections, and a moment of silence, reaffirming their admiration for Atatürk's visionary leadership and his lasting impact on modern Türkiye.



GALA FOR THE ANNIVERSARY OF NORTHERN CYPRUS PROCLAMATION

The 41st Anniversary of the proclamation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) was commemorated with a gala hosted by the Ambassador of the TRNC to the United States, Her Excellency Damla Güçlü, and Mr. Mustafa Güçlü.

This momentous event consistently attracts significant attention from the Turkish communities across the DC-MD-VA area, and this year, it took place at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C. Her Excellency Damla Güçlü delivered the opening remarks, honoring the founders of the TRNC and expressing deep gratitude for the unwavering support of the Turkish community in fostering a more prosperous nation that was established 41 years ago. Congressman Pete Sessions also offered a powerful speech, underscoring the essential need for peace and freedom for all Cypriots on the island, while affirming his steadfast support in the pursuit of this goal.



ERTEGUN JAZZ CONCERT SERIES AT THE TURKISH EMBASSY

The Turkish Ambassador hosted another jazz concert featuring the *Dan Nimmer Trio* as part of the Ertegun Jazz Series. Tony Gallucci, founder of Ahmet's House and Prof. Maurice Jackson of Georgetown University spoke at the event on November 18.

The Ertegun Jazz Series, launched in Oct 2010, honors Turkish Amb. Munir Ertegun and his sons Ahmet & Nesuhi, who welcomed jazz musicians in the 1930s and 40s at the Turkish Ambassador's residence. In 1942, Ertegun brothers organized DC's first integrated jazz concert at the Turkish Ambassador's residence—making history and standing for equality.



TURKISH JOURNALISTS PEHLIVAN AND DEMIRDAĞ WERE IN DC



Journalists Barış Pehlivan and Duygu Demirdağ held a well-attended event at the "Meze" restaurant in Washington, DC, where they discussed social issues in Türkiye. As part of a U.S. tour, they met with Turkish communities in Washington, Boston, New York, and Chicago. Pehlivan spoke about human rights violations in Türkiye, emphasizing the importance of the rule of law and focusing on key issues like justice, education, and the economy. Demirdağ, who made a documentary on the 2023 earthquakes, shared her experiences as a female journalist and stressed the importance of support and solidarity.

ATAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE WILL BE HELD IN MAY 2025

The Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) will hold its 2025 Annual Conference on May 2-3, 2025 at the Westin Crystal City Reagan National Airport in Arlington, VA. The conference will start with registration on Friday, May 2, and end with a gala dinner on Saturday, May 3, in the evening. The annual conference will bring together ATAA members, Turkish Americans, community leaders, and scholars from across the nation, Canada and Türkiye.

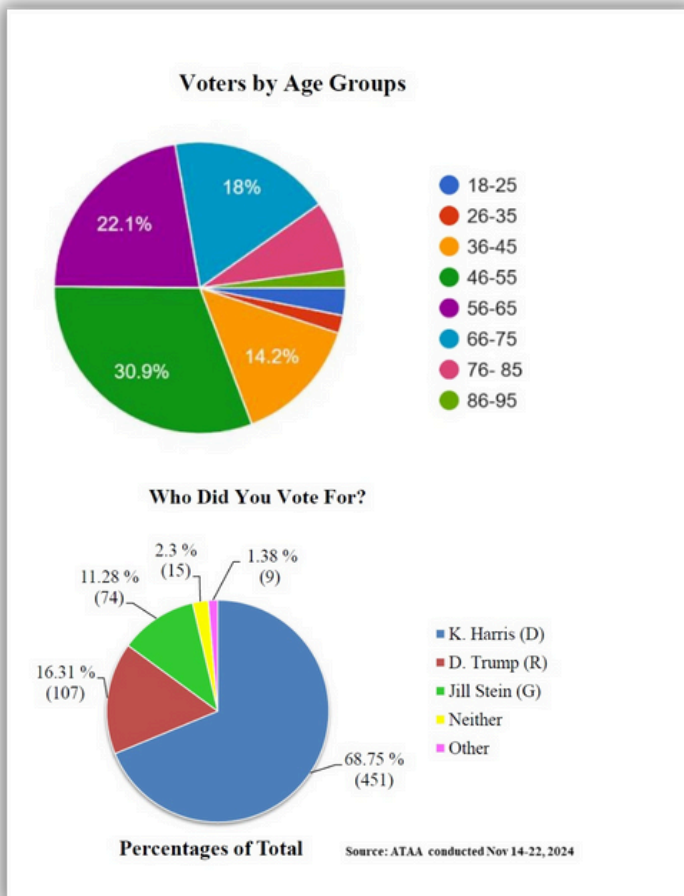
ATAA is offering early bird registration discounts to its members who register for the 2025 Annual Conference by March 1, 2025. If you are a current ATAA member, you will receive an email with the discount code to use at checkout. For questions, contact information is events@ataa.org or 202-483-9090. Current full-time students (high school and undergraduate only) will receive special discounts for the 2025 Annual Conference. Valid proof of student id is required.



SURVEY ON TURKISH AMERICANS' VOTE IN THE 2024 U.S. ELECTIONS

The 2024 Presidential Election Survey conducted by the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) analyzed the voting behaviors of Turkish American voters across 40 states, collecting 756 responses. The survey revealed that 87% of respondents participated in the election, with 68.75% supporting Kamala Harris, 16.31% voting for Donald Trump, and 11.28% favoring Green Party candidate Jill Stein. Kamala Harris received more support from women, especially those aged 46–55. The survey also highlighted a high educational level among respondents, with over 60% holding a Master's or PhD degree.

The data underscored notable trends within the Turkish American community, including higher participation from California and significant representation from age groups 46–55 and 56–65. Female voters were slightly more active, and Jill Stein's support among this demographic was considerably higher than her overall national percentage. The findings demonstrate the political engagement and demographic nuances of the Turkish American population in the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election.





MEMORABLE CELEBRATIONS FOR THE 101ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE

BY FERİHA İŞTAR

Autumn is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful times in DC, and October is its crown jewel. This year, ATA-DC's annual Republic Day Ball was blessed with exceptionally lovely weather, adding a special charm to the occasion.

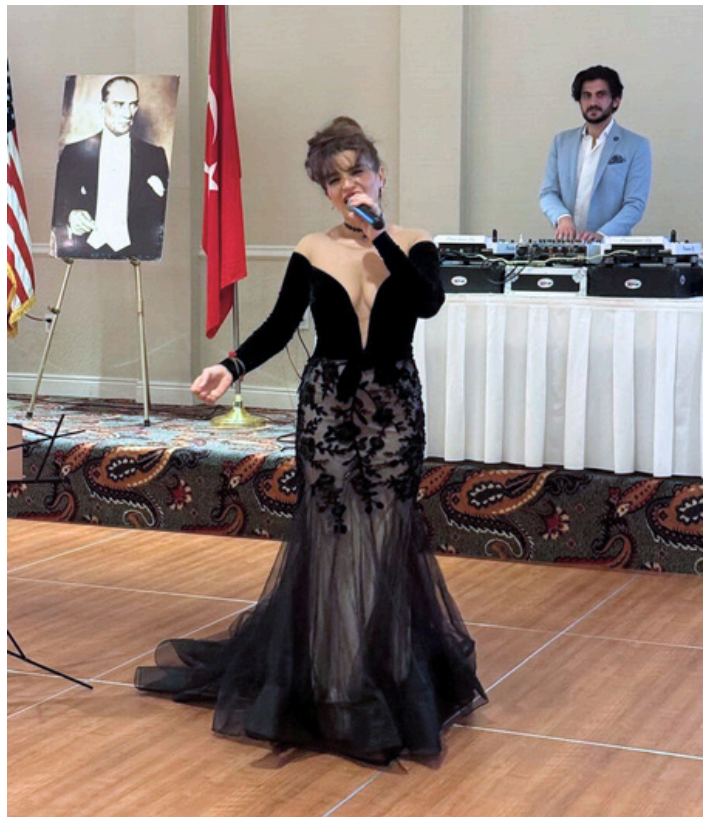
On October 29, 2024, approximately 120 guests gathered at Washington Plaza Hotel to celebrate the 101st anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Türkiye. The event attracted many members of the Turkish American community, including a vibrant representation from younger generations. We were deeply honored by the presence of Ambassador for Northern Cyprus, Mrs. Damla Güçlü, Mr. Güçlü, and Counselor for the Turkish Embassy, Mr. Fırat Sırma and Mrs. Sırma.

The evening began with a cocktail hour, after which guests were seated for dinner and welcomed by the master of ceremonies, Mr. Tolga Özek. The program commenced with a

solemn moment of silence in remembrance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the soldiers who gave their lives for our country. ATA-DC President, Mrs. Sevtap Shreffler, delivered a heartfelt speech, welcoming the attendees and commemorating the 101st anniversary of the Turkish Republic. She paid tribute to this historic milestone while also expressing solidarity with those affected by the recent tragedy at Turkish Aerospace Industries. Mrs. Schreffler highlighted the organization's achievements, including the acquisition of the ATA-DC House in Falls Church, Virginia, and encouraged support for its renovation efforts.







COMMUNITY NEWS



Ambassador Önal was not able to join ATA-DC's celebration due to his duty in NY, thus the newly appointed Counselor, Mr. Fırat Sırma, represented the Turkish Embassy. In his speech, Mr. Sırma celebrated Türkiye's remarkable journey, from its challenging beginnings to its current status as a strong global power. He reaffirmed Türkiye's commitment to Atatürk's principle of "Peace at home, peace in the world," emphasizing the importance of global peace and robust partnerships, particularly with the United States.

Remarkable Receptions Organized by the Turkish Embassy
Meanwhile, the Turkish Embassy organized two separate receptions for foreign dignitaries and Turkish citizens to celebrate the Republic Day. Representatives from the U.S. administration were among the guests.

Acting Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs John Bass gave a heartfelt speech emphasizing the importance of working together towards another century of partnership. "We look forward to another century of friendship that benefits our people and, the region, and the world" Bass said.



Acting Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs John Bass with Ambassador and Mrs. Önal





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DC TURKISH FESTIVAL MESMERIZED THE WASHINGTONIANS ONCE AGAIN!



Washington, D.C. Celebrates Turkish Culture and Heritage at the 22nd Annual Turkish Festival. The celebrations highlighted this year's theme: "Türkiye Calling"



BY SEVTAP SCHREFFLER

On Sunday, October 20, 2024, the streets of Washington, D.C. were alive with the sights, sounds, and flavors of Türkiye during the 22nd Annual Turkish Festival. Held along Pennsylvania Avenue NW, the event was a spectacular display of Turkish culture that brought together tens of thousands of festival-goers, eager to experience the vibrancy and warmth of one of the world's most beloved cultures. Under the theme "Türkiye Calling," the festival was a celebration not only of the rich traditions of Türkiye but also of the enduring bonds between the Turkish and American communities.

This year's festival was part of the 13th Turkish Cultural Heritage Month in D.C., and D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser officially proclaimed October 2024 as Turkish Heritage Month. This proclamation not only honored the contributions of the Turkish-American community but also highlighted the importance of cultural exchange and the strengthening of relationships between different cultural groups. The official recognition by the city underscored how integral the Turkish community is to the diversity and multicultural fabric of Washington, D.C.

A Day of Immersive Cultural Experiences

As festival-goers arrived at Pennsylvania Avenue, they were immediately immersed in a world of Turkish culture. The day was filled with an impressive array of cultural activities and performances. From the bustling sounds of traditional Turkish folk music to the rhythmic steps of Turkish dance, the atmosphere was electric with energy and excitement. One of the most notable features of the event was the Turkish Bazaar, which featured more than 40 vendors selling unique, handcrafted goods. Attendees had the opportunity to shop for everything from exquisite jewelry and hand-woven textiles to authentic Turkish home décor and artwork, all while interacting with local artisans.

In addition to the bazaar, the Turkish Tea House and Coffee House offered a taste of Turkish hospitality, inviting visitors to sample traditional Turkish tea and coffee. In the spirit of Turkish tradition, fortune-tellers were on hand to offer “tasseography” or fortune reading from coffee grounds, adding a mystical and fun element to the experience. The festival also provided an opportunity to engage with Turkish arts, such as paper marbling and calligraphy, with live demonstrations showcasing the centuries-old practices that continue to thrive in modern-day Türkiye.



This year's festival was especially significant because it also featured cultural exhibits from other Turkic nations, expanding its focus beyond Türkiye. Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other Turkic countries were represented offering a glimpse into their unique traditions, crafts, and culinary delights. The inclusion of these nations enriched the cultural diversity of the event, emphasizing the shared heritage and cultural connections. Visitors had the chance to explore the distinct artistic traditions, music, and culinary specialties from these countries, making this year's festival a truly pan-Turkic celebration.

One of the most heartwarming aspects of the festival was the Kids' Tent, where families and children enjoyed arts and crafts activities that introduced them to Turkish culture. Children had the chance to create their own Turkish-themed crafts, such as painted ceramics and colorful lanterns, while parents could enjoy the activities alongside their little ones. The inclusion of these family-friendly activities helped make the festival a multi-generational event, ensuring that Turkish culture would be passed down to future generations.

A Delicious Taste of Türkiye

Food played a central role at the Turkish Festival, offering a delightful array of traditional Turkish dishes that were a hit with attendees. Local D.C. Turkish restaurants set up food stalls offering a wide variety of delicious Turkish cuisine, including succulent kebabs, döner, börek (savory pastries), and an assortment of delectable desserts such as baklava, künefe, and Turkish delight. Visitors could also enjoy authentic Turkish coffee, served just as it would be in the heart of Istanbul or Ankara. The food was a feast for the senses, and it was clear that the festival was not just about showcasing the culture but also about inviting people to experience the unique flavors of Türkiye.

Fostering Cross-Cultural Connections

The Turkish Festival has become one of the most anticipated cultural events since its inception, and it continues to serve as a powerful platform for



fostering cross-cultural understanding. For nearly 60 years, the American-Turkish Association of Washington, D.C. (ATA-DC) has been at the forefront of building bridges between the Turkish and American communities. The Turkish Festival is one of the flagship events, and its success is a testament to the power of cultural celebrations in uniting diverse communities.

This year, the festival garnered significant media attention. WETA and PBS radio stations mentioned the event, highlighting its importance as a cultural landmark in Washington, D.C. Several local and international news channels also showed up to film the event and interview both organizers and visitors. The festival's widespread coverage underscored the growing recognition of the Turkish Festival as a major cultural event in the city. Patsy Jones, chair of the festival committee, shared her reflections on the festival's importance: "For 22 years, we've proudly hosted the Turkish Festival right in the heart of the nation's capital, inviting our American friends to experience and celebrate Türkiye's cultural richness. We're deeply grateful to Mayor Bowser for recognizing Turkish Heritage Month, which highlights the importance of building bridges and strengthening cultural ties. This festival is a true celebration of both Turkish culture and the vibrant community we share."



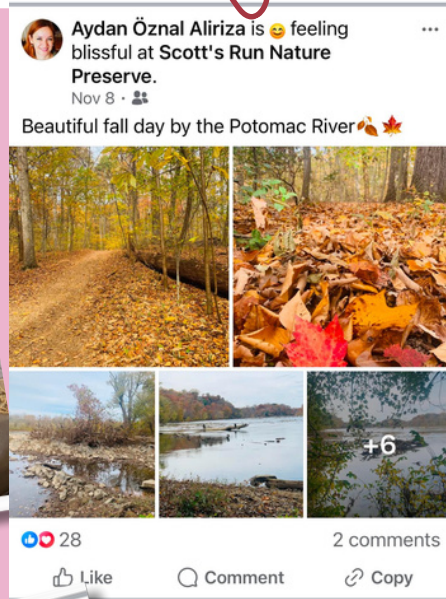
A Successful and Welcoming Celebration

The festival's success would not have been possible without the generous support of its sponsors. Key sponsors included the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, Turkish Coalition of America, Turkish Embassy, and several other local and national organizations. ATA-DC also acknowledged the incredible work of the hundreds of volunteers who dedicated their time and efforts to ensure the event ran smoothly. Volunteers helped with everything from setting up booths to assisting guests, ensuring that attendees had the best possible experience.

In addition to the cultural experiences and festivities, the festival served as a reminder of the deep connections between Türkiye and the United States, as well as the shared values of community, friendship, and hospitality. ■



OUR COMMUNITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA



ATA-DC: A New Home, A New Chapter

Dear Friends,

After six decades of dreaming, planning, and perseverance, we are thrilled to share an incredible milestone with you: ATA-DC now has a place to call our own! This achievement is not just a victory for our organization, but a triumph for our entire community. It is a testament to what we can accomplish when we come together with passion, commitment, and a shared vision.

A Space to Grow and Thrive

Our new home is everything we had hoped for and more. With four classrooms, a spacious kitchen, and an event area that can accommodate up to 90 people theater-style, this space will become the heart of our community. It is perfectly designed to host cultural programs, educational workshops, and social gatherings. The new location is also incredibly convenient. With over 200 parking spots and easy access to major highways, it offers accessibility and ease for everyone who wants to join us. This location lays the foundation for ATA-DC's continued growth, making it the perfect space to realize the exciting plans.

A Rollercoaster Journey to Securing the Space

But the journey to get here wasn't easy. Just when we were about to sign the contract, another offer came in, threatening to derail everything. What followed was a tense negotiation, but thanks to the unwavering dedication of our amazing realtor, Öykü Hanna, we were able to secure the property at a price well below its appraised value. It was an emotional rollercoaster, but every moment was worth it.

A Historic Moment for Our Community

Our first board meeting in the new space was an unforgettable experience. We were joined by one of ATA-DC's founders, Engin Holmstrom, whose pride and excitement were contagious. Her reflections on the years of dedication leading up to this moment were truly inspiring. We were also honored to have Esin Reinhardt, a long-time supporter and past board member, with us to celebrate this historic occasion. As we gathered in our new home, we couldn't help but reflect on how far we've come. This new space is more than just a physical location; it represents years of hard work, determination, and a shared vision for our community's future.

The Next Chapter: Transforming Our Space

Now, we turn our focus to the next chapter—transforming this new space into a vibrant hub for all of us. Renovations are already underway, and we need your help to bring this vision to life. Whether it's through donations, volunteer time, or offering professional expertise, there are countless ways you can get involved in making this space a true center for connection.

This is just the beginning. The dream of a permanent home for ATA-DC is now a reality, and with your continued support, we'll build on this success to create a place where our community can thrive for generations to come. To help make this vision a reality, please consider making a donation using the QR code below.

Let's celebrate this moment and continue working toward an even brighter future!

**Warmly,
The ATA-DC Board of Directors**



ATA-DC HOUSE YOUR SUPPORT OUR FUTURE

Help us transform it into a vibrant community hub with modern spaces, a library, a kitchen, and classrooms for the Atatürk School.

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BRIDGING CONTINENTS AND INDUSTRIES

AN INTERVIEW WITH TUNA YILDIZ, THE FOUNDER AND CEO OF **BELTWAY GLAZING** ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP, CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SUCCESS

BY ÖZGE ÖVÜN-SERT



When Tuna Yıldız embarked on his journey from Türkiye to the United States, he carried with him dreams, ambitions, and a wealth of experience. In this exclusive interview with ATANews, we delved into the inspiring story of this visionary entrepreneur, whose path from Istanbul to Washington, D.C. reflects determination, adaptability, and a deep commitment to excellence. With a career that bridges continents and industries, Yıldız has overcome the challenges of building a business in a foreign land while honoring his cultural heritage. Join us as he shares the motivations behind his move to America, the lessons learned along the way, and the defining moments that have shaped his remarkable career.

Thank you for taking the time to do this interview with us. To start, can you walk us through your journey from Türkiye to the United States? What inspired you to move and launch a new career here, and how has your background influenced your business and career path in the U.S.?

I'm originally from Ankara but went to university in Eskişehir. While I was studying business, I also pursued a minor in music at the Anadolu Üniversitesi Halk Bilimler Enstitüsü. After graduating, I moved to Istanbul and started my career at the International Republican Institute's Istanbul office. Shortly after that, I joined Efes Pilsen, Türkiye's largest beer brand.

Throughout university, I always had an entrepreneurial spirit. So, after gaining a few years of experience, I partnered with a friend to start our own business—a foreign trade company with offices in both Shanghai and Istanbul. We mainly focused on construction materials and quickly secured major deals, selling to countries like Türkiye, Iraq, and Azerbaijan.

In 2012–2013, while my wife was doing her doctoral research at Yale, I met someone who introduced me to Selva, a like-minded entrepreneur living in Washington, D.C. Selva had years of experience in the U.S. commercial construction sector and was eager to bring in affordable and innovative European products to the market. After a phone call, I flew to D.C. to meet her. We started as client and supplier, but eventually, she convinced me to expand the business and establish a company together in the U.S.

At first, I was basically dividing my time between Istanbul and Washington D.C., managing businesses in both countries. However, as our projects in the U.S. grew, they quickly outpaced the work in Türkiye. That’s when my wife and I decided to relocate to Washington D.C. full-time. And that’s how our journey here began.



Beltway Glazing organized a trip to Türkiye, introducing Turkish manufacturers to the American builders and contractors



What led you to enter the glazing industry? And, as an immigrant entrepreneur, what were the most significant challenges you faced while starting your business in this field?

The glazing industry was initially just one of the many fields I worked in. However, in the U.S., specialization and becoming highly skilled in a particular niche is critical for success. Rather than spreading myself thin across multiple areas, I decided to focus on glazing, as it offered significant growth opportunities and aligned with my professional expertise.

Of course, the journey wasn’t without challenges—there were plenty, especially as an immigrant entrepreneur. One of the most striking differences I noticed was the business mindset. Having worked in Türkiye, I was immediately aware of how differently things operate here. For instance, in Türkiye, business deals are often negotiated directly between owners at the table. Relationships and personal connections play a huge role. In the U.S., however, that’s rarely the case. Many of the projects I’ve worked on here were secured without ever meeting the company owner or even the project team face-to-face.

The learning curve was steep. There were cultural differences to navigate, industry standards to learn, and trust to build in a market that values proven expertise. The reality is, as someone coming from Türkiye and trying to establish a business in the U.S., you have to work twice as hard as your local competitors. It's not just about competing—it's about proving that you belong in the game. Ultimately, it's this combination of adaptability, persistence, and an unwavering commitment to excellence that allowed me to overcome these challenges and build a successful business in the glazing industry.

Your business focuses primarily on the commercial sector, including competing in government bids—a rare achievement for many immigrant-owned businesses. Could you share how this process works? What challenges and opportunities have you encountered, and what advice would you offer to readers interested in pursuing similar projects in the public sector?

Competing in both government and commercial contracting is a very structured and rigorous process, but it can be incredibly rewarding for businesses willing to put in the effort. For immigrant-owned businesses, these opportunities may seem daunting due to the complexity of regulations, compliance requirements, and the need to establish credibility in competitive markets. For government contracting, the process typically starts with registering your business in government procurement systems. Key point is getting the prequalification from general contractors. From there, it involves monitoring bid opportunities, submitting proposals that meet strict criteria, and navigating extensive documentation and approval processes. Success in this area requires meticulous attention to detail and a deep understanding of each project's specific requirements. Commercial contracting, on the other hand, often focuses more on building relationships, networking, and proving your value to private clients or general contractors. Unlike the formalized structure of the government bids, commercial projects may require more flexibility, adaptability, and a strong reputation in the industry. Both sectors demand the highest level of professionalism and reliability, but commercial clients often emphasize trust and ongoing partnerships as key factors in awarding contracts.

One of the biggest challenges I faced early on was overcoming the perception barrier. As an immigrant-owned business, you often feel like you're starting from scratch in terms of building trust and proving your capabilities. It was critical to showcase not only the quality of our work but also our ability to comply



with stringent standards, deliver on time, and exceed client expectations in both sectors. However, the opportunities are immense. Winning government contracts provides stability, long-term projects, and a strong reputation in the industry.

My advice to anyone interested in pursuing either government or commercial contracting is to master the basics first: ensure your business is properly registered, invest in understanding the process for each sector, and be patient—it's a long game that requires patience and persistence. Building relationships and networking within the industry are equally critical, especially for commercial contracting. And most importantly, never ever compromise on quality. Delivering excellent work, whether for public or private clients, is the best way to stand out and build a strong foundation for future opportunities.

Have you worked on any notable projects in the Washington, DC area that you're particularly proud of?

From an architectural perspective, we worked on numerous award-winning projects across the country. We recently completed work on Modan Restaurant in Tysons, which received design accolades. Additionally, we've finished countless office and restaurants projects in Washington, D.C., many of which were designed by some of the region's most celebrated architects. We've also taken on significant public sector projects. One of our proudest achievements is working on glass and window replacement or repair for numerous public schools in the D.C. area.

How do you balance preserving your cultural identity while catering to the American market? In other words, has your experience as a Turkish immigrant influenced your business values or operations?

Balancing my cultural identity while catering to the American market has been an ongoing but rewarding process. As a Turkish immigrant, my background has certainly shaped the way I approach business, often giving me a unique edge. One of the things I deeply admire about the American market is its structured, "by-the-book" approach. It ensures consistency and sets clear expectations. However, I've also noticed that this rigidity can sometimes make problem-solving difficult, especially when unexpected challenges arise. This is where my Turkish background has been invaluable. Turks are known for their practicality, adaptability, and ability to find creative solutions in the face of adversity. These traits have helped me navigate situations that require flexibility and quick thinking—qualities that aren't always emphasized within the American system. For example, in my business, there have been times when strict adherence to the rules might have delayed a project or left an issue unresolved. But by applying a more flexible, solutions-oriented mindset, I've been able to bridge gaps and deliver results that satisfy both American standards and the immediate needs of the situation. This ability to adapt without losing sight of the end goal has become one of the core values of my business. At the same time, I've embraced the importance of professionalism and precision that the American market demands. Combining these two approaches—Turkish practicality and American structure—has allowed me to operate with efficiency and creativity while still meeting the high standards expected in this market. It's a balance that not only preserves my cultural identity but also enhances the value I bring to the table as an entrepreneur.

Is there a story or moment in your journey that encapsulates why you do what you do?

Two days before President Biden's inauguration, my phone rang—it was the Secret Service. At first, I was surprised and unsure of the purpose of the call. I soon learned that they wanted us to install bulletproof glass at the Lincoln Memorial to protect the president during his speech. While this request was a great honor, we had to decline due to the extremely tight timeline. This remains one of the most unforgettable moments in my career. Since that day, however, we've had the opportunity to work on several projects for the Secret Service, which has been a tremendous privilege.

What's the most valuable lesson you've learned as a small business owner?

The most valuable lesson I've learned is the importance of resilience and adaptability. Running a business comes with its fair share of challenges and unexpected obstacles, market fluctuations, and even failures. But what sets successful businesses apart is the ability to stay focused, pivot when needed, and never lose sight of your goals.

One specific lesson is the power of relationships and trust. In both government and commercial contracting, earning trust—whether from clients, partners, or employees—is crucial. It's not just about delivering quality work; it's about being reliable, transparent, and consistently going the extra mile. Building strong relationships has been one of the most important factors in the growth of my business.



Another lesson is to always remain open to learning. As a business owner, you're constantly exposed to new challenges, industries, and people. Staying curious and willing to adapt is what allows you to turn challenges into real opportunities. Ultimately, I've learned that success doesn't come overnight. It's the result of patience, persistence, and an unwavering commitment to your vision, even when things don't go as planned. Every setback is a learning experience, and every small win is a step forward. This mindset has been invaluable in shaping my journey as a business owner.



What are your long-term aspirations, both as a businessman and in your roles as a father and husband in your personal life?

My long-term aspirations are deeply rooted in achieving a balance between professional success and personal fulfillment. I aim to grow my company Beltway Glazing into a trusted name across the nation, recognized for its innovative and sustainable solutions. However, my greatest ambition is to create a business that not only thrives but also positively impacts the communities we serve, leaving a legacy of trust, quality, and innovation. At the core of everything I do is my family. As a father to Teohan and Tuana, I want to guide them

in becoming compassionate, confident, and independent individuals who pursue their dreams with integrity. For my wife and our partnership, my focus is on building a strong, supportive foundation that allows our family to grow together in love, respect, and shared values. Ultimately, I want to be remembered as someone who balanced ambition with compassion, built something meaningful in both my career and personal life, and always prioritized the happiness and well-being of those I care about most.

What do you miss most about Türkiye, and how do you stay connected to your roots while living in the U.S.?

What I miss most about Türkiye is the deep sense of community and the cultural richness that surrounds every aspect of life. The hospitality, the warmth of the people, and the strong bonds shared with family and friends are irreplaceable. I often find myself reminiscing about simple yet meaningful moments—sipping tea by the Bosphorus, the aroma of freshly baked simit on the streets, or the energy of bustling bazaars.

I AIM TO GROW MY COMPANY 'BELTWAY GLAZING' INTO A MOST TRUSTED NAME ACROSS THE NATION, RECOGNIZED FOR ITS INNOVATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS. HOWEVER, MY GREATEST AMBITION IS TO CREATE A BUSINESS THAT NOT ONLY THRIVES BUT ALSO POSITIVELY IMPACTS THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE, LEAVING A LEGACY OF TRUST, QUALITY, AND INNOVATION.

The connection to tradition is another thing I deeply miss. To stay connected to my roots while living in the U.S., I make it a priority to celebrate Turkish traditions with my family. We cook traditional meals, speak Turkish at home, and share stories about our heritage, ensuring that our children grow up with a strong connection to where they come from. I also engage with the Turkish-American community, participate in cultural events, and visit Türkiye whenever possible to keep that connection alive. For me, maintaining these ties is not just about nostalgia; it's about passing on a legacy and ensuring the richness of my culture remains a part of my life, no matter where I am. ■



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FROM WRESTLING CHAMPION TO ACADEMIC LEADER

Adem Kaya's journey highlights the profound impact of sports and athleticism

BY ELVAN RAMAZANOĞULLARI

Adem Kaya's story is one of resilience, dedication, and unwavering commitment to excellence. A six-time Türkiye National Wrestling Champion, Kaya has made an indelible mark in both athletics and academics. Today, he serves as a professor at Bowie State University, where he teaches and mentors students in sports management, blending his experience as an elite athlete with his academic expertise. Recently, he expanded his impact by opening Hive MMA Fitness in Fairfax, Virginia, offering programs in martial arts, wrestling, women's fitness, and youth training. Kaya's story is an inspiring testament to the power of perseverance, cultural pride, and an unveiling passion for empowering the next generation.

In a recent interview with ATANews, our Managing Editor Elvan Ramazanogullari sat down with Kaya to explore his journey to success in the U.S., and his vision for the future.

From Wrestling Champion to Adjunct Professor

Your journey from being a six-time Türkiye National Champion to a professor at Bowie State University is truly remarkable. Can you share how your experiences as an elite athlete shaped your approach to teaching and mentoring students in sports management?

My dream of transitioning from being a competitive athlete to becoming an educator in higher education began when I was on the Turkish national wrestling team before coming to the United States. While I was an athlete on the Turkish National Wrestling team, I competed twice in the United States as a Turkish national team member and learned about opportunities in wrestling. I tried out for the 2000 Turkish Olympic team, but it didn't work out in the final tryout. So, I decided to pursue my educational and professional career in the United States.



Originally, I came to the U.S. as an F-1 language student with the hope of becoming a coach or graduate student if I got an opportunity to stay here. Thankfully, it worked out well at the language school in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, where I established a good friendship with the head coach and others. As a result, I was offered a coaching opportunity at a prestigious Division I university, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While working there as a coach, I eventually earned my master's and Ph.D. from North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, NC. There's no question that my professional elite wrestling background has definitely helped me be more effective in my teaching. I often give examples from personal experience, whether it's about sports psychology or sports ethics. I frequently draw on real-life examples from my personal and professional experiences during my lectures.

Türkiye Wrestling Legacy

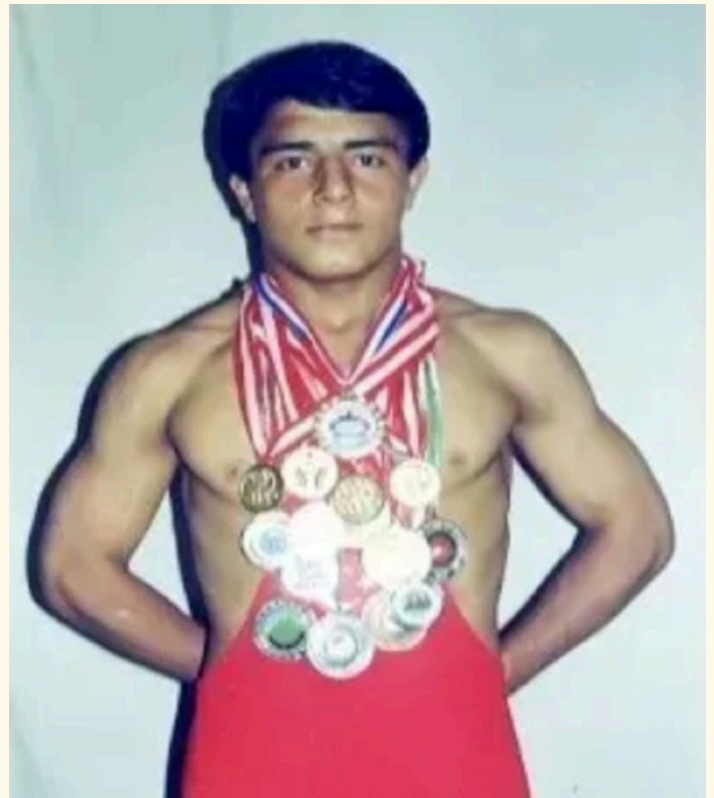
You were a long-time member and captain of the Türkiye National Wrestling Team, participating in over 25 major international tournaments. How has the wrestling tradition in Türkiye influenced your coaching philosophy, especially here in the U.S.?

I am originally from Kahramanmaraş, where wrestling is the most popular social activity in the region. I've worked with several wonderful coaches and learned a lot from each of them, whether it was about good or bad coaching styles. I was fortunate to have been coached by several great individuals who played an important role in shaping my coaching philosophy and style. I learned how to effectively teach youth, focusing not just on technique but also on motivation, healthy eating, discipline and determination. It all matters. For me, coaching is all about commitment, sacrifices, and hard work.

Cultural Integration in Sports

How have your Turkish heritage and experiences as an international competitor influenced your work with American athletes? Do you bring any unique perspectives or training methods from your time in Türkiye to your coaching in the U.S.?

Because I'm Turkish, people in the wrestling community here know that Türkiye has a great wrestling tradition and success on the global stage. Historically, Türkiye dominated world wrestling at one time, especially between 1940 and 1960. Some of our club or national team coaches were exceptional,



and I personally learned a lot from them. Now, I try to incorporate those lessons into my coaching. Some of the techniques I teach are unique and may not have been seen or properly taught here in the U.S. This gives me the opportunity to introduce new techniques and methods to my wrestlers, which sets them apart.

Turkish Athletes in the Global Arena

Türkiye has a rich history of wrestling success, especially in the Olympics. How do you see the role of Turkish athletes evolving on the global stage? What can young Turkish American athletes learn from Türkiye's legacy in wrestling?

Historically, Turkish wrestling has had a wonderful reputation since the modern Olympics began. While there have been some ups and downs in recent decades, in general, Turkish wrestling still holds a phenomenal reputation. For instance, we've had several legendary wrestlers like Taha Akgül and Rıza Kayaalp, who have dominated world titles in the last decade in their heavyweight classes. When you think about all this success, it's something people remember and respect. It makes me very proud. I've seen the benefits of this respect firsthand. When people in the U.S. learn that I'm from Türkiye with a wrestling background, they respect me more. My advice to Turkish Americans is to be proud of their heritage and wrestling background because wrestling has been an integral



Looking Ahead

What are your future goals in both the academic and athletic worlds? Do you see yourself continuing to mentor young athletes, or are there other projects on the horizon that you're passionate about?

Absolutely. As long as I live, I will be involved in sports because I see tremendous benefits in participation. Looking at today's society, I see many young people who are physically inactive, which concerns me. There are so many kids out there who need guidance, motivation, and empowerment. It's our moral and ethical responsibility as educators and coaches to guide them and make a difference. My future goal is to start a sports center where I can make a meaningful impact on the community while continuing to teach in academia and contribute to the literature in the field of sports management.

Dr. Adem Kaya's journey from a six-time Türkiye National Wrestling Champion to a respected professor and coach highlights the profound impact of sports on both personal and professional level. His passion for teaching, rooted in his experiences as an elite athlete, continues to inspire students and athletes alike both in the U.S. and abroad. ■

Coaching at the University Level

You've coached at prestigious institutions like UNC Chapel Hill and Lock Haven University, where you led teams to conference titles and produced All-Americans. What do you think is the key to building successful teams, both in wrestling and in the broader context of sports management?

Coaching is not just about instructing; it's about motivating, guiding, and helping athletes set and achieve goals. Success requires pedagogical knowledge and experience. You need to teach in a way that wrestlers can understand, apply, and use to improve themselves step by step.

Balancing Coaching, Teaching, and Family

With your extensive career as a coach and professor, how do you balance your professional commitments with your family life? What lessons from wrestling and sports do you pass down to your children?

I've learned a lot of life skills through sports, such as discipline and hard work. Competing at the elite level requires significant time commitments and sacrifices. Success doesn't come by luck; you have to work hard and discipline yourself to balance eating, sleeping, studying, and working. If you maintain discipline, there's no room for error. I try to instill similar values in my children, who also participate in sports.



For the first time in school history, a teammate from Adem Kaya's High School Wrestling Team won Maryland State Championship

IT IS NEYHOM, NOT TURKEY! CURIOUS TALE OF A BIRD'S NAME

BY DEMET CABBAR

The tale begins with European settlers mistaking the bird with the guinea fowl—another bird that was brought to Europe by Ottoman Turkish merchants



As a Turkish immigrant, I've always had a complex relationship with the connection between Turkey and my homeland, Türkiye. This connection became even more intriguing when I discovered that the bird commonly associated with Thanksgiving in the United States was named after my country, Türkiye. Of course, this was a misnomer because the turkey isn't native to Türkiye at all. In fact, we call the turkey "hindi," which means "From India". This small linguistic mix-up led me to dive deeper into the story, and I found that the tale of the turkey's name is far more complicated and fascinating than I ever imagined.

Growing up in the shadow of *Midnight Express*, a film that painted a harsh and distorted image of Turkey and its people, I always felt a deep responsibility to share the more positive and nuanced aspects of my country with the world. So, when I discovered the misconnection between the turkey and Türkiye, I saw it as an opportunity to educate others and correct this historical mix-up. I began sharing articles about

this topic with friends, colleagues, and on social media, and later, after having my son, I started visiting schools to discuss the issue. At my son's school, I explained to the students how the turkey, a bird mistakenly associated with my country, was actually named after Türkiye, despite not being native to it. I also explained that in Türkiye and much of continental Europe, the bird is called by names linked to India, stemming from Christopher Columbus's misguided belief that he had reached India when he arrived in the Americas. And guess what? The bird is native to the Americas. This fascinating historical and geographical confusion became an engaging story, one that both entertained and educated the students.

But a few years ago, my turkey story took a significant turn when a friend, whose family hails from the Wampanoag tribe, shared something profound with me. I had assumed Thanksgiving was simply a challenging time for his family for another reason, but I was wrong. He explained that Thanksgiving, for the Wampanoag, is not a day of celebration



but rather one of mourning. The Wampanoag were the first Native Americans to welcome the English settlers to their land, offering them the turkey as a symbol of their hospitality. Tragically, this gesture marked the beginning of their downfall, as the settlers went on to take their land, erase their language, and destroy their culture. To this day, Thanksgiving is a day when the Wampanoag gather to protest, remembering their losses.

This revelation was eye-opening. I had always known about the immense suffering Native Americans endured at the hands of settlers, but hearing it from someone whose family lived through it gave the story a depth I had never fully appreciated. It was at that moment that I realized something crucial was missing from my narrative about the turkey. The story needed a call to action—a recognition of the tragic history that Thanksgiving represents for many Native Americans. It was a reminder to honor the generosity of the Wampanoag and other indigenous peoples. And it was also time to share the turkey’s indigenous name, “neyhom,” as a mark of respect for the bird’s true heritage.

During a Thanksgiving discussion with fifth graders at Escuela Key, we honored the bird's legacy by thanking the Wampanoag tribe for their generosity in their language: Kutaputush. It was a powerful moment of cultural exchange and recognition. With the students we discussed how the turkey’s name is tied to a complex web of global confusion, spanning geography, history, and sociology, and reaching from Türkiye to India and beyond.

The tale begins with European settlers, who, upon encountering the bird in North America, mistakenly thought it resembled the guinea fowl—a bird brought to Europe from Africa by Ottoman Turkish merchants. The English called it the "turkey fowl," which over time was simply shortened to "turkey." The story doesn't end there. In Türkiye, the bird is called "hindi," meaning "Indian," stemming from the widespread belief that it came from India. In India, it is known as "tarki," influenced by British naming conventions. This confusion continued to spread across Europe, with the French calling it "dinde," the Russians referring to it as "indushka," and the Polish using the word "indyk"—all names referencing India, in line with Columbus’s mistaken belief that he had reached India when he arrived in the Americas.

Another theory suggests that when the Spaniards brought the bird back to Europe, the English continued to source it through Ottoman Turkish merchants, leading them to call it "turkey," associating it with their African bird cousins. Interestingly, even the Portuguese name for the bird, "peru," adds another layer to the story, linking the bird to the South American country of the same name. Yet, the one name that the turkey does not bear is its original name in the Wampanoag language: "neyhom." This omission undermines an important point—the turkey is a bird native to the Americas, tied to the land long before European settlers arrived.

As you gather around the table on Thanksgiving, I encourage you to take a moment to reflect on this bird’s global journey and its indigenous roots. Thanksgiving is not just about the meal; it’s about gratitude, history, and honoring those who made this celebration possible. Let’s not forget to thank the Wampanoag and other Native American tribes for their hospitality and generosity, and let’s acknowledge the true name of the turkey: neyhom. ■



STANDING AGAINST DISASTERS, BY THE SIDE OF HOPE

AKUT FOUNDATION BY NASUH MAHRUKI



Based in Istanbul, the AKUT Foundation dispatched essential supplies from its logistics hub to the region after the 7.7 magnitude earthquake epicentered in Pazarlık and struck on February 6, 2023, leaving many citizens homeless.

When natural or technological hazards; risks and vulnerabilities converge, destructive disasters might occur. Increase in economic, sociological, environmental, and physical vulnerabilities, exacerbate the severity of disasters' impacts. Mitigation of the potential impacts of disasters is only possible through effective disaster risk management and enhancing community resilience against disasters.

Since its establishment in 2011, the AKUT Foundation has been organizing training programs to raise disaster awareness in society, mainstream a culture of safe living, and prepare for emergency situations. Actively contributing to societal solidarity in post-disaster recovery processes, the Foundation is also one of the founding members of the "Child Rights Protection Platform" and the "Disaster Platform" in Türkiye.

During the devastating Mediterranean and Aegean wildfires in 2021, the Foundation carried out large-scale aid activities in the region, with the support of more than 1,000 donors. It also assigned volunteers to the field, by providing equipment support to search and rescue teams during the Çanakkale fire in 2023.

The Foundation continued its disaster awareness training and carried out studies to ensure the preparedness of the society. It continued to share its knowledge and experiences to increase disaster awareness through collaborations with public institutions, and carried out trainings, seminars and exercises in this context.



One of the most critical needs during emergency situations is hygiene. In response to this need, the "Life Goes On Personal Care and Hygiene Project" was launched in Hatay during the post-earthquake period, in order to provide free personal care and hygiene services to those affected by the disaster. The first hairdresser opened on April 17, 2023, funded by Turkish Philanthropy Funds (TPF), and the second one opened on July 18, 2023, funded by The American Turkish Association of Washington, DC (ATA-DC). The project, which employed eight local individuals for approximately two years, has contributed to the normalization and the revival of local entrepreneurship in the earthquake zone. Through two container-based barber/hair salon units, free services were provided to the residents. Since beginning operations, the two salons have served approximately 20,000 people free of charge.

Hatay, which was significantly affected by the earthquake, two prefabricated schools were opened on the earthquake's anniversary to support education and strengthen societal solidarity, with Turkish Philanthropy Funds (TPF) as the main sponsor.



The schools, inaugurated on February 5, 2024, began operations with the start of the academic year. The school in Serinyol accommodates 396 students, while the one in Maşuklu serves 420 students. A total of 51 teachers and administrative staff work at these two schools.

In addition to addressing physical needs during the post-disaster recovery phase, the AKUT Foundation has supported students by focusing on sports and arts activities to facilitate normalization and maintain psychological well-being. As part of these efforts, a kindergarten and a library were built in Serinyol.

In the first half of 2024, the Foundation established two music schools in temporary housing areas to help children in the disaster zone discover and develop their talents in various music genres. The instrument needs for these two music schools in temporary settlements were met with the support of donors. While students continued their education, good news kept coming from the field: the primary and middle school students of Serinyol Elementary School, won second place in a Folk Dance Competition held across Hatay!

The AKUT Foundation continues to provide training to individuals and social responsibility initiatives to build a healthier society during emergencies such as natural disasters and human-induced crises. ■

BY SELÇUK OFLAZ / DEMET CABBAR

YCAP STUDENTS MET COMMUNITY LEADERS DURING THE FALL SESSION

The ATA-DC's Young Cultural Ambassador Program (YCAP) for 2024-2025 was launched in October, welcoming 38 high school students from the DMV region and beyond. This ATA-DC leadership development initiative focuses on empowering youth through volunteerism, cultural, and civic engagement.

The program kicked off with a volunteer activity at the Turkish Festival on October 20, allowing participants to connect with their community and learn about cultural exchange.

Throughout the fall season, YCAs had the opportunity to virtually meet and interact with accomplished professionals who shared their experiences and insights. Notable speakers included Aycha Sawa, the first woman elected as Comptroller of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and one of 12 elected Turkish Americans in public office; Lydia Borland, Founder of LB International Solutions and U.S. Government Relations Expert; and Zuraya Tapia-Hadley, an Arlington School Board Member and lawyer by training. These sessions aimed to inspire the next generation of leaders, enhancing both their professional, and civic engagement skills.



ATATÜRK SCHOOL'S 1ST SEMESTER FILLED WITH JOY AND EXCITEMENT

ATA-DC Atatürk School has been very active in its education program and organizing holiday celebrations during the 1st semester of the 2024-2025 school year. Some of the notable days celebrated included Turkish Republic Day, Teachers' Day, and Atatürk's Commemoration Day. The school also hosted an end of year party with students and parents.

On December 8th, Ayçe Bükülmeyen Özerdem, author and documentary producer, introduced and distributed her book "Ezber Bozan Kızlar" which focuses on Türkiye's pioneering women, coincided with the commemoration of women's right to vote on December 5th. Ayçe Bükülmeyen Özerdem is a renowned author and documentary producer, specializing in women's empowerment. Her work highlights the achievements of Turkish women who paved the way for future generations.

The school will continue to celebrate memorial days during the 2nd semester, upholding our tradition of honoring Türkiye's heritage and history.



BEING A GOURMET! & TASTE COUCH!

BY DENIZ ORHUN

Merriam-Webster defines 'gourmet' as a noun meaning a connoisseur of food and drink, with synonyms like bon vivant, gastronome, and epicurean. A 'bon vivant' is someone who enjoys living well. The term 'gourmet' originates from the French word for a wine broker or taste-vin expert but now encompasses high-quality food and dining. 'Gourmet' can refer to high-quality food, the ability to prepare it skillfully and with elaborate techniques, and someone with a refined taste in expertly prepared meals. For me, it also means knowing how to live well with food.

If you are a host inviting people for a dinner or lunch, your "knowledge of taste" helps the flavor identification, allowing you to tailor your recipes to your guests' age, culture, health, and the season. In your home, use your dining table and show yourself how much you enjoy living well. It's your plate -not social media - where you can break the rules, shift the balance, and make your voice heard. Changing just one meal can change the world. It's up to us to reduce consumption of overused resources, explore local food sources that are often overlooked, and influence trade through our consumption choices.

Some studies on taste receptors highlight the complexity of taste perception, reminding us that understanding our plate can empower us to make impactful and informed food choices. In the 1990s, Prof. Linda Bartoshuk of Yale University conducted studies to categorize the tongue into 'super, moderate, and non-taste receptors.' She examined the number of papillae in different regions of the tongue, studied people's genetic structures, and used the PROP bitterness perception test for classification.



Furthermore, Harvard professors explored the number of papillae and the sensitivity of factors on the tongue that influence taste perception. It was later proven that genetic ties are not related to taste perception, but rather to experiences and geography. In November 2018, it was demonstrated that the PROP bitterness perception test is not related to the categorization of 'super taste buds' either. In April 2019, Adjunct Assoc. Prof Mehmet Hakan Özdener and colleagues discovered that olfactory receptors are also present on the tongue. This suggests that the way we eat, taste, and define food may change in the future. If you're going to be your family's taste coach, now is the time to indulge in this kind of knowledge. Differences in the ability to identify and perceive tastes and smells might influence food consumption. The front part of our tongue stops growing between ages 8 and 10, while the back part finishes by ages 15 to 16, and our taste buds become fully developed around the time the front of the tongue stops growing in our tongue's taste journey. Scientists found that taste sensitivity to salty, sweet and bitter taste is changing with aging. Sensitivity to the tastes often declines after age 60. In addition, your mouth produces less saliva as you age.

This can cause dry mouth, which can affect your sense of taste. Considering the ages and preferences of your loved ones when preparing meals can make dining experiences more enjoyable and inclusive. Different age groups might have varying nutritional needs and taste preferences, so taking these into account can help ensure everyone enjoys the meal. Tailoring meals and recipes can make a big difference on your health.

As I wrap up my article with two homemade recipes, I wish you a wonderful mid-Winter and beginning of Spring!



Reyhan Şerbeti (Yield: 4 servings)

Ingredients:

- 1 liter of hot water
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 1 bunch of basil/Reyhan (stems and leaves together)
- Half a lemon, 1 cinnamon stick , 1-2 cloves

Instructions:

- In a bowl, start rubbing and kneading Reyhan stems and leaves together with lemon and brown sugar.
- Add the cinnamon stick and cloves to the mixture.
- Pour the hot water over all the ingredients, stirring to combine.
- Allow the mixture to cool to room temperature, the place it in the fridge to chill.
- Once the syrup has rested, strain it to remove solids and serve in glass cups.

Crispy Quail in Phyllo Dough (Yield: 3 servings)

In order to use our unfamiliar food resources, we used quail in this recipe. Turkey or chicken meat may also be used.

Ingredients

- 1 cooked quail
- 3 tablespoon hazelnut oil
- 2 stalks of celery, finely chopped
- 3/4 cup of red beans, cooked
- 100 gr (3.5 oz) cream cheese
- 5 cloves of garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon fresh ginger, 1 teaspoon sweet red chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper, 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- 1 spring onion
- Phyllo dough (Baklava Dough)

Instructions:

- Cut the cooked quail meat into small pieces.
- In a bowl, combine finely chopped celery, cooked red beans, and minced garlic.
- Add sugar, ginger, soy sauce, cream cheese, sweet red pepper and black pepper. Mix in the cooked quail meat thoroughly.
- Transfer the mixture to a food processor and blend.
- Slice baklava dough into strips the width of your index finger, fill with the mixture, and wrap.
- Heat a pan add 3 table spoon hazelnut oil and panfry the wrapped packs until golden.
- Serve with soy sauce.

Deniz Orhun is an agricultural engineer, masterchef, TV personality, and businesswoman, who seamlessly blends gastronomy with multiple science disciplines. Her journey -from culinary education at Kendall College-National Louis University in Chicago to producing over 1,300 solo TV shows on national and international channels- is the harmonious fusion of creativity, science, and entrepreneurship. She has successfully combined expertise in culinary arts with entrepreneurial spirit, founded and operated Klemantin Bakery for 15 years. She has served many Turkish and foreign celebrities and dignitaries. Deniz's impact extends beyond the kitchen; she collaborates with universities, research centers, and local authorities, advocating for food as medicine, searching for unused natural resources and how to add them economic value.



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