



AMERICAN TURKISH  
ASSOCIATION OF  
WASHINGTON DC

APRIL 2026  
ISSUE 9



*Birthday*

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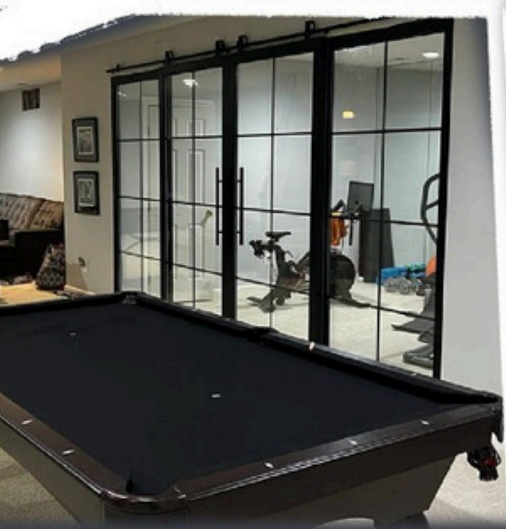
**THE BEGINNING OF US-TURKISH RELATIONS  
INTERVIEW WITH LINCOLN MCCURDY**

**ATA** *News*

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**PELİN TANYERİ KOÇ**

CONTRIBUTOR

**FİLİZ ODABAŞ-GELDIAY**

**DENİZ ORHUN**

PHOTO CREDITS

**WWW.FREEDOM250.ORG**

WWW.ATADC.ORG

WWW.TURKISHFESTIVAL.ORG

INFO@ATADC.ORG

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Friends,

As we move into the final stretch of our season, I find myself reflecting not only on what we have accomplished, but on what lies just ahead. The coming months will bring a close to another vibrant chapter for ATA-DC—one filled with gatherings that continue to strengthen our sense of community and shared identity. We are especially excited about an upcoming exhibition of Turkish textiles, featuring pieces from traditional dowry chests. These items are more than beautifully crafted objects; they are stories—stitched, preserved, and carried across generations. In many ways, they mirror the experience of our diaspora: bringing pieces of home with us, holding onto them, and finding ways to share them in new places.

Of course, one of the highlights of our spring will be our beloved April 23 National Sovereignty and Children's Day celebration. Each year, welcoming over 300 guests, this event reminds us why we do what we do. Watching the children of our Atatürk School proudly showcase what they have learned—while others join in the joy of music, dance, and laughter—captures something truly special. It is in those moments, when languages mix, traditions come alive, and children simply enjoy being together, that community feels most real.

Our Community Engagement Series will also continue through June, with our next seminar focusing on wealth management—another example of how we aim to support not just cultural connection, but practical empowerment within our community. As summer approaches and many of us prepare for time away, we will also be laying the groundwork for one of our most anticipated traditions: our award-winning festival. Even as people travel, the work behind the scenes continues—a reminder that community is sustained not only in visible moments, but in the quiet dedication that makes those moments possible.

Living in the diaspora often means balancing multiple identities, navigating between worlds, and sometimes feeling in between. Yet it is precisely spaces like ATA-DC that turn that in-between into something meaningful. Here, a familiar song, a shared meal, or even a brief conversation can instantly create a sense of belonging. As we wrap up this season, I invite you to join us—not just to attend events, but to be part of the connections they create. Because in the end, it is not the calendar that defines us, but the community we continue to build together.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

With warm regards,

Sertap Schreffler

**PRESIDENT OF ATA-DC**



# turkish festival



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## WHAT OUR SPONSORS SAID

For over 30 years, David Saltzman and I have supported Turkish American organizations nationwide. But the number of successful organizations has not kept up in recent years. In that sense, ATA-DC is exceptional, serving as an organization of its time and the future, always. We believe the Turkish Festival and Republic Day Gala are beautiful celebrations. What a Turkish Delight your leadership has been. Thank you!

GUNAY EVINCH, SALTZMAN & EVINCH

I've been supporting ATA-DC as RE/MAX since the first festival in 2002, and each year it's a joy to set up the RE/MAX balloon with my family on Pennsylvania Avenue. It's a wonderful experience to reconnect with old friends and clients, meet new people, enjoy Turkish cuisine, and watch the amazing shows at the stage. I'm proud to support ATA-DC's efforts in promoting Turkish culture. Excellent work, ATA-DC!

MELIH CAKMAK, RE/MAX

## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Hello friends and ATANews readers,

On behalf of ATANews publishing committee, I am pleased to share with you a new issue of ATANews, highlighting the ongoing efforts of ATA-DC's Board of Directors to bring our community together and further establish the ATA-DC House as a central hub for Turkish Americans in the DMV area.

Over the past months, we have seen a steady expansion of programs and events designed to increase engagement and participation across our community. With each new issue, I find myself returning to a familiar thought that what we create here is never just a magazine, but a reflection of who we are becoming as a community.

This issue captures the diversity of activities starting with the Turkish Heritage Night with Alperen Sengun at the Capital One Arena. You will also read about the Women's Day Indoor Bazaar, which brought together local artisans and supported a meaningful cause through fundraising for girls' education. We feature the powerful performance by Pinar Ayhan, highlighting the role of women in the early Turkish Republic, as well as updates from our Atatürk School and Youth Cultural Ambassadors Program, where younger generations continue to engage with their heritage while building leadership skills.

Beyond local programming, this issue includes broader topics relevant to our community. We are pleased to feature a conversation with Lincoln McCurdy, who shares valuable insights on the evolving relationship between the U.S. and Türkiye, along with reflections on the role of Turkish Americans in strengthening that partnership. As the United States marks its 250th anniversary, we also explore the Freedom 250 initiative and its focus on civic engagement and national reflection. Finally, this issue features an interview with Dr. Mustafa Yılmaz, focusing on a significant international academic achievement by Hacettepe University that made us all proud as Turkish Americans.

We hope this issue keeps you informed and engaged, and we look forward to seeing you at upcoming ATA-DC events.

As always, our heartfelt thanks go to our contributors, volunteers, and readers for their continued support.

With best wishes,

*Özge Övün-Sert*

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

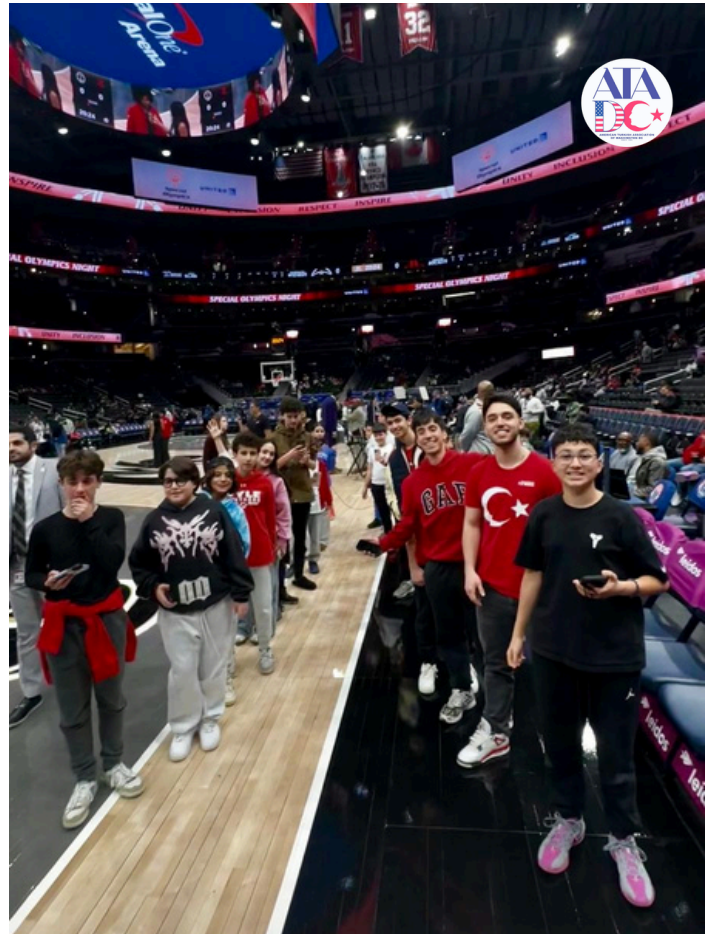
ATA-DC SECRETARY GENERAL



## ROCKETS, ROOTS, AND PRIDE: ANOTHER UNFORGETTABLE ATA-DC TURKISH COMMUNITY NIGHT AT CAPITAL ONE ARENA

Another successful ATA-DC Turkish Community Night lit up the Capital One Arena on Monday night, March 2, 2026, during an exciting NBA matchup—marking the 8th Turkish Community Event organized by ATA-DC in the NBA League. Following the pandemic, this event proudly marked the return of ATA-DC’s beloved annual Turkish Heritage Night, bringing together nearly 300 Turkish Americans, basketball fans, and friends of the community for a night that celebrated sports, culture, and shared pride.

The evening was made even more special by the presence of Alperen Şengün of the Houston Rockets, one of the NBA’s brightest stars. As an NBA All-Star and a true trailblazer for Turkish basketball, Şengün continues to inspire a new generation with his exceptional talent, humility, and leadership on and off the court. His success in the NBA stands as a powerful symbol of achievement and pride for the Turkish and Turkish-American community.



As part of the night’s activities, 50 Turkish-American children and youth proudly wearing Turkey-themed t-shirts participated in the fan tunnel, enthusiastically welcoming the players as they entered the court.

Before the game, fans also enjoyed early entry access, allowing them to watch warm-ups up close. During this time, the community showed strong support not only for Alperen Şengün, who warmly engaged with fans and took photos, but also for Kevin Durant and the Washington Wizards players, cheering them on as they prepared for the game.

The atmosphere throughout the arena was vibrant and joyful, making the evening truly Turkish-delightful for both Wizards and Rockets fans as well as members of the Turkish-American community. The energy, pride, and sense of togetherness once again demonstrated how sports can serve as a powerful bridge between cultures.

ATA-DC extends its sincere thanks to the Capital One Arena and the Washington Wizards organization for their continued partnership and support in making this special night possible. ATA-DC also warmly thanks Alperen Şengün and all the fans and volunteers whose enthusiasm and participation made the night such a memorable success.

## HOP DOCUMENTARY FILM WIN THE SOULS AND HEARTS OF AUDIENCE

On Saturday, February 21st, ATA-DC hosted a documentary screening to mark the third anniversary of the February 6th earthquake.

Directed by Jale İncekol, the film follows playworker Nedim Buğral and a group of volunteers who set up playgrounds across Hatay just two weeks after the earthquake. The documentary captures how children created their own toys from recycled materials using their imagination, how play became a path to healing from trauma, and the transformative power of solidarity – all told in a deeply moving way.

The screening left a profound emotional impact on the audience. Following the screening, director Jale İncekol and project founder Nedim Buğral joined us from Turkey via an online connection for a heartfelt conversation with our audience – touching on future plans to bring this project and film to wider audiences.



## ATA-DC'S COMMUNITY CONNECT SERIES ON TAX AND IMMIGRATION

ATA-DC continues to strengthen community engagement through informative and timely events designed to empower Turkish Americans with practical knowledge. In January, ATA-DC hosted “Smart Strategies for the Tax Season” seminar at ATA-DC House, featuring CPA İsmail Demirkıran. The session focused on strategies, including how to benefit from deductions, leverage tax credits, and navigate legal opportunities to reduce financial burden. Attendees gained valuable insights into integrating tax planning into broader financial and business strategies.

Building on this momentum, ATA-DC welcomed Attorney Tolga Özek in February for a seminar on the latest developments in U.S Immigration policies. During the session, Özek addressed pressing topics such as evolving immigration policies, ICE practices, current procedures, and key court decisions shaping the legal landscape. Participants also had the opportunity to better understand the complexities of immigration interviews and federal authority boundaries.

### PINAR AYHAN'S SOLO PERFORMANCE IN CELEBRATING INT'L WOMEN'S DAY

ATA-DC welcomed renowned artist Pinar Ayhan to Virginia on April 14, 2026, presenting her acclaimed performance "Beni Hatırlayınız – In the Light of the Republic: Atatürk and the Women's Revolution." Organized in recognition of Int'l Women's Day, the event brought together members of the Turkish-American community for an evening of reflection and inspiration. Ayhan's performance blended history, music, and storytelling to highlight the transformative role of women in the early years of the Turkish Republic. Through powerful narratives, she portrayed women who stood strong in challenging times, embodying courage, dignity, and resilience. In her remarks, Ayhan expressed her joy in meeting the community, emphasizing the importance of passing on the values and vision of Atatürk to younger generations.

The event was supported by ATA-DC's Youth Cultural Ambassadors (YCAP), whose members played an active role in its organization while gaining leadership experience. During her visit, Ayhan also met with students at the Atatürk School, where she engaged with children and was deeply moved by their knowledge and enthusiasm.



### ATA-DC HOUSE HOSTED A CHARITY BAZAAR TO SUPPORT GIRLS EDUCATION



On March 7, 2026, the American Turkish Association of Washington, DC (ATA-DC) hosted its first Women's Day Indoor Bazaar, bringing together around 15 Turkish artisans and small business owners from across the DMV area. The event turned a local venue into a marketplace featuring a mix of traditional crafts and modern products. Visitors browsed a range of items, including Turkish textiles, handmade handbags, jewelry, and henna designs. Food was a central draw, with offerings such as "Dubai chocolate" cakes, sourdough breads, and traditional dishes like börek, baklava, and asure. Many of the food items were donated by local Turkish restaurants and community members.

The event also served a charitable purpose. All proceeds, including those from a second-hand goods section, were donated to the Bridge to Türkiye Fund (BTF). The funds will support girls' education in regions of Türkiye affected by the 2023 earthquakes. By combining a community marketplace with fundraising, ATA-DC aimed to support both local entrepreneurs and a broader humanitarian cause.

### TURKISH FOOD LOVERS ORGANIZED THE FIRST COOKING COMPETITION

The Turkish Flavors Competition, organized by Turks in DMV, Turkish Food Lovers, and Virginia Türkleri (Turks of Virginia), recently transformed Fairfax into a vibrant hub of culinary heritage, drawing about 300 guests and participants from across the DMV area. This spirited event brought the community together to celebrate the richness of Turkish cuisine, featuring contestants who prepared traditional dishes from various regions of Türkiye. A distinguished panel of judges evaluated each entry based on flavor, artistic presentation, and authenticity, giving attendees a firsthand look at the incredible diversity and depth of the nation's world-renowned food culture.

Beyond the delicious aromas, the gathering was a powerful display of community solidarity and social responsibility. Local Turkish businesses and brands stepped up as sponsors, while the event's proceeds were donated to Bridge to Türkiye to fund vital educational projects. By blending cultural pride with a mission to give back, the competition proved to be much more than a contest; it was a meaningful bridge between heritage and philanthropy.



### ART OF LIVING FOUNDATION'S AWARD HONOREE ÜMRAN BEBA

Art of Living Foundation's International Women's Conference (IWC) was held on March 5 at its headquarters in Washington, D.C. During the awards ceremony to honor inspirational women, Ümran Beba, a leader in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), was one of the awardees among other esteemed individuals. Currently a partner at August Partnership in New York, she advises organizations on leadership development. She is also the co-founder of the Beba Innovation and Entrepreneurship Foundation, dedicated to empowering youth through innovation.

The IWC has convened ten global gatherings, bringing together more than 7,500 women leaders from 100 countries across business, civil society, philanthropy, and media since 2005. The Conference has welcomed heads of state, First Ladies, ministers, parliamentarians, diplomats, and global thought leaders.

This year's honorees include Phylicia Rashad, a six-time Emmy nominee and former dean emerita at Howard University, Navy Commander Grace Landers and Retired U.S. Army Lt. General Telita Crosland.

## THE 3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL “HAMSI ŞENLİĞİ” HAPPENED IN FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

The 5th Annual Hamsi Şenliği was held on Sunday, February 8, at the HAWA Center in Fairfax, VA. Despite the freezing winter weather, attendees showed up in force, filling the space with warmth and energy. Organized by the Turks in DMV group, which was founded by Yusuf Bulca, and supported by various sponsors, the festival once again brought together people who share a love for Turkish culture, food, and community. At the heart of the event was hamsi, specially brought from Türkiye and prepared fresh on-site throughout the day. A variety of traditional dishes, along with Turkish desserts, including Laz böreği, added to the rich culinary experience. Live music set the day's rhythm, with Türküler Sevdamız choir lifting the energy with familiar folk songs, and Rüştü Arıkan adding his own touch through his performance. A total of \$8,530 from the proceeds was donated to LÖSEV.



## CEREMONY FOR MARCH 18 VICTORY AND MARTYRS' REMEMBRANCE DAY

On March 18, the Turkish Embassy in Washington, DC held a commemoration ceremony marking the 111th anniversary of the Çanakkale Victory and Martyrs Day. Ambassador Sedat Önal described the victory as a milestone in both Turkish and global history, highlighting Mustafa Kemal's emergence as a defining military leader. The Gallipoli Campaign marked a turning point in World War I, as Ottoman forces defended their homeland against Allied invasion. The battle laid the foundations for Türkiye's War of Independence and modern statehood. Damla Guclu, Ambassador of the Northern Cyprus and Khazar Ibrahim, Ambassador of Azerbaijan attended the commemoration and placed flowers to the Ataturk monument

## ATAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN FRISCO, TEXAS THIS MAY



The Assembly of Turkish American Associations will host its 2026 Annual Conference and Gala on May 1–2, 2026, at the Westin Stonebriar Golf Resort & Spa in Frisco, Texas, bringing together members, community leaders, scholars, and youth from across the US under the theme “Stronger Together, Building Tomorrow.” The two-day gathering will feature a dynamic program of discussions, networking opportunities, and special events beginning with opening activities on Friday and continuing through Saturday, fostering collaboration and dialogue on issues important to the Turkish American community.

## **YADİGÂR EXHIBITION AT THE ATA-DC HOUSE IN VA**

ATA-DC will host the “Yadigâr Exhibition: From Chest to Present” on April 25–26, 2026, at the ATA-DC House, offering visitors a unique journey through the rich heritage of Turkish handicrafts.

This special exhibition brings together carefully preserved, handcrafted treasures that reflect generations of patience, artistry, and cultural memory. Each piece on display tells a story—woven, stitched, and shaped with devotion—bridging the past with the present. As many traditional crafts face the risk of fading into obscurity, the exhibition aims to rekindle appreciation and awareness within the community. Open from 3 to 6 pm, the event invites guests to rediscover these timeless works and celebrate the beauty of craftsmanship.



## **BAYRAM CELEBRATION AT THE DİYANET CENTER IN MD**

The Turkish community came together on Sunday, March 22, the third day of Eid, at the Diyanet Center to celebrate Bayram with friends and families. Hosted by the Turkish Embassy in Washington DC and the Diyanet Center of America, the gathering brought people from all walks of life together in a warm and joyful atmosphere.

Guests enjoyed a traditional Turkish breakfast, followed by lokma for dessert and freshly grilled corn. Children filled the grounds with laughter as they played on moon bounces and ran around with friends.

Turkish Ambassador Sedat Önal and Madam Önal strolled through the venue, warmly greeting guests, exchanging Bayram wishes, and engaging personally with community members throughout the event.



# TURKISH AMERICAN RELATIONS

1923 - 2023



G. Lincoln McCurdy

Commemorating the Centennial  
of the Republic of Türkiye

OCTOBER 29, 1923 – OCTOBER 29, 2023





# LINCOLN MCCURDY

## **A CENTURY OF CONNECTION: REFLECTIONS ON U.S.–TÜRKİYE RELATIONS**

*In a conversation with  
ATANews, **Lincoln McCurdy**  
reflects on history,  
challenges, and the future  
of a vital partnership.*



BY ÖZGE ÖVÜN SERT

**N**early a century after the establishment of formal diplomatic ties between the United States and Türkiye, the enduring relationship between the two nations continues to be shaped not only by policy, but by the individuals who have dedicated their lives to strengthening it. In this milestone moment—marking almost 100 years since the beginning of U.S.–Turkish diplomatic relations—ATANews spoke with Lincoln McCurdy, a distinguished and seasoned international affairs professional whose four-decade career spans government service, business, and community leadership. From his early experiences in Türkiye to his influential roles in organizations such as the American-Turkish Council and the Turkish Coalition of America, McCurdy has been at the forefront of fostering bilateral understanding.

In this conversation, he reflects on his personal journey, the evolution of U.S.–Türkiye relations, and the insights behind his recent work chronicling a century of shared history.

***Lincoln, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us. We truly appreciate your generosity in sharing your insights and experiences with ATANews.***

Thank you, Özge, for reaching out to me. Before we begin, I would like to extend my congratulations to ATA-DC for its outstanding representation of the Turkish American community in the nation's capital. Your organization offers excellent programs that promote Turkish culture and heritage to the broader public—especially the top-notch annual festival.

***Your career has spanned diplomacy, policy, and community engagement. For readers who may not know your story, could you tell us about your personal and professional journey and how you became involved in strengthening U.S.–Türkiye relations?***

I first set foot in Türkiye as a graduate student at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., during a summer break. It was my first journey outside the United States—an experience that would not only broaden my horizons but ultimately shape the course of my life. I had grown up in southern Indiana, isolated from global affairs. It was a place where international news felt distant and abstract, and where learning a foreign language was not considered essential. Yet even in that environment, I felt a persistent curiosity about the wider world, and I wanted to see it for myself. The journey to Türkiye itself felt like an initiation into that wider world. I flew with Icelandic Airlines to Luxembourg, then boarded a bus to Frankfurt, Germany. From there, I embarked on the Istanbul Express, a train that carried me across the Balkans. Traveling on the other side of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War was both exhilarating and sobering. I shared compartments with Turkish workers returning home for their summer holidays. Their quiet dignity left a lasting impression on me. When the train finally pulled into Sirkeci Station, I stepped into a city unlike any I had ever imagined. Istanbul was vibrant, layered, and alive with history. Its sounds, colors, and rhythms were at once unfamiliar and deeply compelling. As a young man in his twenties who had never traveled abroad, I found myself both overwhelmed and inspired. That first encounter with Türkiye did more than introduce me to a new country. It awakened in me a deeper understanding of the richness and complexity of the world.

As I traveled throughout Türkiye, I became increasingly aware of Turkish society’s determination to build a better future. At the same time, I began to recognize a disconnect between the reality I was experiencing and the image of Türkiye often portrayed in the American media. The country I encountered was far more nuanced, dynamic, and hopeful than the narratives I had previously absorbed. That realization stayed with me. Years later, I returned to Istanbul in an official capacity as the Consul for Commercial Affairs at the U.S. Consulate General. This time, I worked closely with Turkish business leaders and observed the Türkiye’s economic

development firsthand. When my diplomatic assignment came to an end, I faced a choice: return to the United States or remain in Türkiye. I chose to stay. I joined the Bank of Boston and helped establish its Istanbul branch. Eventually, I returned to Washington, D.C. I became Executive Director of the American Friends of Turkey (AFOT). Later, I played a role in the formation of the American–Turkish Council (ATC), serving first as Executive Director and then as President. These roles allowed me to engage with policymakers, business leaders, and members of civil society, all with the shared goal of strengthening a vital bilateral relationship. After my time at ATC, I continued this work as President of the Turkish Coalition of America (TCA), and most recently as Senior Advisor to the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA).

When I lived in Türkiye, I came to the decision that I would dedicate my career to fostering stronger ties between the United States and Türkiye. It troubled me to see how often Türkiye and the Turkish people were misunderstood—or, at times, unfairly marginalized—in American discourse. This was especially concerning given Türkiye’s longstanding role as an important ally of the United States and its strategic significance in a complex and often volatile region.



*You served as a U.S. Foreign Service officer in Istanbul and worked in the historic Palazzo Corpi, a building that symbolized the American diplomatic presence in the city for more than a century. What are some of your most memorable experiences from that period, and how did they shape your understanding of Türkiye and its people?*

I was fortunate to work in the historic Palazzo Corpi, which housed the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul's Tepebaşı neighborhood before the consulate relocated to İstinye in the early 2000s. Acquired by the U.S. government under unusual circumstances, the building had originally served as the American embassy during the Ottoman era. Its ornate architecture and storied past gave it a distinctive character, and walking through its corridors each day was a reminder of the long and complex history of U.S.–Turkish relations. I discuss the building's history in greater detail in Chapter 8 of the Chronicle, alongside other significant American and Turkish diplomatic properties. Because Palazzo Corpi lacked an in-house cafeteria, American diplomats routinely lunched at nearby neighborhood restaurants and buffets. What might have been seen as an inconvenience in other postings actually encouraged a deeper integration into Turkish society than was typical for our colleagues in Ankara, where the embassy compound was largely self-sufficient. These daily outings provided opportunities for informal conversations, cultural immersion, and a better understanding of local life.

Among my preferred lunch venues were the historic Pera Palace Hotel, located just across the street, and the well-known Russian restaurant Rejans near İstiklal Avenue—both of which I describe in Chapter 6 of the Chronicle. Another favorite of mine was an elegant and fashionable restaurant called Zihni in Maçka. It was a gathering place for young Turkish businesspeople and professionals, and I was often one of the few foreigners going there. Dining in this restaurant offered a window into the aspirations and dynamism of a new generation of Turks shaping the country's future.

Serving in Istanbul during the 1980s was particularly rewarding. At the time, the city still retained much of the atmosphere of an earlier era, before its rapid transformation into the sprawling modern metropolis it is today. Türkiye was also emerging from a difficult period marked by widespread terrorism and political instability, and there was a sense that the country was turning an important corner. Daily life, however, still bore the marks of a developing infrastructure



Electricity and water outages were common, communications were often unreliable, and transportation options were limited by today's standards. Yet these inconveniences were balanced by a distinctive charm. Social life revolved largely around entertaining at home, where diplomats, business people, and Turkish friends gathered for long dinners and animated discussions. At that time, Türkiye had only two international-standard hotels—the Istanbul Hilton and the Sheraton Istanbul—both located in Istanbul. These establishments served as central meeting points for diplomats and the foreign business community, hosting conferences, receptions, and informal gatherings. Despite Istanbul's population of millions, even at that time, the city retained something of a small-town atmosphere within diplomatic and business circles. People knew one another, and encounters were frequent and personal.

Looking back, those years offered a rare vantage point from which to observe a country in transition—one that was balancing its rich historical legacy with a growing determination to modernize and expand its role on the global stage. For me, it was a formative period that deepened my connection to Türkiye and further strengthened my commitment to building lasting ties between our two countries.

***Your book, A Chronicle of Turkish American Relations: 1923–2023, was written during the centennial year of the Turkish Republic. What inspired you to undertake such a comprehensive historical project, and what did you hope Turkish Americans would gain from it.***

Few people are aware of the challenges the founders of the Turkish Republic faced in establishing formal relations with the United States. Influenced by the American missionary community, British propaganda during World War I, and narratives promoted by certain minority groups of the late Ottoman Empire, the image of the Turkish people in the United States was deeply negative. As a result, it took more than three years for the U.S. government to formally recognize the new Republic. It is important for Turkish Americans to understand this history, as well as the efforts of both Turkish and American individuals who played critical roles in overcoming these obstacles. Their perseverance laid the foundation for the relationship that exists today.

If Turkish Americans are to play a more active and effective role in the American political arena, they must be grounded in a clear understanding of the historical relationship between the two countries. Until now, however, there has not been a single, accessible source that presents this history in a concise and engaging way. For this reason, I believed that developing a Chronicle—one that highlights key events in a clear and straightforward manner—would serve as a valuable resource, helping Turkish Americans better understand their shared history and encouraging greater civic engagement.

***As you researched the last hundred years of relations between Türkiye and the United States, were there particular moments, individuals, or stories that surprised you or changed the way you view the bilateral relationship?***

I was particularly struck by the contributions of nine public officials and private individuals who played a critical role in reshaping American public opinion of Türkiye during a formative period. Among public officials, three figures stand out: Admiral Mark L. Bristol, who served as U.S. High Commissioner in Istanbul following the Ottoman Empire's surrender in World War I, and the first two U.S. ambassadors to the Republic of Türkiye—Joseph C. Grew (1927–1932) and Charles Sherrill (1932–1933). Their leadership and engagement helped lay the diplomatic foundation for a more balanced and

constructive relationship between the two nations. On the Turkish side, the first two ambassadors to the United States—Ahmet Muhtar Mollaoğlu (1927–1934) and Mehmet Münir Ertegün (1934–1944)—played equally important roles in strengthening bilateral ties and fostering mutual understanding.

Credit must also be given to influential private citizens. Three independent and courageous Turkish women—Halide Edip Adivar, Selma Ekrem, and İsmet Şanlı—made a profound impact on American perceptions of the Turkish people through their writings, lectures, and personal engagement. Defying traditional expectations, they emerged as pioneers advocating for women's rights in Türkiye, the United States, and beyond. Traveling to America as highly educated and determined individuals, they acted—entirely on their own initiative—as unofficial ambassadors of the new Republic, guided by a deep belief in its principles and ideals. Finally, Rev. Asa Kent Jennings stands out as an extraordinary example of individual initiative and humanitarian commitment. As a private citizen, he played a crucial role in helping Mustafa Kemal Paşa (Atatürk) address a major humanitarian crisis during the Turkish War of Independence. In the years that followed, Jennings worked tirelessly to build bridges of friendship between the American and Turkish peoples. He carried out this work without seeking financial gain, at a time marked by strong anti-Turkish sentiment in the United States and deep suspicion among many Turks toward the West and Christianity.

***The book highlights not only government diplomacy but also many people and organizations that have shaped Turkish-US relations. Why do you think these personal connections are important in sustaining the relationship?***

The relationship between Türkiye and the United States extends far beyond formal government ties. Since the founding of the Republic in the 1920s, there has been a rich and evolving tapestry of interaction between Turks and Americans. These connections—built through education, commerce, culture, and shared experiences—form the true foundation of the bilateral relationship. For any community to be strong and effective, its members must understand their past and take pride in their heritage. For Turkish Americans, this means not only recognizing the diplomatic history between the two nations but also appreciating the personal stories that have shaped their collective identity.

People are naturally drawn to human stories—accounts of perseverance, achievement, and resilience. The experiences of Turkish immigrants to the United States over the past century offer precisely that. Their journeys, marked by both challenges and successes, have contributed meaningfully to the fabric of American society. These stories have the power to inspire younger generations, encouraging them to pursue their ambitions while remaining connected to their roots. Many Turkish Americans are familiar with the remarkable legacy of Ahmet Ertegun, whose influence in the music industry helped popularize African American artists and break down racial barriers in the United States. Yet his story is only one among many. There are countless other examples—across academia, business, engineering, the arts, law, science, media, public service, sports, and beyond—of Turkish Americans who have made significant and often underrecognized contributions. Each of these stories reflects determination, creativity, and a commitment to excellence.

In addition to highlighting Turkish American achievements, I have included accounts of some Americans whose lives meaningfully intersected with Türkiye. Figures such as James Baldwin, who lived in Istanbul, and Muhammad Ali, whose visit to Türkiye resonated deeply with the public. I also recount the thoughtful tribute by John F. Kennedy honoring Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the 25th anniversary of his passing. Finally, I highlight the contributions of those Americans who worked diligently to challenge and overturn the negative perceptions of Türkiye and the Turkish people that, unfortunately, have persisted in the United States.

Through these narratives – of Turkish immigrants and Americans alike –readers can discover a shared human experience that bridges cultures and histories. In these stories, one finds common values, mutual respect, and a sense of connection that strengthens the enduring ties between the people of both nations. Basically, the Turkish and American people share similar values and are alike in many ways.

***Your own family reflects a unique cultural bridge: you are married to Leyla McCurdy, and your family includes children and grandchildren with Turkish heritage. How has that personal connection influenced your perspective on Türkiye and the Turkish-American community?***

Leyla and I have always hoped that our daughters—and now our grandchildren—would take pride in their Turkish heritage, alongside their Western European roots. Turkish was the first language for both of our daughters, and during their high school years, we encouraged them to improve their Turkish by sending them to summer programs in Istanbul. Today, our grandchildren are also learning Turkish, and both take great joy in visiting Türkiye. It is our hope that they will be role models within the Turkish American community.

***Many readers will be curious about how Turkish traditions and values have become part of your family life. Are there particular customs, experiences, or moments that stand out as meaningful examples of how Turkish heritage has shaped your family?***

We celebrate both American and Turkish holidays. Gardening is one of my passions, and I have incorporated a Turkish touch into our garden, including building a model of a Safranbolu house that served as a playhouse for our children. As a family, we take pride in promoting Turkish culture in our daily lives. I have also remained engaged with my alma mater in Indiana, helping to establish a study abroad program in Türkiye to foster deeper cultural understanding.



Politically, I have been actively involved in supporting Turkish American political action committees that I helped establish. Through this work, I have met with Members of Congress and candidates who are open to engaging with Turkish American perspectives. Whenever Turkish American candidates run for public office, I have made it a priority to support their campaigns. In addition, I am committed to promoting connections between Indian Country and the Turkish people. I believe collaboration, especially in business and education, will be a win-win for both communities.

If I may, I would also like to take a moment to share my sentimental connection to Türkiye. Over time, I've come to truly appreciate how sacred and enchanting the Bosphorus and Anatolia feel. I find that sitting along the Bosphorus, simply watching the water move, can be a deeply magical moment. Thinking about how many people, over thousands of years, have stood in that same place, watching that same current pass by, never ceases to amaze me. There's something profoundly humbling about it. It reminds you that nothing in life is permanent. Daily stresses—and even global challenges—can feel overwhelming, but the Bosphorus offers a quiet perspective: they don't last. Like its waters, they keep moving—steady, continuous, always flowing forward. And Anatolia has its own kind of magic. You can almost feel the presence and energy of the ancient civilizations that once lived on that land.

***For younger Turkish Americans—many of whom are growing up between two cultures—what lessons from history do you think are most important for them to understand about the relationship between the United States and Türkiye?***

They need to learn about their history and take pride in their heritage. I believe that the Chronicle will serve as an excellent resource—both as a record of their history and as a source of inspiration for greater involvement in community affairs and the political arena. I also strongly encourage the younger Turkish American generation to master the Turkish language. In today's global community, being bilingual is not only an asset but an essential skill. At the same time, they should study the fundamental principles of leadership. Cultivating virtues such as patience, attentive listening, and compassion is critical for those who aspire to strengthen and unite the Turkish American community. Equally important is the avoidance of harsh rhetoric, which can hinder constructive

dialogue and progress. I commend ATA-DC for its Young Cultural Ambassadors Program, which plays a vital role in educating Turkish American youth about their heritage while fostering a strong sense of civic responsibility and political engagement.

***Your book emphasizes the importance of civic engagement and political participation among Turkish Americans. What advice would you give to members of the community who want to play a more active role in shaping the narrative?***

To date, only a small number of Turkish Americans have been elected to public office, and primarily at the local or regional level. If we are to foster a more balanced and informed dialogue on issues affecting Turkish Americans and Türkiye, it is essential to see greater representation at the state and congressional levels. The presence of Turkish Americans in these governing bodies would serve as a stabilizing factor in the bilateral relationship. In this regard, Turkish Americans can draw inspiration from the Turkish Australian model—embracing pride in one's heritage while demonstrating a strong commitment to the country they serve. Such a balance strengthens both identity and civic responsibility.

***Looking ahead to the next century of relations between the United States and Türkiye, what gives you the most hope? And what role do you believe the Turkish-American community will play in strengthening that partnership?***

Turkish Americans are exemplary citizens who make meaningful contributions to the US economy and society. They have achieved success across a wide range of fields, including academia, business, engineering, and the sciences. At a time when polarization and governmental dysfunction pose growing challenges to democracy, Turkish Americans are well-positioned to play a constructive and unifying role. Their perspectives, experiences, and commitment to civic engagement can help address pressing issues both at home and abroad. Moreover, they can serve as ambassadors of understanding—educating fellow citizens about the complex realities of Türkiye's region with clarity and balance. By fostering respectful dialogue, they can contribute to mutual understanding in an increasingly divided world. Now is not the time to stand on the sidelines. It is a moment for greater engagement with communities, and the democratic process. Without such participation, we risk deepening domestic divisions and escalating global tensions that affect us all. ■



# STARLINE SHADES

## SHADING SYSTEMS



# 250 YEARS AGO



*“Citizens by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections.”*

*— Farewell Address, George Washington*



# A NATION CELEBRATES 250 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

BY ELVAN RAMAZANOĞULLARI / PATSY JONES

In 2026, the United States reaches a defining milestone in its national journey, the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Known as *Freedom 250*, this once in a generation commemoration is unfolding as a sweeping nationwide reflection on the ideals of liberty, democracy, civic responsibility, and opportunity that have shaped the country for two and a half centuries.

Across the nation, a year long tapestry of events, exhibitions, festivals, and educational initiatives is drawing communities together to honor the country's founding while also imagining its future. From symbolic ceremonies in the nation's capital to immersive traveling exhibits reaching towns and cities far beyond major metropolitan centers, the *Freedom 250* initiative seeks to engage Americans of every generation and background in a shared moment of remembrance and renewal.



PHOTO CREDITS: [WWW.FREEDOM250.ORG/](http://WWW.FREEDOM250.ORG/)

The celebrations began with a dramatic visual statement in Washington, DC, when the Washington Monument was transformed through projection mapping and fireworks during New Year festivities, launching what organizers envision as one of the most expansive national anniversary commemorations in modern American history. One of the most ambitious nationwide undertakings is the Freedom Truck Mobile Museums tour.

Throughout 2026, interactive traveling exhibits are visiting communities including Tampa, Nashville, Boca Raton, Orange Park, Fort Campbell, Batesburg-Leesville, Columbia, Phoenix, and Newland, bringing multimedia storytelling and hands on historical experiences directly to schools, civic centers, and public gathering spaces. Complementing this effort is the Freedom Plane national promotion tour, which is traveling across the country to inspire public participation and build anticipation for the summer’s major celebrations.

As spring turns toward summer, the national calendar grows increasingly dynamic. On May 17, thousands are expected to gather on the National Mall for the Rededicate 250 National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise, and Thanksgiving, an event intended to encourage reflection on shared civic values, national unity, and gratitude. In early June, the National Mall will again become a focal point for celebration during the Capitol Cast



recreational fishing event, bringing together youth, veterans, and professional anglers in a family centered tribute to outdoor heritage and conservation. Cultural programming intensifies throughout June and July as the National Archives hosts Spirit of Independence events and special exhibitions leading into Independence Day. A historic mixed martial arts event is also planned for June 14 on the White House South Lawn, symbolizing the intersection of contemporary culture and national milestones during this landmark year.

The central highlight of *Freedom 250* will arrive on July 4, 2026, when celebrations unfold across the country. Historic reenactments, parades, concerts, flyovers, and large scale fireworks displays are planned in cities and towns nationwide, with major programming expected in Washington, DC, and along New York Harbor. In San Diego, the Anchored in Freedom celebration at Liberty Station on July 3 will honor the nation’s naval legacy and patriotic traditions as part of the broader anniversary Festivities.

Later in July, the National Mall will host the Great American Farmers Market, a week long showcase of agriculture, culinary traditions, innovation, and family programming that highlights the diversity of American food culture and rural heritage. In August, global attention will once again turn to Washington as the *Freedom 250* Grand Prix, an international IndyCar street race, takes place around the National Mall, celebrating innovation, transportation history, and national pride.

Beyond the capital, the US 250 Tour is traveling coast to coast throughout the year, presenting music, storytelling, educational exhibits, and large scale patriotic programming in all fifty states. These events are designed to connect local communities with the broader national narrative of independence and democratic progress.

Museums and cultural institutions are also playing a central role in commemorating the anniversary. The National Museum of American History will present the exhibition *In Pursuit of Life, Liberty, and Happiness*, exploring the evolving meaning of freedom in American life. The National Gallery of Art will host *American Icon: The US Flag in Art*, examining artistic interpretations of one of the nation's most enduring symbols.

The anticipated reopening of major galleries at the National Air and Space Museum will further highlight American innovation, scientific achievement, and exploration. The momentum of cultural engagement continues into the fall with DC JazzFest programming focused on the future of American music, the tenth anniversary celebration of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the reopening of the revitalized Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden.

Together, these programs underscore the richness, complexity, and diversity of the American experience. *Freedom 250* is also marked by a strong emphasis on volunteerism, civic participation, and historic preservation. Nationwide initiatives are encouraging citizens to restore historic sites, support veterans, and engage in community service projects intended to leave a lasting legacy beyond the anniversary year. In doing so, the commemoration becomes not just a reflection on the past, but a call to action for the present. It invites individuals and communities alike to actively shape the nation's future while honoring the values that have defined it for generations.

For Turkish American communities, including readers of ATANews magazine, this historic milestone carries particular resonance. Immigrant communities have long contributed to the cultural, economic, and civic fabric of the United States, and *Freedom 250* offers a meaningful opportunity to reflect on shared democratic values, enduring friendships, and the role of global perspectives in shaping the American story. As anticipation builds toward Independence Day and beyond, the celebrations unfolding across the country serve not only as a tribute to the past but also as an invitation to imagine the future.

By connecting historical remembrance with conversations about innovation, cooperation, and civic responsibility, *Freedom 250* is inspiring a new generation to engage with the ideals that have guided the nation for 250 years.

Two and a half centuries after its founding, the United States continues to evolve, shaped by people of many backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations. The nationwide commemorations of 2026 stand as a powerful reminder that the pursuit of freedom, unity, and progress remains an ongoing journey. ■





# RAISING THE FLAG ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

## A milestone victory highlighting the global competitiveness of Türkiye's next generation of surgeons

BY SEVTAP SCHREFFLER

**I**n an era where global scientific competition increasingly defines excellence in medicine, a remarkable achievement by Hacettepe University has captured international attention. At the prestigious Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) Annual Meeting in New Orleans, residents Dr. Nazlı Melis Coskun and Dr. Atilay Koltuk, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Mustafa Yılmaz, secured first place, outperforming a team from Yale University and representing Europe with distinction. Their success not only underscores the strength of Türkiye's medical training on the world stage, but also reflects the rigorous academic culture and mentorship that define Hacettepe's Faculty of Medicine. In this interview, Dr. Mustafa Yılmaz and his team share insights into the journey behind this milestone, the values that shaped it, and what it signals for the future of Turkish physicians in global medicine.

*Dr. Yılmaz, the STS Annual Meeting is considered one of the most respected scientific platforms in the world. What did it mean to you personally and institutionally to see your team achieve first place on such a stage?*

The STS Annual Meeting is one of the most respected scientific platforms in cardiovascular and thoracic surgery worldwide. Achieving first place on such a stage was an extraordinary moment of pride for our department and for Hacettepe University. Personally, it was deeply rewarding to see our residents demonstrate their knowledge and composure at the highest international level. Institutionally, it confirmed that the training model we have developed at Hacettepe can produce surgeons who compete with the best programs in the world.



Dr. Mustafa Yılmaz (left) celebrating the victory with his team



***How do you interpret this success within the broader academic legacy and long-term vision of Hacettepe University Faculty of Medicine?***

Hacettepe University Faculty of Medicine has long aimed to combine strong clinical training with a rigorous academic culture. This success reflects that tradition. It demonstrates that our commitment to evidence-based medicine, scientific curiosity, and disciplined surgical training continues to produce internationally competitive physicians. It also gave us a deep sense of global awareness and responsibility. Time and budget constraints tested us, but we developed strong problem-solving skills and grew more confident. It has changed how we see the world and our own potential.

***The STS knowledge competition evaluates participants at the highest level of cardiovascular and thoracic surgery. In your view, what specific competencies does this competition truly measure?***

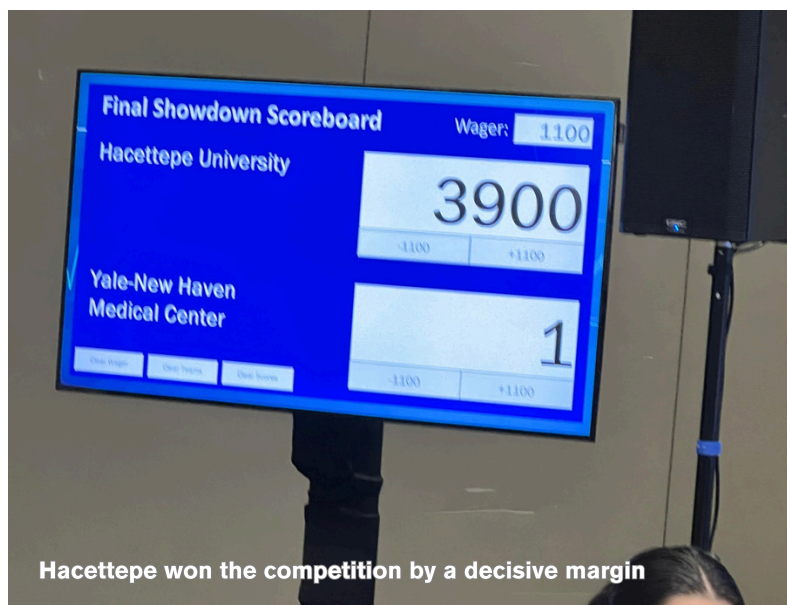
The competition evaluates far more than factual knowledge. It assesses clinical reasoning, interpretation of complex surgical scenarios, familiarity with current guidelines, and the ability to make rapid decisions under pressure. In many ways, it reflects the intellectual demands of modern cardiovascular surgery. We can consider it as a real-life challenge for surgeons in-training.

***Your team, representing Europe, surpassed Yale University, representing the Americas. Beyond the symbolic value, what does this outcome reveal about the academic strength and training model at Hacettepe?***

Competing with institutions such as Yale and Oxford and achieving first place shows that high-level surgical education is not limited to a particular geography. At Hacettepe, our residents receive extensive clinical exposure while simultaneously engaging in academic discussion and research, which allows them to develop both practical judgment and theoretical depth.

***What aspects of Hacettepe's medical education and residency training do you believe were decisive in preparing your residents for success at this level?***

Several elements were decisive: intensive exposure to complex cardiovascular cases, structured academic teaching sessions and literature discussions, early involvement in scientific research, and strong mentorship within the department. As a biggest academic cardiac center in Türkiye, we offer all spectrum of cardiovascular surgical practices to young generation surgeons during their training. It includes cardiovascular surgeries performed in hour old newborn baby to octogenarians. Also, we are the only center in Türkiye performing pediatric heart transplantations, assist devices and other circulatory support systems. Together these elements create an environment where residents are continuously challenged to improve.



**Hacettepe won the competition by a decisive margin**





“

This experience taught me that persistence is the most important thing one can have. I will never forget the moment after the semi-finals when a staff member from STS approached me and said that I had dominated the stage as a woman—especially since I was the only woman in the competition. It was a very proud moment for me, as I know that many women still face challenges in this field. And it was especially meaningful to achieve this success while representing Hacettepe at the end of my residency.

”

Dr. Nazlı Melis Coşkun

“

We felt the pressure throughout the entire preparation process. However, when we stepped onto the stage, we had only one goal—to win—and that helped us stay calm. Many times we reminded each other to stay calm during the competition. While preparing for the competition, the mental support of my loved ones meant a lot to me; I might not have succeeded without them. The professors at my university also gave me all the support I needed. My advice to those who want to test themselves in this competition is to try and enjoy the process.

”

Dr. Atılay Koltuk



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## THE ATATÜRK SOCIETY OF AMERICA'S COMMITMENT TO VISION, DIALOGUE, AND SHARED PURPOSE

*Carrying a Legacy Forward*



BY FİLİZ ODABAŞ-GELDIAY

**A**s the new President of the Atatürk Society of America, it is with great honor and a deep sense of responsibility that we continue to grow as an organization following our recent elections, which brought together a new Board of Directors—individuals who have generously offered their time, talent, and dedication for many years.

Since its founding in 1995 by the late Chairman and Founding President Hüdai Yavalar and a small group of us, the Atatürk Society of America has been more than an organization. It has been a community of people who believe deeply in the transformative power of ideas—ideas that shaped a nation and continue to inspire the world. For three decades, we have worked to share the vision of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: a vision grounded in reason, education, dignity, equality, and peace. What began as a modest effort by committed individuals has grown into a lasting platform for dialogue, learning, and remembrance.

Atatürk is often described as the George Washington of Türkiye, and in many ways the comparison is fitting. Like Washington, he led his nation through its most fragile moment and helped lay the foundation of a modern republic. But to many people, especially those who grew up hearing his story, he represents something even deeper: the courage to imagine a better future when everything seemed lost.

Nearly a century after his passing, Atatürk continues to live in the hearts and minds of millions. There is something profoundly moving about seeing the younger generation rediscover him in their own way. Today, social media is filled with short films, quiet moments, and small acts of remembrance—young people sharing images, stories, and reflections from everyday life that reveal how deeply they still feel connected to him. These are not formal commemorations; they are spontaneous expressions of gratitude and admiration.



Perhaps nowhere is this connection more visible than on November 10th, the anniversary of his passing in 1938. At 9:05 in the morning, an entire nation pauses. Sirens sound. Traffic stops. People step out of their cars and stand in silence on sidewalks, in offices, and in schools. For one minute, everything becomes still. Even after almost a hundred years, that moment can bring people to tears. In a world often divided by politics, identity, and ideology, this shared act of remembrance remains something deeply human and profoundly unique.

It reminds us that great leadership is not only measured by victories or reforms, but by the lasting place it holds in the collective heart of a people. And yet, remembering alone is not enough. The challenges facing our world today—conflict, polarization, mistrust, and instability, particularly across the Middle East and many other regions—make Atatürk’s ideas more relevant than ever. His commitment to upholding universal human values, rational thinking, secular democracy, education, equality, and the simple yet powerful principle of “Peace at home, peace in the world” offers a framework that deserves renewed attention.

For those of us at the Atatürk Society of America, this creates both a privilege and a responsibility. We believe that Atatürk’s legacy should not only be honored, but studied, discussed, and applied. His vision has much to contribute to modern conversations in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, democratic governance, and international cooperation.



Our mission, therefore, is not only to remember—but to share, to teach, and to inspire. We invite scholars, students, community members, and friends from every background to join us in this effort. Your voice, your participation, and your support help ensure that the ideals Atatürk championed continue to reach new generations. History has given us an extraordinary legacy. What we do with it now is our responsibility.

In carrying this legacy forward, we remain guided not only by history, but by a shared belief in the future we can build together. With humility and determination, we will continue to honor Atatürk’s ideals through meaningful action and open dialogue. We look ahead with hope, confident that through collective effort and understanding, his vision will continue to inspire and illuminate the path for generations to come. ■

## GRASSROOT GATHERINGS



## COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR COMMISSIONER TAYFUN SELEN

A group of Turkish Americans joined a community event in support of Morris County Commissioner Tayfun Selen (NJ).

During the gathering, Commissioner Selen thanked attendees for their continued support and opened his remarks on a warm and lighthearted note, which was met with positive energy from the audience.

He reflected on past elections, noting that while the process had been challenging, it had consistently resulted in success, and expressed confidence in the upcoming election. He also spoke about the growth of the region, highlighting the increasing population as more people move into the state, particularly from metropolitan areas.

Commissioner Selen also acknowledged and thanked local city leaders, including several mayors in attendance, for their support. He concluded his remarks by expressing his appreciation to everyone who has supported him.

## TURKISH AMERICANS MET REP. MICHAEL BAUMGARTNER OF WA

Turkish Americans met with Congressman Michael Baumgartner (WA-5) during their recent visit to Capitol Hill. The meeting provided an opportunity for an in-depth discussion on regional developments and U.S.–Türkiye relations. Congressman Baumgartner demonstrated a strong understanding of the region, drawing on his personal and professional experience, including time spent in Syria, service in Afghanistan, and multiple visits to Türkiye with his family.

Participants highlighted the importance of stability in Syria and its broader impact on regional security. The discussion also touched on the Zangezur Corridor in the Caucasus, emphasizing its potential as a key trade route connecting Türkiye with Central Asia and beyond. The importance of timely U.S. engagement in this initiative was noted, particularly in light of growing geopolitical competition in the region.

Baumgartner currently serves on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, including the Subcommittees on the Middle East and North Africa and on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber, where he focuses on regional security and cooperation.



## ATATÜRK SCHOOL PREPARES FOR A MEANINGFUL APRIL 23 CELEBRATION

ATA-DC Atatürk School kicked off the second semester with enthusiasm despite the chilly weather. The school's community of dedicated students and experienced teachers is now focused on preparations for the April 23 Turkish National Sovereignty and Children's Day celebrations. This year's program promises to be unforgettable, with performances from each class showcasing students' talents.

The school is also excited to announce the launch of its Folklor Dance class, held every Sunday after school. It is heartwarming to see children in the Turkish community embracing their heritage through dance. The folklor team will also perform at the April 23 celebration, taking place on Sunday, April 26 at McLean High School, as it does every year. The school invites everyone to join this special celebration of Turkish sovereignty and to honor Atatürk's legacy.



ATA-DC Atatürk School also had the honor of hosting Pınar Ayhan, a renowned artist, orator, and historian, who visited with the students for a special interactive session. During her visit, Ayhan engaged warmly with the children, speaking about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding of the Republic, and the enduring values of unity, independence, and cultural identity. Students had the opportunity to ask questions, share their thoughts, and actively participate in meaningful discussions. The session created an inspiring and memorable learning experience, helping students connect more deeply with their history while fostering curiosity, confidence, and pride in their heritage.



**YCAP 2026: CONVERSATIONS THAT INSPIRE, ACTIONS THAT MATTER**

The Youth Civic Ambassadors Program (YCAP), organized by ATA-DC, continued its strong momentum throughout the second semester of 2026. Since January, the program has offered participants a dynamic blend of thought-provoking speaker sessions and hands-on civic engagement opportunities, creating a well-rounded and impactful learning experience. At the heart of the program was an impressive speaker series that brought together distinguished leaders from diplomacy, technology, finance, education, and international trade. Through these sessions, Youth Civic Ambassadors (YCAPs) not only gained valuable and unique insights from accomplished professionals but also deepened their understanding of global issues and expanded their perspectives on future career paths. The 2026 speaker lineup featured:



- Ambassador Francis Ricciardone, Former U.S. Ambassador, who highlighted The Importance of Diplomacy and the critical role of dialogue in international relations.
- Şarka Şengezener, Education Specialist and Founder of Europe Option, who addressed What Makes a Good Education? Learning Smarter in a Global World.
- Mert Arkan, a DC-based international trade lawyer, who gave practitioner perspective on Law and International Trade rules and regulations
- Eylem Şenyüz, Senior Vice President and Senior Macro Strategist at Truist Advisory Services, who explained Why Finance Matters and its relevance to everyday life.



Complementing the speaker series, YCAPs also engaged directly with their local governments as part of their assignments by requesting official proclamations recognizing **World Turkish Coffee Day** and **World Turkic Languages Day**. These efforts led to notable successes, with Kayra Olgun receiving a World Turkic Languages Day proclamation from the Mayor of City of Fairfax and Altay Düzyol receiving a proclamation for Turkish Coffee Day from Montgomery County, collectively reflecting YCAP's impact on leadership and civic engagement.



## **THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF BARLEY**

BY DENIZ ORHUN

Barley's journey started in the Fertile Crescent around 9600-6400 BC, according to a 2019 research paper titled "Barley in Archaeology and Early History", (Simone Riehl, Oxford Academic). This period marks the very beginning of the early agricultural revolution and early Neolithic farming cultures. That was long before the rise of any organized civilization like the Sumerians, which emerged around 5000-4000 BC. Archaeological studies and ancient illustrations show the practices used at that time, such as pressing, extracting liquid, fermentation, and grinding. In that region and its agricultural societies, we see the need to preserve and store grains for both farming and dietary purposes. Barley harvests symbolized hope and blessing. For thousands of years, barley's farming practices and examples have inspired optimism.

This ancient grain is high in fiber and nutrient-rich, containing beta-glucan, selenium, and magnesium, all of which are very beneficial for people over 40. Consult your healthcare provider about including barley in your diet. Hulled barley is a whole grain with minimal processing, where only the inedible husk is removed. Pearled barley has the bran removed. Barley provides a good source of fiber, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and beta-glucan. You can cook it as a pilaf, add it to salads and soups, or make a pudding.

Barley is one of the most widely traded cash crops worldwide. In modern times, barley continues to thrive. Maryland was recognized by the USDA as having a record domestic barley production. It is cultivated as both a cash crop and a popular

winter cover crop. The craft beer industry in Maryland uses locally grown barley, and Virginia breweries and distilleries also source local barley, earning national awards.

Just as in real life, when we stop undervaluing what we have and start sharing, unleashing our talents no matter how small, like barley, they return to us in abundance; the same principle applies in the kitchen. When we start using and sharing these values with the next generation and those around us, the kitchen becomes a space that supports our health and well-being.

Barley is more than just a grain; it's a reminder of adaptation that sustains us. Here is a barley soup recipe that highlights this ancient grain's versatility, resilience, and nutritional power.



**Barley Soup (Yield: 4 servings)**

**Ingredients:**

- |                                 |                        |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 tablespoon of olive oil       | 1 ½ cup yogurt         |
| 2 cloves of garlic              | ½ cup milk             |
| ½ medium size onion             | Red pepper (to taste)  |
| 1 cup of chicken broth          | Rosemary               |
| 5 cups of water                 | 1 tablespoon of butter |
| 5 tablespoons of pearled barley |                        |

**Directions:**

1. Cook 5 tablespoons of barley with 3 cups of cold water for 30 minutes and set aside.
2. Sauté chopped onion and minced garlic with 2 tablespoons of water until the water evaporates and onion becomes translucent.
3. In separate bowl, mix yogurt, milk, and ¾ cup of water until it becomes smooth.
4. Add olive oil in a pot and sauté the translucent onion garlic until half caramelized. Add broth, remaining 1 cup water, add cooked barley, cook for 10 minutes.
5. Temper yogurt water mix, cook 3 more minutes. Blend until smooth with an immersion blender.

Serve with rosemary and clarified butter with red pepper.



*Deniz Orhun is a businesswoman engineer, chef, TV personality, U.S.-certified multidisciplinary food journalist who seamlessly blends gastronomy with other disciplines. She is also an active member of the Community Emergency Response Team and a board member of the American Culinary Federation-NCCA.*



*Her culinary journey, from earning a culinary degree at Kendall College-National Louis University in Chicago to producing more than 1,300 solo TV shows on national and international channels, represents a harmonious fusion of creativity, science, and entrepreneurship. Beyond the kitchen, Deniz collaborates with universities, research institutions, and local authorities, advocating for healthy cooking techniques and the role of nutrition in enhancing individual well-being through thoughtful flavor combinations. Her research spans natural calendars, celestial observations, unused food resources, healthy recipes developed for extreme conditions, and food history.*

*Deniz is the author of \*What You Eat Affects How You Behave/Yedikleriniz Davranışlarınız Olur.\* She has published scientific research papers and, for more than nine years, has written culinary articles for culinary magazines and other publications. Her work sits at the intersection of science, art, and storytelling, inspiring fresh perspectives on food and its role in our lives.*

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