



Maria, Gus, and Catina Stamoolis

Stamoolis Brothers Co.

*Providing Fine Foods for a Century
In the Strip District Tradition*

By Christopher Cussat

Since 1909, Stamoolis Brothers Co. (Stamoolis Brothers.) has provided customers with the finest Greek and Mediterranean foods. This one-hundred-year-old tradition began as the vision of five brothers from Chios, Greece — Orestus, Evangelos, Matthew, Christos, and James. The Stamoolis brothers built their business on a foundation of genuine love and passion for sharing Greek culture and cuisine with others.

In fact, the Stamoolis family has always been involved in the selling of quality products and exceptional goods. The brothers' father was a food merchant by trade who dealt primarily with the sale of mastic gum. This natural and rare tree-resin or sap comes from a bushy tree that grows only on the southern side of Chios. Mastic was used in pharmaceuticals and culinary specialties. This rare resin is still available for purchase at the Stamoolis Brothers store in the Strip District!

The beginnings of the company trace back to New York City in 1907, when the five Stamoolis brothers arrived in America. After working in Greek restaurants for two

years, they opened a retail store there that specialized in food imports, and the company known today as Stamoolis Brothers was born.

With the success of their first store, the brothers relocated to Pittsburgh in 1929 to join their brother-in-law, who had a similar store on Market Street. Before long, they opened the store and warehouse at its present location on Penn Avenue in the Strip.

No triumphant story is free of adversity. The history of Stamoolis Brothers is no exception. In 1951, a disastrous fire extensively damaged one building and completely gutted the other. But the tragedy only empowered the Stamoolis family's resolve. The brothers pulled together and began operating again in a single building.

Much has changed since the Stamoolis Brothers Co. has been in the Strip District. But if you step through the company's doors today, you may feel transformed back to when the five Stamoolis brothers first opened for business.

You cannot miss the sense of nostalgia and coziness while in the store amid the

original, exposed brick walls. And when walking on the antique, wide-plank, wood floor, you cannot help feeling connected to the thousands of visitors who have been there before. The exotic aromas of spices, cheeses, and meats permeate the air and tempt your nose and palate.

Today, the Stamoolis family's dedication and devotion to quality products and personal service are lovingly carried on by Gus Stamoolis -- the son of Orestus, one of the original founding brothers -- his family, and a number of dedicated employees.

When Gus and his brother, Peter O. Stamoolis, took over the company in 1965, they restored the building damaged in the fire of 1951 and added two more warehouse buildings to accommodate business growth. Peter began his career in the food industry at a young age and never wavered from his father's insistence that the Strip-based company remain in the family. When he and Gus expanded Stamoolis Brothers, Peter created recipes for more than 60 Mediterranean food dips that to this day continue to be popular sellers.

Peter was a true connoisseur and all-around lover of food. "Sadly, Peter fell asleep in the Lord last year around Thanksgiving," says Gus. Yet, his spirit and passion for preserv-

myriad of tastes, sizes, colors, and in olive oils.

Stamoolis Brothers has a large selection of more than 100 different spices many of which are hard to find elsewhere. The spices are guaranteed to be fresh and reasonably priced. What's more, you can buy as much fresh grain as you want, right out of the original metal bins that have been in the store since the 1920's.

With several hundred visitors and customers each day, Stamoolis Brothers Co. sells in excess of 20,000 pounds of fillo dough a month and 15,000 pounds of gyro meat per week. Two rare and exclusive products available at the store are masticha -- the mastic tree-sap -- and mahlep -- pits of sour cherries.

If you haven't already visited this charming, character-filled, landmark store in the Strip, take yourself there soon. And remember to bring your taste-buds. At Stamoolis Brothers, you can sample more than 30 of Pete's homemade dips, including favorites like Asiago Cheese Spread, Artichoke Spinach Feta Spread, Spicy Feta Spread, Feta Tomato Asiago Spread, and more. Be warned, however. Once you enter Stamoolis Brothers, you may not be able to leave without trying and buying a little bit of everything.



Christosporos



Evangelos



Mathew



James



Orestus

ing and spreading Greek culture still remains alive and vibrant at Stamoolis Brothers. A part of Peter is still there. And the fantastic dips and spreads he loved concocting and making are always available at the store.

Today, Stamoolis Brothers is a leading importer and food distributor of wholesale and retail Greek, Italian, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and other international foods. The company services the tri-state area of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, including restaurants, caterers, hotels, grocery stores, and other businesses.

Among the thousands of products you'll find at Stamoolis Brothers, some of the Greek specialty foods include: fillo and kataifi dough, spanakopita and tiropita triangles, stuffed grape leaves, baccala (dried fish), gyro meat, various pita breads, baklava, finikia, and bougatsa.

The store also carries a wide selection of cheeses, including seven types of the ever popular Feta cheese and more than 300 kinds of cheeses imported from around the world. It's no surprise that more than 30 varieties of olives are always on hand in a



A few of our prized employees: (left to right) Chris McGuire, Koco Priftani, and Eric Araviakis

Gus, the current president and owner of Stamoolis Brothers, attributes the company's success to determination, perseverance, and pride. These qualities have been ingrained in the generations of the Stamoolis family because of everything the family has achieved over the years and the many hardships and obstacles the family has surmounted.

"A strong work ethic and a belief in giving a superior product at a fair price have contributed to our longevity

Continued on page 34

and success,” he says. “We listen and pay attention to the desires and requests of customers in every way possible and attempt to fulfill their needs.” The company is also proactive in adhering and adapting to the requests, needs, and desires of its customers and in the continual improving of its products.

Stamoolis Brothers has been a special place for the family for many reasons. Peter’s children, Kara and Peter Michael, as well as Gus’s children, Christina, Catina, and Connie, have all worked at the store since they were young. Many friends and relatives have also held summer jobs there.

The store is extra special for Gus. That’s where he met his wife, Maria. At first, Gus seems a little embarrassed when asked to talk about this, but he soon glows as he affectionately recalls their in-store courtship.

“Maria used to shop here all the time, and she caught my eye,” he says. “So I would leave the office to make sure I was behind the counter when she was here. I would wait on her, and we would talk at length, so much so that we’d just sit there talking and the line of customers would build up.”

Stamoolis Brothers is such a caring family environment that many employees like Eric Araviakis and Koco Priftani have worked at the store for many years. “People tell us that it is so nice coming here because of our dedicated and helpful employees,” says Gus.

Grace Barrett was another employee known for her kindness who was always heartwarming and inspirational to fellow employees and customers alike. “Grace is in her eighties, and recently retired, but she always brings joy to everyone here when she stops by,” says Gus.

Gus feels that the Stamoolis Brothers location in the heart of the Strip District has definitely helped his business. “Many years ago, the Strip was just a location. Now, it has become a destination,” he says.

As Gus sees it, the Strip is a place full of energy, a tapestry of humanity where people from all over the world, speaking different languages, come together to shop, dine, and experience a variety of cultures and hospitality. “Being a part of the Strip District community has enhanced

our business throughout the years and the efforts of Neighbors in the Strip and The Strip Magazine have helped promote and sustain this area as a unique market place,” he says.

Of all the qualities of Stamoolis Brothers, perhaps the most distinctive is its continuity. Countless customers have shared their memories and shopping experiences at the store with their own children and grandchildren. The store is distinctive because much of the company’s physical space and philosophical standards have remained the same.

“It’s reminiscent of a simpler time, when people mattered and service and loyalty were at the forefront with selection and price. It’s this continuity and stability that

keeps families coming to Stamoolis Brothers.”

A visit to Stamoolis Brothers is more than just shopping. It’s an experience. It’s about spending time in a living museum and watching the past com-

mingle with the present. It’s about seeing how generations can be linked through a shared passion and dedication.

“There are many stories behind these walls,” says Gus. “If they could talk, they would provide a strong link to our past and tell us about the brothers who started the business and about the customers who shopped here.”

Become a part of the rich Stamoolis Brothers tradition and visit the store at 2020 Penn Avenue in the Strip District. While you’re there, introduce yourself to Gus and his family, ask questions, try some excellent food, and take a stroll on that wooden floor well worn with time.

For more information call 412-471-7676 or log on to www.stamoolisbros.com. !



The Stamoolis brothers home on Chios Island, Greece



With loving and fond memories, this article is dedicated to the late and greatly missed, Peter O. Stamoolis.