



By day, Greektown takes on another air. Kol Spacaj takes a break from playing pool to watch the shoppers winding in and out of the stores and bakeries. (Staff photo by Gary Friedman)

Hellenic hustle

It's not a dance, but Greektown shakes with activity day and night

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Greektown is a Mediterranean gem in a Detroit setting.

By day the sun casts a bright spell on both sides of the street, with its narrow sidewalks and colorful storefronts. Gift and souvenir shops, groceries and bakeries, restaurants and cafes lure city dwellers, downtown-area workers, tourists and suburbanites to Monroe Street, just west of I-75.

At night, neon signs beckon visitors to enter and enjoy the activities of this small, thriving community. The Greek heritage that has been retained makes Monroe a magnet in Detroit's downtown.

Greektown, one block from police headquarters on Beaubien, is always well-policed by officers who enjoy the vibrant street.

YOU CAN TAKE in Greektown at a glance by standing on the corner, facing Beaubien and Monroe. On the right, the first thing you see is a blue and white sign showing a Grecian facade and telling you that this is Greektown.

On the left side of the street, you can enter Delmar Foods of the World through its three-dimensional Grecian facade topped by a turquoise awning that reads "Grecian Boutique."

Inside, women shoppers browse at the souvenir jewelry counter and import clothing boutique. Greek fisherman hats of denim and braid are on sale for \$10.

At lunchtime, during the week, you can select your own Greek bread or fat rolls in the grocery section and have a sandwich made to order; meanwhile, you can eye the cheese, olives and other Greek specialties in the meat-market cases.

Back on the street, you can continue your journey down both sides, coming closer to the spires of St. Mary's Church across Monroe. In the church, noontime worshippers slip into the pews, and a jingling breaks the silence when a young mother comes in with her daughter, whose baby shoes have bells on them.

AT NOONTIME during the week, Greektown is jammed with people hurrying into such favorite restaurants as the Grecian Gardens or New Hellenas Cafe, to enjoy shishkebab, souvlaki and many other Greek dishes.

Food in Greektown is plentiful and inexpensive. A meal usually begins with thick slices of Greek bread. There may be Greek wine, including retsina with a resin taste, to enhance the food. A Greek salad arrives overflowing with piquant flavors: lamb, with okra or other vegetables, is juicy and tasty.

On the sidewalk, old men and other visitors rest sitting on wood and concrete benches. You may meet a panhandler. Cars pull quickly in and out of the full-up parking-meter spaces at the curb.

Many of the signs in Greektown are in both Greek and English, lending a feeling of authenticity to the street. Most buildings, in a cooperative merchant effort, are a pinkish-red brick, and awnings are in blue, red and white.

Curious pigeons peck curbside on the sidewalk and sparrows nibble in the street.

AT LUNCH TIME, Stemma Cafe overflows with customers, many of

them businessmen, who walk away carrying small, string-tied white boxes, presumably taking baklava or other Greek pastries home for dinner.

Uniformed police officers, military servicemen and women abound in Greektown, among the many interesting people you will see here.

In the bareness of the Peloponnesos Cafe, men play pool or drink at tables, and at the Macedonia Club, pinball machines are in operation. Other businesses, such as the Litos Agency (travel service), Atlantis News Agency (imported cigarettes, Greek records) and Athens (books, music, gifts, printings) offer assorted wares to those who step inside.

Trapper's Alley, an historic old building that has been renovated, houses boutiques selling plants, clothes (T-shirts that say "I Love Greek Town, Greek Town Loves Me"), antiques and collectibles, candles, paintings, books and pottery. Paintings are exhibited in an alley court.

Nighttime in Greektown throbs with food, music and entertainment. The gutsy Attic Theatre at Trappers Alley, which has received critical acclaim, just opened with "The Shadow Box," a 1977 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winner.

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