

# **ATLANTA'S INTERNATIONAL VILLAGES / THE TURKS: 'American' adds to rich heritage;**

## **Business, study draw Turks here**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

December 11, 2002 Wednesday, Home Edition

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
ajc.com

**Section:** Atlanta & the World;; **Series**

**Length:** 986 words

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**Series:** **ATLANTA'S INTERNATIONAL VILLAGES**

### **Body**

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Some came as doctors in the 1950s. Others were students. Turkish immigrants have been coming to Atlanta for decades, and their presence is visible in small restaurants and shops throughout the metro area.

More recently, they have moved here from other parts of the country. Here they found jobs, opportunities and friendships.

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Mazlum Kosma, a board member of the Turkish-**American** Cultural Association of Georgia, or TACAGA, estimates there are 2,500 **Turks** in the metro area. The group has an active membership and offers classes in Turkish to the public.

"Medical doctors came in the '50s and '60s, and also some technical and engineering students. Right now they are retired or recently retired or on the way [to] retirement," said Kosma, who is also the community director for graduate and family housing at Georgia Tech, which has 117 Turkish students, the fifth-largest **international** student group at the school.

Yavuz Tarcan, Turkey's honorary consul general in Atlanta, said most **Turks** live in the Marietta area.

The 2000 census says that of the 423,105 foreign-born residents in the 20-county metro Atlanta area, less than 1 percent --- 1,381 people --- are from Turkey. Statewide, there are 1,610 **Turks** among the state's 577,273 foreign-born residents, according to the census.

Among the first to arrive in Atlanta was Yuksel Yesiltepe, who went to Georgia Tech in 1959 on a Turkish government scholarship to **study** textile engineering.

Americans at the time "didn't know where Turkey was, even though Turkey was on the side of the U.S. after World War II. They were curious. They thought we were still living in Ottoman times, that our clothing was different," said

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Yesiltepe, who married "a Southern girl" while studying here. The couple later moved to Turkey and, after living in Holland for several years, retired to Atlanta in 1992.

When Yesiltepe was a student, "It took some time [for Americans] to accept that Turkish people are similar to Americans, except of course for the religion," he said.

Many studied, stayed

Turkey is a relatively new democracy. It is a Muslim country in Europe and Asia, carved out of the vestiges of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. Kemal Ataturk, national hero and the father of the republic, moved to separate religion from government. Secularism was codified in the country's 1937 constitution.

Atlanta's "next generation of [Turkish] students are finishing school and remaining here afterward," Kosma said. "There are people who came in the '80s and '90s; the majority came [to study]." Many of those students stayed after getting full-time jobs in metro Atlanta.

Turkish parents, who met through the Turkish-American Cultural Association, have formed a group that meets Sundays to teach their children the Turkish language, dance and music, said Kosma, who is a board member of the association.

Shops such as the International Grocery and Deli on Franklin Road in Marietta cater to Turks with specialties like basterma, dried beef with spices; nargilet, tobacco flavored with fruits like apple, strawberry and lemon; or yafka, pastry leaves that are stuffed with cheese and meat.

About half of the store's customers are Turks. The shop also carries Middle Eastern, Greek and Armenian foods.

### Business opportunities

Other recent arrivals in metro Atlanta are people like Hakan Senkal, who came two years ago looking for business opportunities. Senkal had a restaurant in Seattle. When it closed, "A couple of good friends said Atlanta was the place," he said.

His restaurant, Efes on the Square, opened in June 2001. He runs the Marietta Square restaurant with his wife and two nephews.

Ziya Devletsah studied music in California and owned an instrument shop in New York before arriving in metro Atlanta in 1997. A cousin suggested he visit. He liked what he saw and stayed.

Devletsah lives in Kennesaw, where he makes and repairs violins and teaches students in a small room at Sadler Music on North Main Street.

His parents and grandparents were Tatars born in Manchuria --- now part of China --- and had to learn Russian and Japanese as the two powers struggled for control of the region.

Devletsah, 43, was "first-generation" Turkish. But after 21 years in the United States (he became a citizen in 1995), he feels "fifty-fifty"--- a Turkish-American whose roots stretch back to Europe and Asia.

"I already have two cultural backgrounds, Turkish and Tatar. And I have adapted to this American culture. So that makes me Turkish-American. What is 'feeling American'? To me [it] is proud of being modern, educated, strongly believing [in] the power of democracy [and] --- very importantly --- being helpful; it is the most unique American idea."

Like other Turkish immigrants in metro Atlanta, he views recent political events in Turkey with cautious optimism.

Turkey is an ally of Israel and the United States, sharing borders with Iraq, Iran and Syria on one side and Greece and Bulgaria on the other. It is trying to gain entry into the European Union.

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Last month's election triumph by the Justice and Development Party means an end to decades of coalition governments. **Turks** here hope that the new government leaders will be able to curb rampant inflation that plagues the country.

"The biggest economic crisis we lived [was] in coalition times," said Utku Diril, the president of the Turkish Students Organization at Georgia Tech.

"I have concerns and I have hopes, too," he said. "You can't be that radical in Turkey because for years we have been living in a secular state. Most people think it's the heart of the republic."

But others, like restaurant owner Senkal, are concerned that Justice and Development Party leaders like Tayyip Erdogan --- once an Islamist firebrand --- will use democracy as a means to create an Islamic state.

"They will be walking a thin line," Senkal said.

## Graphic

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Photo: Ziya Devletsah teaches Casey Musselman. Devletsah, whose parents were Manchuria-born Tatars, restores and makes violins. / ANDY SHARP / Staff; Photo: Mazlum Kosma estimates that 2,500 **Turks** live in the metro area. Behind him, children practice a traditional dance called Feyli Turna in a Georgia Tech activity room. / KIMBERLY SMITH / Staff; Photo: **Atlanta's Turks** take pride in **heritage**

Turkish immigrants in metro Atlanta celebrated Saturday when Miss Turkey, 21-year-old Azra Akin, was crowned Miss World in London./ ALASTAIR GRANT / AP (TEASER)

ME: One in an occasional series on immigration in metro Atlanta.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (90%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (89%); RELIGION (84%); IMMIGRATION (78%); STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS (78%); YOUTH CLUBS & ACTIVITIES (78%); FOREIGN STUDENTS (78%); TYPES OF GOVERNMENT (75%); SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANTS (73%); EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (73%); CHILDREN (72%); DEMOCRACIES (69%); MUSLIMS & ISLAM (60%); PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS (56%); WORLD WAR II (50%); FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT (50%)

**Industry:** RESTAURANTS (72%); TEXTILES (64%); PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS (56%)

**Geographic:** ATLANTA, GA, USA (96%); GEORGIA, USA (94%); TURKEY (95%); UNITED STATES (95%); EUROPE (79%); ASIA (79%)

**Load-Date:** January 9, 2003