

Local people join the Olympic torch relay celebration.

Qiao Qiming



Odyssey from Athens to Beijing

By WANG QIAN

George Sapounidis will at last fulfill his dream of being a Beijing Olympic torchbearer.

"I finally can make my journey complete from Athens to Beijing," he explains in fluent Mandarin.

It is the second Olympic Games in which the Greek-Canadian singer has been involved. His debut was during the 2004 Athens Games. At that time, he served as a volunteer to the Chinese team.

As a Greek performing artist who sings in Chinese, he is an apt torchbearer to help transition the torch from Athens to Beijing.

"I think I am qualified to be a torchbearer in Beijing, but when the news came, I still could not believe my eyes," he remembers. On the day he heard the news of his selection, "I experienced the most



George Sapounidis gets ready for the torch relay in Beijing.

exciting moment in my life."

Sapounidis spends eight months of the year working as a federal government statistician in Ottawa. During the other four months, he travels throughout China performing traditional Greek and Chinese songs, often singing in Mandarin.

"Statistics is the talent of my brain," he says, "while music is the talent of my heart."

His interest in Chinese language and culture began more than a decade ago, when a Chinese woman taught him to sing a classic Xinjiang folksong — *Girl from the Daban City*.

"I was deeply attracted by the beautiful music of the song," he says. "Only in China can I be free to be my own self, to

have relationships with people through my music and to reach my potential."

Robert Yip, the director of the Chinese Canadian National Council, explains the musician's immense appeal: "With passion and respect, Sapounidis delivers an intoxicating musical cocktail of Greek exuberance and Chinese tranquility. He charms and delights his audiences with the best of both worlds and more."

Last Saturday, Sapounidis taught 10 volunteers from 49 countries to sing *Ode to Olympic Volunteers* in both Mandarin and English.

His favorite Chinese quote is attributed to Mao Zedong: "You will give good services for all people." The singer explains that this line "just reflects the Olympic spirit".

"What is important about the Olympics is friendship. Olympic spirit represents friendship, peace and hope for better future, for China and the whole world," Sapounidis says.

He pulls out his guitar and gives a short sample of the song he will sing when he carries the Olympic torch:

*"Carrying the flame,
joining hands together,
dreaming the dream,
dreaming for the future,
running the race,
running to make the world better,
singing a song of harmony."*

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