

Winchester woman's passion for Greece leads to business focusing on honey imports

Joanna K. Tzouvelis

This article originally appeared on [WickedLocal.com](https://www.wickedlocal.com), in The Belmont Citizen-Herald, and The Lexington Minuteman, member publications of the USA TODAY Network.

WINCHESTER — Nikki Menounos Daigel wasn't afraid to take a chance.

She left her job in health care to start a business importing honey and other products from Greece. Portoula, which was founded in 2022, is an online retailer of three types of Greek honey, as well as apparel and accessories.

In the 1960s, Daigel's parents immigrated to America from Akovos, Greece. She would travel with them to visit their native country each summer, and once she had children of her own, continued the traditional summer vacation.

"I do believe that really created an imprint for me personally," Daigel said. "This sort of juxtaposition of two different kinds of worlds."



Every time she returned home after visiting Greece, Daigel felt depressed, and wanted to bring back a piece of the country with her.

"It became clear to me that Greece was such a huge part of me, and that I didn't feel like Greece was represented in the way that I experienced it," she said. "It's not just about gyros and spinach pie.

"There's so much more to Greece."

Portoula was started to bring (Greek) joy to others

Daigel sought to infuse more joy into her own life through a business that would bring joy to others.

A few years ago, she planned a trip to Greece to get further inspiration for her business — but later had to cancel due to COVID-19.

This didn't stop Daigel, though. While stuck at home, she came up with the business name of Portoula, which means "little door" in Greek.

"I've always been fascinated by little doors in Greece, especially in our village," she said. "I always wanted to know what was behind them."

With pandemic restrictions lifted, she visited Greece in September 2021. But she wasn't able to travel the country as much as she hoped as she tried to determine what products Portoula would sell.

Her husband, Roger, suggested starting with a product she brings home every year when she visits Greece; the product everyone asks for — honey.



Daigel was nervous about the challenge of importing food, but realized he had a point.

She met with a family friend who is a fourth-generation beekeeper, to see what he thought of importing the honey he made to the United States.

“We reached an agreement,” Daigel said.

In Akovos, bees pollinate the dew left on certain tree bark

Daigel is now as much of an expert when it comes to honey as a beekeeper. Akovos, her family's native village, is mountainous, and many believe its forests are magical, she said. The honey is called “forest honey” because instead of pollinating flowers, bees pollinate the dew left on the bark of a certain species of trees. Greece has thousands of species of flora that don't grow anywhere else in the world, and bees are around these aromatic plants and herbs, Daigel said. She believes you can taste it in the honey.

“It's incomparable,” she said.

Daigel imports three types of honey: fir, oak and pine.

Fir honey is from fir trees in Akovos. Oak, a darker honey that's high in antioxidant properties, is also from Akovos.

“It's almost like the fir honey, but has a savoriness,” Daigel said, adding that it's even more of an antioxidant than Manuka honey.



Daigel takes pride in importing honey directly from producers

The third honey she imports is pine, which is harvested from trees in the pine forest of Evia, a large island off the coast of Athens.

Daigel takes pride in the quality of products she imports because it comes directly from people who produce it.

“The purest honey comes from a beekeeper,” she said. “It doesn’t pass through 10 hands before it gets to you. It doesn’t get heated. It’s not made in a factory.”

“We offer a product that is a single estate,” she continued. “Its origin is completely traceable. It’s lab-tested by us before it’s ever put in a jar. It’s never heated. Its raw and has all the beautiful properties it should have. It’s absolutely delicious and I would say it could stand up to anything on any shelf anywhere.”



The forest honey Portoula imports is naturally lower in sugar and moisture, so it doesn’t crystalize like flower honey and it doesn’t taste as sweet.

She also said beekeepers move hives to optimize conditions for the bees. When it gets too cold in the mountains, hives are moved closer to the sea, she said.



Daigel's honey reaps awards from The Guild of Fine Food

The Guild of Fine Food recently presented multiple Great Taste awards to Portoula for its honey. More than 14,000 products from 109 countries were part of the competition's rigorous blind judging process.

Portoula's fir and pine varieties each earned a Great Taste 2-star — “above and beyond delicious,” a designation awarded to only 11% of products. Portoula Oak honey was awarded a Great Taste 1-star — “food and drink that delivers fantastic flavor,” and awarded to less than 30% of products.

Apparel and accessories, too

Besides honey, Daigel is importing apparel and accessories from Greece, including scarves, shawls and jewelry.

“I’m happy to support the people who make the products. It makes me really happy to connect these two worlds that I love,” said Daigel.

In addition to Portoula’s website, Daigel is selling her products at [Curio Spice Company](#) in Cambridge; [Butternut Bakehouse](#), in Arlington and Belmont; [Sofra Bakery and Cafe](#) in Cambridge; [Honeycomb](#) in Hamilton; [Bizalion's Fine Food](#) in Great Barrington; and [Greek Habits by Eva](#) in Arlington.

