



Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



ST. NICHOLAS IS CENTER OF GREEK COMMUNITY LIFE

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TARPON SPRINGS --- As Florida churches go, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in the heart of Tarpon Springs is not "old." But it is literally in the hearts of all who live here. As one observer points out, St. Nicholas is the very center, "the mortar," of Greek community life.

The sponge industry developed here at the turn of the century and professional divers were imported from Greece. By 1903, the town began celebrating Epiphany Day in January, one of the most holy days of the Greek Orthodox church. In the same year, the first St. Nicholas Church was started. It was finished in 1907, a small edifice seating only 250 persons and costing \$15,000.

That is much in contrast to today's gorgeous and elegant cathedral, which was dedicated in 1941. The beautiful Byzantine structure has a glistening interior of white Grecian (of course) marble which serves to highlight the magnificent beauty of stained glass windows and iconography, offset by several huge, delicate crystal chandeliers. There is a white Carrara marble altar dedicated to the memory of the Rev. Theophilos Karaphillis who served the church as pastor from 1922 until his death in 1963.

Thousands throng to Tarpon Springs each Jan. 6 to watch a church dignitary toss a golden cross into the icy cold waters of Spring Bayou and to watch the excitement as many young Grecian lads dive in to retrieve it. The "winner" is assured good luck all year.

