NEW YORK, NY - The Armenian community honored one of its own last weekend, and did it with style. Hirair Hovnanian - first generation Armenian-American industrialist and long-time philanthropist - received the Armenia Assembly's Distinguished Service Award at an elegant Gala at New York's Waldorf Astoria, June 4. Joining the celebration were Armenia Vice President Gagik Harutunian, Congressman Richard Loebs (D-CA), the Hovnanian family and over 700 well-wishers from around the country and around the world.

"All of us here tonight are representatives of the countries, institutions and causes Hirair holds dear to his heart," Assembly Board of Trustees Counselor, and master of ceremonies, Robert A. Kabousian, said as he opened the program. "Each of us has been the beneficiary of his commitment, leadership and generosity. This evening’s tribute is richly deserved and long overdue."

Symbolic of the two nations most cherished by Hovnanian, both the American and Armenian national anthems - "Star Spangled Banner" and "Mer Hayenik" - were sung beautifully by soprano Mariam Najarian Lair. At the honoree's request, Lair came to the microphone again at the end of the program with an inspired rendition of "Vayrevan-Erebuni."

The bilingual invocation, by Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, Prelate of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, Eastern United States and Canada, gave thanks for the banquet and asked for blessings "to strengthen our resolve in bringing comfort to our brothers and sisters in Armenia who have suffered too long."

Welcoming the 700 guests, Gala committee Chairwoman and Assembly Associate Trustee Shakes Mekjian thanked them, her family and the committee for the contribution of each toward making the event an outstanding success. I accepted this assignment because of the deep respect and admiration I have for the work of the Armenian Assembly and its Trustees. Chairman Hirair. Working on this Gala this past year, I have been given the opportunity to witness the intellect, wisdom and leadership of this exemplary.

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