

The Joseph Castrogiovanni Family: From Aragona to Rockford and Beyond



The family of noted Rockford grocer Joseph Castrogiovanni and his wife Rose trace their roots to Aragona in southern Sicily. Joseph emigrated to Rockford in 1910 at age 17. On arrival, he worked two jobs -- one in his cousin's meat market and the other at Nelson Knitting Company. Within two years, he earned enough money to finance passage for his mother, brother, and two sisters. In 1914, he was drafted into the U.S. Army. He served overseas in World War I for three years. On his return, he married Rose Buscemi.

In 1919, he opened the Sanitary Meat Market at 1006 South Main with his younger brother Anthony. The popular neighborhood store -- known for its high quality meats and customer service -- launched a second branch in 1937 at 2219 E. State near Welty Avenue in Rockford's growing east side. As business thrived, Joseph and Rose raised four sons: Anthony, Alfred, Joseph and John.

In 1948, Joseph and his sons rebranded and expanded their East State store, renaming it Hilander Foods as a nod to Highland Grade School across the street. A new branch at Prospect and Rural Streets in 1955 marked the beginning of a regional expansion that would see five more locations throughout Rockford area. With the opening of its final store in Roscoe, Hilander was purchased in 1998 by the Cincinnati-based national grocery chain Kroger.

Today, Joseph and Rose's descendants are dispersed across the U.S., from Illinois to New York and Texas to California.

In the photograph are pictured from left to right: Sanitary Meat Market co-owner Anthony Castrogiovanni with nephews Tony and Alfred (Joseph's two eldest sons).

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