

Honoring Decorated Italian Troopers

Re-enactors tip their hats to Monte Cervino unit at Midway Village's World War II Days

By Mike Doyle

About 1,100 re-enactors gathered at Rockford's Midway Village Museum on a rainy weekend last fall for World War II Days, the largest event of its kind in North America. Among those taking part were soldiers representing the United States, Russia, Japan, Australia, and Poland.



Original artwork of Alpini Capello
by Morgan Anderson

Perhaps the most striking of all re-enactors was the *Monte Cervino* Battalion, representing the *Alpini Corps* of Italian Army, whose sporty headwear features an Alpine hat topped by a brightly colored feather. "That certainly catches the eyes of the public, and many are curious about what exactly we're portraying," said Anthony Lebda of St. Paul, Minnesota, at the event September

21-22, 2019. The hat, known as an *Alpini Capello*, also attracts other reenactors, including Bob Leininger of Newport, Minnesota. "I was drawn to it because (Anthony) was wearing this nice, awesome hat," Bob said.

Fashion aside, Anthony became more intrigued by the unit once he did some research. He found that *Monte Cervino* was a highly sophisticated mountain battalion that fought valiantly in both world wars and exists today as the only mountain paratrooper unit in the world.

"I got into re-enacting *Monte Cervino* after reading several books on the subject, specifically, *Sergeant in the Snow* by Mario Rigoni Stern," he said. "This book recounts the initial action of the Italians during Operation Little Saturn, and the subsequent retreat on the Russian front."

After finding other individuals interested in creating the

unit, they put their collective minds together, and with additional research, were surprised at what they found. "When we started, we thought they were just a famous brigade of the *Alpini Corps*, but we discovered that they were what we would now consider 'special forces,' with their own unique equipment and uniform items. This made it even harder to find specific gear," Anthony said. "Everyone quickly recognizes the American, German, Japanese or Russian reenactors, but the Italians wore very unique and vibrant uniforms, featuring items such as feathers on their hats and helmets, capes, cleated boots for mountainous terrain, etc."



Anthony Labda (left) and Bob Leininger in front of the unit flag at World War II Days. Note their Alpini hats.

Soldiers were equipped with finest, almost luxurious, gear with each issued two pairs of special boots. Of all their special

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End of a bakery era



Customers make selections on the last day Roma Bakery was open.
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'I leave a piece of my heart in Rockford'

Exchange students from Ferentino enjoy their American experience



Four exchange students from Ferentino enjoy the Taste of Italy event

By Mike Doyle

They ate, they sang, they danced. And that was just one afternoon of the eight-day visit to Rockford by 15 high school students from Ferentino, Italy, as part of the

Rockford Italian Sister City Alliances' exchange program. On Sunday November 3, 2019, they met more than 200 people and sampled local Italian cuisine at RISCA's Taste of Italy fund-raiser at the Venetian Club.

"I'm very glad to have shared this experience with wonderful people," said Federica Paragallo, one of the exchange students. "I enjoyed everything. I wish that I will come back here to discover other things. I leave a piece of my heart in Rockford."

Federica stayed with the David and Michelle Vella family, one of nine Rockford-area families that opened their homes to students. The exchange program is part of Rockford's sister city program that began in 2006. In 2017, 11 Boylan Catholic High School students visited Ferentino. In 2016, 13 students from Ferentino came to Rockford.

"Hosting Federica from Ferentino was a wonderful experience for our family," Michelle Vella said. "We loved getting to know this young person, and it was so much fun to experience our city, culture, and way of life through her eyes. We had an early snow in October, which was great because they don't really get snow there, and she was so excited to see it. I was so happy we decided to host, most of all because of the impact I could see that the experience had on Federica. We all cried when she left. It was sad to see her go, but satisfying to know that she had such a meaningful time here."

The Italian students were accompanied by two of their teachers and each spent three days at a local high school, including Belvidere North, Boylan, Harlem, Hononegah and Keith Country Day. They also took part in classroom and lab experiences at the University of Illinois Rockford School of Medicine and Rock Valley College.

Federica noted that the school environment in Italy tends to be more intense, and that there is more creativity in subjects in American high schools. Also, that students exchange classes here. "But, despite this," she said, "I wouldn't change my type of school."

Their stay included a visit to the Burpee Museum of Natural History and extended beyond Rockford to Starved Rock State Park and Chicago, where a two-day trip included the Museum of Science and Industry, the United Center, Willis Tower and a walking food tour on an unseasonably cold autumn day. And many of Rockford's establishments made sure no one left hungry.

Among the local businesses that offered free or discounted fares were JMK Nippon, Cucina di Rosa, Woodfire Pizza and Stone Eagle. They also shopped at Crimson Ridge, had a welcome dinner at Franchesco's and typical American teenager fare at the St. Ambrogio Club, which provided a lunch of hamburgers, hot dogs, French fries and onion rings, as well as a farewell dinner. The dinner followed Mass at St. Anthony of Padua Church, where the students were recognized.

At the Taste of Italy, Italian cuisine from pasta to pizza to meatballs was provided by Bravo, Ciao Bella, Cucina di Rosa, Franchesco's, Gerry's Pizza, Napoli's, Roma Bakery, Lombardi Club, St. Ambrogio Club and Venetian Club. Desserts included

cookies by Jo Ginestra and cakes by Nothing Bundt Cakes.

Federica's immersion into American food resulted in two new tastes. "My best food discovery here is the sandwich with peanut butter and jelly, and, also Goldfish



Federica Paragallo (lower right) and her host family Michelle and Dave Vella (top row) and their daughter Grace (lower left). More photos on page 15.

crackers," she said.

In return, she cooked one of her family's favorite dishes from Ferentino – *Bucatini All'Amatriciana*. (See Page 13 for a recipe).

Her first impression of our country was that "everything was bigger," she said. "Then I met the people and I had the opportunity to know them well. And I immediately noticed that most people here are really kind and friendly."

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You can see the steam from the meatballs provided by Bravo at Taste of Italy



Roma Bakery, the last of its kind in South Rockford, closes

By Mike Doyle

When Roma Bakery closed its doors for the last time on Tuesday, December 31, 2019, it marked the end of an era. Roma was the last remaining Italian bakery in South Rockford, ending more than 100 years of succulent warm bread, sweet rolls and savory pizza.

"When people find you're closing, and they have memories, it's sad because they have been coming here for generations," co-owner Marilyn Bowler said in the *Rockford Register Star* that declining business and the desire to retire led to the closing. "It's kind of become a family tradition."

Roma Bakery was located on Marchesano Drive and had previously been located at 810 West Street. There were at least three Italian bakeries in South Rockford in the mid-20th century – Piemonte, Roma and Sunny Boy. Now there are none. "It's devastating," said Polly Matranga Happach of Bella Luna Bakery. "But I understand it. You've got to sell a lot of bread."



Luigi Dodaro, founder of Piemonte Bakery, bakes bread for St. Joseph's Day in 1984. He is 100 years old in this photo.

Research indicates that Piemonte was the first Italian-owned bakery. Begun by Luigi Dodaro, who had opened bakeries in Canada and Chicago before starting Piemonte Bakery in Rockford in 1914. It operated at the same location, 1122 Rock Street, until it closed a few years ago after 100 years of operation. Generations of Italian-Americans recall late night stops at Piemonte to buy fresh bread and sweets.

During the 1960s, Piemonte would deliver hot, fresh bread to small grocery stores late Sunday afternoon. Among those were Ferri's in South Rockford and, on the east side, Broadway Certified, which would sell thick slices of hot, baked ham to go with the bread.

For years, Piemonte was the only bakery in South Rockford, until the Capitol Bakery opened nearby at 1126 South Main Street in the late 1920s. It was run by Charles Labunski, who later moved the operation to a building located in the rear of 411 Lincoln Avenue. Labunski's Bakery was a "must stop" after Sunday morning Mass at St. Anthony or nearby St. Peter and Paul's churches, where peanut rolls and snowballs were among the top sellers. In time, Poska Bakery moved into the location.



Polly Matranga Happach (right) and Lorie Parker-Weinrich in their downtown bakery Bella Luna. They are holding a photo of Polly's father, Cosmo, on the right and two of his Rockford buddies from World War II

By the late 1940s, Joe and Rose Potenziani opened Sunny Boy Bakery at the corner of Montague and Winnebago streets. Others took over ownership until the Perrecone family bought it and moved the bakery to East State Street. Sunny Boy was known for its Italian twist bread, pizza squares, and small loaves of bread covered in sesame seeds.

"We bought it from the Rinaldo family," said Paul Perrecone. "They stayed with us for quite some time to show us the ropes."

Paul recalled delivering leftover bread to the Poor Clare Convent on South Main Street. He also remembers how the walls were stacked with pizza boxes and bread at Christmastime. Sunny Boy baked bread for many local Italian restaurants from the early to the late 1980s.

While LaChiquita grocery store on the 1100 block of South Main Street has a bakery, the last remaining bakery with Italian ties is Bella Luna, run by Polly Matranga Happach and Lorie Parker-Weinrich. It is located in downtown Rockford at 308 West State Street. Polly said small bakeries are forced to juggle many workplace issues. "It's exhausting," she said. "You have long hours, finding employees and people are more demanding than they were years ago. They want it cheaper. Italian bread hasn't changed; but expectations have."

Although consumers can find Italian bread, cookies and other bakery items in many stores and from home bakers, Bella Luna is the last brick-and-mortar Italian bakery in town. "This is it," she said. "It makes me feel proud but intimidated to know that."

Polly and Lorie started Bella Luna at City Market six years ago before moving into the old Stewart Square Building. With Polly's Italian heritage and Lorie's Norwegian and Swedish background, they bill their place as a "Unique Blend of Culture." You can find Scandinavian items like cardamom rolls, limpa rye and pepparkraker, as well as Italian cookies like chocolate, sesame

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Populists, environmentalists ... and sardines

By Rosaria Mercuri-Ford

If one were to scroll through some of the political commentary posted on the Italian social media, one would immediately notice some interesting terms referring to new political trends and factions: *nazionalisti*, *populisti*, *neo-fascisti*, *buonisti*, *scafisti*, *sovranisti*, etc. The Italian political lingo, in sync with the fluid social currents, has always been very colorful in defining the revolving political trends.

For the longest time, opposite factions on the political spectrum would insult one another either as *fascisti* or *comunisti*, whenever their ideas were just a bit off to the right, or to the left of those expressed by the main centrist parties, such as the old DC (*Democrazia Cristiana*) or the newer DP (*Partito Democratico*).

Later, new terms came about, such as *qualunquisti*, referring to the politically indifferent individuals; *arrivisti* describing the social climbers; *berlusconiani*, term reserved to those who embraced the entrepreneurial, and often controversial, policies of the four-time Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi (1995-2011). Then there was the turn of the *ambientalisti*, the Italian environmentalists, the *globalisti*, obviously referring to those in favor of globalization, even the *terrapiattisti*, the movement that believes in a flat earth.

In 2009 a new grass-roots movement, *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement), surfaced on the political arena. The *Stelle* members, also known as *pentastellati*, vowed to change politics as simple citizens, not as a political party. Also known as *grillini*, after the founder of the movement, Beppe Grillo, the *pentastellati* advocated direct democracy and sustainability. The movement did, eventually, become a party and recently, from 2018 to 2019, governed with the right wing party, *La Lega* (The League), led by Matteo Salvini. The *Lega* has become a national party in the last decade, coming from the old *Lega del Nord*, the Northern League for the Independence of Padania, the northern and richer regions area.

The populist coalition of *La Lega* and *5 Stelle* did not last, and *5 Stelle* politicians are now governing with the center party, DP. The *leghisti*, however, who oppose the new coalition and are constantly preaching, "Italians, first!", have significantly grown in numbers at the last regional elections. In the midst of the arena are the *piddisti*, members of the centrist PD party that has seen its numbers shrink in the last 15 years. They are being accused by right wing parties and by the *leghisti*, also known as *salviniani*, of being too soft with the migrants who have been flocking to Italy. Hence the negative name *buonisti*, to describe all those Italians considered to be too naively tolerant of the migration phenomenon. The *salviniani*, instead, have always wanted to close all ports and deport most of the immigrants; not only, but they also caution against being too submissive to the demands of the European Union.

And, just when everything seemed to be another major impasse, a new grass-roots movement started peacefully

demonstrating in very large numbers, demanding a renewed civil discourse, political accountability and serious commitment on the part of all politicians. Mostly educated millennials, they call themselves *Sardine* and just like sardines they have packed the squares of the largest Italian cities, the last demonstration taking place on December 14, 2019, in the large Piazza San Giovanni in Rome. It is hard to tell where this movement is headed, but one thing is certain: the *sardine* oppose the divisive and racist rhetoric of Matteo Salvini and of the other right wing parties.

Editor's notebook

The *Pappagallo* welcomes a new byline starting with the Spring 2020 issue. Paul Arco, a graduate of West High School, Rock Valley College and Marquette University, is a well-known local writer and public relations specialist as well as one of the newest members of the GRIAA board. He continues a series on local persons who excel in the arts. Once again Rosaria Mercuri-Ford writes on the fascinating changes in the Italian language. And Joan Schmelzle returns as she writes about her favorite country. Joan's topic is Venice, but she professes a love for Rome, which she first visited in 1961. The cover artwork is another creation of Boylan Catholic High School senior Morgan Anderson.

The editors encourage readers to consider completing a nomination for GRIAA's Hall of Fame and Special Recognition awards. The nomination form can be found on Page 5 and additional information on Page 6. The awards are announced in the Fall issue of the *Pappagallo* and the recipients are honored at the annual Hall of Fame dinner in October.

A few copies of the second edition of the *Immigration Histories of Rockford Italian Families* are available at \$20 a copy. To purchase one, contact Frank Perrecone at Suite 202, 321 West State Street, Rockford, Illinois, 61101, frankaperrecone@aol.com or (815) 962-2700. Finally, the editors want to thank Stephanie Spataro Mares of Greendale, Wisconsin, for her donation to the *Pappagallo*.

Your editors,

Mike Doyle, editor, Frank Perrecone, assistant editor

Roma Bakery ... Continued from Page 3

and fig (*cucciadati*).

"We sell them memories," said Polly, who recipes come from her family. "I have people who eat my chocolate cookies. They sit at the table and cry. They say, 'These taste exactly like my nana's'," she said. Historically, there also have been Italian bakeries in different parts of Rockford. For a while, Roma Bakery had stores on North Main Street in Rockford and North Second Street in Loves Park. And Stella Bakery operated for years on 11th Street in Southeast Rockford





Honoring ... *Continued from Page 1*

equipment, the *Cervino* was best known for their boots. The *Alpini* of the unit were the first to be issued boots with the new Vibram soles. Developed by Vitale Bramani and produced by Pirelli in 1937, mountaineering boots fitted with Vibram soles were significantly superior to the existing climbing-ski boots in use by all armies. When the battalion was reformed in 1940, the commander, an experienced climber-skier, insisted that the unit's skis boots be rebuilt with Vibram soles.

Re-enactors typically educate visitors about the armies they represent, and Anthony said he enjoys informing them about other brands that were specifically designed for use by the Italian army. That includes Fiat, which made fighters, bombers, trucks and tanks; Panerai watches, made for special forces divers (and made famous by Sylvester Stallone, who has worn them in several films); and Beretta, which made pistols and submachine guns. "These are all recognizable company names that had a great (reputation)," he said.

Many who have visited different parts of Italy may have noticed war memorials in the town squares of cities large and small. Invariably, these monuments are for those lost in World War I. Italy's reputation for military success, which started with the Romans, was seemingly harmed during World War II. *Monte Cervino* may have fought on the losing side, but it distinguished itself as a unit.

Formed as a mountain unit in northern Italy in November 1915 as part of the Triple Entente, *Monte Cervino* saw most of its action east of the Alps against Austria of the Triple Powers. The unit was dissolved in 1919 but was reformed in 1940 as a skiers' battalion, seeing early action along the Albanian border and in Greece after the German invasion. Its successful operations in Greece in 1941 resulted in the battalion being awarded Italy's second highest military honor – the Silver Medal of Military Valor. It was dissolved for a time, but was reformed and sent to fight Russia on the Eastern front, where it was nearly annihilated at the Battle of Nikolayevka.

"They were almost destroyed in Russia," Bob said. "The whole time they were in Russia fighting, they lost 114 men – 72 in battle, seven to disease and 35 were captured," Anthony said. "There were 224 survivors."

Survivors returned to Italy in 1943, where they were awarded the Gold Medal of Military Valor. Reformed for a third time, the *Monte Cervino* was in France when, in September 1943, the Italian government surrendered. The battalion was disbanded after the Italian government capitulated. Some of the men fought their way back to Italy, but most were surrounded by German forces and forced to surrender, thus ending the World War II history of *Monte Cervino*.

Anthony is aware that the number of World War II monuments in Italy is small. "But, as far as I understand, there have been talks recently about creating World War II monuments," he said. "All were good fighters, including those in the military

today."

The Cold War prompted the unit to resurface once again. Five platoons of *Alpini* paratroopers were merged in 1964 into the *Alpini* Paratroopers Company. In January 1990, the company was renamed the *Monte Cervino* and became the core of the new *battaglione paracadutisti* Alpine *Monte Cervino*. Its troopers have been sent to Bosnia, Mozambique and Afghanistan, serving as the elite of the *Esercito Italiano*. It's a military legacy of which all Italian-Americans should be proud.

Criteria for Hall of Fame nominations

The Greater Rockford Italian American Association annually honors men and women who have shown a tremendous amount of dedication and leadership. Inductees are nominated by community members and selected by the Hall of Fame and Special Recognition Committee. Nominees should be persons of Italian heritage who, in their exemplary lives, have made significant contributions to the community in and through the arts, sciences, government, business, industry, education, and volunteer, civic, and philanthropic activities or any other appropriate category. Such contributions should reflect a notable community impact and the highest standards and ideals. The primary difference between Hall of Fame and Special Recognition consideration is described below:

Hall of Fame criteria – The nominee should have made a significant overall impact to the Italian-American community.

Special Recognition criteria – The impact of the nominee in the Italian-American community is significant but more specialized, such as in athletics or the arts.

The nomination form can be found on Page 5. It is not necessary to indicate on the nomination form which category you are nominating the individual or group for. The committee will make that determination on the information provided.

Scholarship opportunities

Scholarships are available for students of Italian-American descent, including:

Greater Rockford Italian American Association

Through this committee, scholarships are presented annually to area Italian American families to defray the cost of a private or parochial education. Through the 2019 Festa Italiana, \$730,000 in scholarships has been presented.

Visit www.griaa.org, then onto the Scholarship Committee, chaired by Ben Todaro and Frank Valentine. Scholarship information can be viewed and printed by clicking on Application Form.

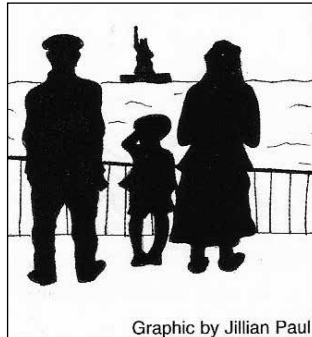


Immigration discrimination hardly a new issue

Italy among nations unable to send masses to U.S. in 20th century

By Frank Perrecone

The booming era of Italian immigration to the United States was from about 1890 to 1924. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, during those years, more than four million Italians immigrated into the U.S. They arrived by ship, primarily at ports in New York and New Orleans.



Graphic by Jillian Paul

It was very common for husbands to arrive first and earn enough money for their families to join them. As families became settled, extended family members and friends from their cities and villages made the crossing. Rockford is a microcosm of this immigration pattern. Many Italians from Ferentino, Italy, and Sambuca, Sicily, arrived in the U.S. during this boom era and settled in Rockford.

Italians were still arriving at U.S. ports after the end of WWI, though the war had slowed immigration substantially. After the war, between 1920 to 1924 alone, more than 450,000 Italian immigrants arrived in America. However, in 1925, immigration dwindled to only 6,203.

But why did this great era end? Nothing substantially changed for Italians by the end of 1924. Many, especially in the South, were still living in poverty when the American economy was booming during the Roaring 1920s. Italian immigrants were working in industry or starting businesses while many became community leaders and holders of elective office. Although Italian-Americans were subject to various forms of discrimination, they were establishing themselves into the fabric of the U.S. population.

The reason for the change was the Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act. The law established immigration quotas for Italians and other nationalities, and outright excluded immigration from Japan and other Asian countries. The purpose of the law, according to historians, was to preserve the ideal balance of the U.S. population's homogeneity.

The impact of the law was especially punitive to the many Italian hopefuls who wanted to join family members and friends in U.S. cities that had established large conclaves of Italian immigrants, such as New York, New Orleans, Boston and Chicago, down to smaller conclaves found in cities the size of Rockford.

The immigration quota was 2% which was applied to the nationality origins of each immigrant and natural born citizen based on the 1890 census, which favored countries such as Great Britain, Germany and Ireland because great numbers of persons of those nationalities lived in the U.S. then. No doubt,

since the purpose of the law was to preserve an "ideal" U.S. population mix and Italians were considered for immigration purposes as "undesirables," the 1890 census was used to exclude from quota calculations the millions of Italian immigrants and their offspring born in the U.S., which data would have been available in the 1920 census.

It appears that as far back as 1911, a congressional joint commission concluded that immigration from southern and eastern Europe, China, Korea and Japan presented a serious threat to American culture and society and, therefore, should be limited or restricted. Included in this mix were Italians. Dubious "science" had led to the belief that established and accepted U.S. races, nationalities and cultures were in danger of being overrun by inferior ones, which included Italians. This mistaken belief, in part, explains the reason federal leaders established discriminatory immigration laws in the 1920s.

Eventually, discriminatory quotas and restrictions based on national origins were ended in the 1960s, giving way to this country's second wave of Italian immigration. In Rockford alone, many families emigrated from Italy and planted roots here then. I went to St. Anthony Grade School with some of these young immigrants. In order to compensate for the language barrier, the Franciscan sisters would place these students two grade levels below their grade attained in Italy.

I believe there is a lesson today that can be learned from the discriminatory restrictions placed on Italian immigration. One era's group of nationalities targeted as "undesirables" is a future era's leaders, elected officials, professionals and model citizens. Today's immigration and asylum crisis will be resolved fairly or unfairly, depending on your point of view. But what is almost certain, those currently being targeted or facing discrimination, if legally allowed into our country under existing law, will in the future, just like Italian-Americans, assimilate and be part of the fabric of the U.S. population.

2020 Spring, summer festivals in Italy

March (Marzo)

19 – St. Joseph's Day (celebrated as Father's Day in Italy)

29 – Rome Marathon

April (Aprile)

19-22 – *Vinitaly* Wine Festival, Verona

May (Maggio)

15-17 – *Infiorata* (flower festival), Noto, Sicily

July (Luglio)

24-26 – Unicorn Festival, Vinci

August (Agosto)

16 – Second *Palio* race in Siena



One day not nearly enough to appreciate Venice

By Joan Schmelzle

Venice! One of my favorite cities with so much to see and to enjoy, I highly recommend a visit, please don't be a "day tripper!" Venice suffers from too many. And, as a friend told me recently, when she spent only one day there, she was unimpressed. A longer stay definitely changed her mind,

Yes, there are the crowds, and there is the high water you've read about and seen on TV. Travel in the late fall can avoid most of the crowds, and, though more possible in fall, most spells of "*aqua alta*" are manageable. Venice is prepared with raised walkways and is working toward solving the problems of last fall with "Moses," the man-made barricade to stop flooding. It was recently deemed OK, but work is progressing to make it better.

Of course, a visitor will want to see *Basilica San Marco* and the Doge's Palace. The basilica features marvelous mosaics, chapels, and also two sights which cost extra but are well worth it. The *Pal d' Oro* is a 10th century altar piece with gold, enamels, and precious stones. In the museum, you can view the original bronze horses stolen from Constantinople, then from Venice by Napoleon, and now, back in Venice where copies greet visitors from a balcony above the main entrance.

Next door is the *Doge's Palace*, where the Venetian ruler lived and where his council met. The building, both outside and inside, is full of magnificent art and architecture. The Secret Itinerary of the palace is fun and must be reserved ahead. However, it leaves out much that should be seen. So, before or after the tour, be sure to wander on your own with information from the entrance office or on another tour.

Two other sights I would recommend in Piazza San Marco are the Clock Tower and Florians, a top café. The most interesting tour I took in Venice was the inner workings and top of the Clock Tower. You can find information on this by going online to visitmue.it where you can click on English and scroll down to the Tower. Florians is expensive, especially sitting outside in nice weather. However, I don't regret the 12 euro I spent sitting inside with a work of art - *cioccolato calda*. Be sure to use sugar as well as the mound of whipped cream because the hot chocolate will not be sweetened.

Do not miss the *Accademia*, a huge collection of Venetian art covering five centuries. Whether wandering on your own with information provided by the gallery or on a tour, enjoy the beauty and variety. Not far away, the Foundation Peggy Guggenheim offers paintings and sculptures for those who enjoy modern art.

A favorite church I recommend for a visit is the *Frari*, a large

church with art work by Titian, Bellini, Donatello, and others. The monks' choir seats are works of carving art, and the church also contains tombs and monuments of famous Venetians.

The *Frari* is one of an association of 17 churches called Chorus, formed to secure the upkeep of the art in the churches.

There is a fee for visiting, but a reasonably priced ticket allows entry into all Chorus churches. And, yes, I did visit all of them last time I was there. Recalling some of the many artists featured, I agree with the association's description, "The greatest museum in Venice."

Very near the *Frari* is the *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, one of several major guild sites, and one I would not miss on a return to Venice. Dedicated to St. Roch and formed to help the sick, the *scuola* features many artists, but it was chiefly decorated with paintings by Tintoretto, including the Crucifixion which covers an entire wall.

One last favorite I can't leave out is the beautiful Rialto Bridge, one of only three to cross the Grand Canal, and the market it leads to. Besides beautiful displays of fruits and vegetables, you will find meats and cheese and a huge variety of seafood so fresh some are still wiggling.

More than the beauty and variety of Venice needs to be considered before a visit. While walking is a great way to see the city, there are times you will want to take the *vaporetto* water buses. Consider purchase of a Venice Pass for the time you are there so you can hop on and off whenever you want. The pass can also cover entrance to some sights. Visit veneziaunica.it, click for English and read the information to decide and purchase the pass you want. I would recommend choosing a hotel close to one of the docks for the *vaporetto*.

If interested in city guided visits such as a tour of the Grand Canal, there are many companies. I would recommend two that I have used very happily and both have plenty of Venice tours: Walks of Italy and Context Travel. Use www.walksofitaly.com and scroll to Venice. For Context use www.contexttravel.com/tours If you have trouble with the latter as I did on my computer, Google found Context Travel website.

(A GoFundMe page has been set up by Venezia Autentica to help local Venetian businesses recover from recent flooding).



Raised wooden walkways allow Venetians and visitors to get around during times of high water.



The author in front of Campanile di San Marco, Venice's famous bell tower



Art is all in this family

Lisa & Libbie Frost teamed to paint pillars under downtown bridge

By Paul Anthony Arco

It didn't take long for artist Lisa (Trapani) Frost to realize that she had a budding artist on her hands — her daughter, Libbie.

"Whenever I had the art supplies out for the kids, Libbie's work was always elaborate," said Lisa, owner of The Lisa Frost Studio, who is known for her murals, portraits, clothing design and even a line of products, including dishes, she developed that were bought and sold all over the world through a national gift company. "At a young age, she was telling stories through her art." In middle school, Libbie started baking cupcakes and selling them, calling her mini-business "Libbie Frosting."

Libbie's breakthrough came last year when the Frost family was traveling cross country on a college tour. A Boylan High School graduate, Libbie noticed many murals along the way. "We need murals in Rockford," she told her mom. When they returned home, Libbie got busy, writing a proposal, getting permission from the city, and starting a GoFundMe page to raise money for supplies.

She spent two weeks on her mural, called "Rockford" which is located on the northeast end of the State Street Bridge, near the Joe Marino Memorial Park and visible to the thousands of visitors to city market. "I want people to look at it and feel a sense of pride for Rockford," Libbie said. "What interests me most about art is its power to be new. Art instills within people new thoughts and feelings."

The mural caught the eye of the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, which invited Libbie and Lisa to take part in the city-wide CRE8IV: Transformational Art Festival.

The Frosts teamed up to paint the 42 pillars under the Jefferson Street Bridge. The pillars range from one to four stories high and each one had 250 square feet of painting on four sides. Not to mention the location is divided by a busy street and railroad track.

"I thought 'how are we going to get this done,'" said Lisa, who enlisted help from former Boylan students and friends from a painters' union. They made scale models in their basement that they used as their guide and created a design that included bold shapes and colors. "Don't be afraid to do something big," Libbie

told her mom.

"It's was awesome," Lisa said. "What I love about working with Libbie is she has such a good eye. I trust her judgment."

The feeling is mutual. "What makes our relationship so awesome is our ability to bounce ideas back and forth so seamlessly," Libbie said. "We critique each other without taking any offense. We push our ideas further, and most importantly, push each other to turn our ideas into a reality."

Today, Libbie is a freshman at University of Notre Dame, where she is studying business and industrial design. "I want to create innovative products and experiences that improve the lives for people who need it the most," she said. "Design allows me to empathize with the users and help people on a large scale."

In college, Libbie is working on developing a small business, Mindful Manis. It is a nontraditional, pop-up manicure experience for college campuses. "We offer healthy nail treatments and a healthy mental break to get away from stress," she said. "We want to give our clients an experience where they can relax, feel inspired, and walk away feeling more confident."

"I am so grateful that I was exposed to creative resources at an early age," she added. "Having an art studio in my basement filled with paints and canvases along with having a mom who allowed me to dip my hands in the paint definitely allowed my imagination to grow. In addition, my art teachers such as Mrs. Haas at Holy Family and Mrs. Pelley, Ms. Strominger, and Mrs. Minardi at Boylan played a very important role in fostering my creative interest."



Libbie Frost in downtown Rockford near one of her painted bridge pillars



Lisa Frost amid the pillars she and her daughter Libbie painted under the Jefferson Street bridge.



'A Voice That Loves You'

Enrico Caruso's role in giving the world gift of Italian music

By Jimmy Sartino

"A voice that loves you," is how Rosa Ponselle, the American soprano who made her operatic debut opposite Caruso, said in description of Enrico Caruso. Like many of our favorite stories, Caruso's began in Naples, Italy, in 1873. He was born into the same type of poverty that led to the emigration of masses of Italians throughout the world. He lived from 1873-1921, almost simultaneous with that mass immigration (1880-1920).



Enrico Caruso. "Who sent you to me, God?" Puccini said after hearing his voice.

As you can imagine, Caruso's voice was a voice of comfort, of love, to those Italians as they settled, often uncomfortably, into their new countries and became his biggest fans. Opera was ferociously popular throughout Europe in the 1800s as an expression of the romantic ideas of nationalism followed by the popularity of *Canzone Napoletana* music. Both genres of music required passion, volume, and melodrama. Caruso was just the man.

Opera legend has it that when Caruso auditioned for Giacomo Puccini in June of 1897, Puccini's response was, "Who sent you to me, God?" The timing of Caruso's life and his Neapolitan

talent certainly appeared like a miracle. He brought a mastery and joy for both opera and *Canzone Napoletana* music to the world at a time period that saw three remarkable things: a mass migration of Italians throughout the world, the United States as a new influence in worldwide culture, and the recording of music for use on record players.

By 1902 Caruso had already estab-



Enrico Caruso in costume as the clown Pagliacci, one of his most famous portrayals.

lished himself as a rising opera star, but something was about to cross his path that would make his name eternal. A man named

Fred Gaisberg of the Gramophone & Typewriter Co. was looking for opera talent to record and produce. Other opera tenors had laughed at him, but Caruso took the opportunity. Gaisberg signed him to sing ten songs and arias, all to be recorded in one session, for a fee of 100 English pounds. (You can find these recordings easily on the internet today).

To an opera purist, they would be able to recognize the mistakes made by Caruso during these recordings, but it didn't matter as sales of those ten recordings eventually totaled over \$2.5 million! Just as Yankee Stadium was once known as "the House that Ruth built," so Caruso had made the flat disc phonograph respectable, and the phonograph made him famous. Gaisberg's company would come to be better known as RCA Victor. RCA yielded royalties of \$1,825,000 during his lifetime, and his family continues to collect royalties to this day.

Since most people reading this are probably Italian Americans, it is worth knowing that Caruso's first sighting of New York Harbor was aboard the *S.S. Sardegna* on November 11, 1903. It was primarily at the Metropolitan Opera House that he became synonymous with the role of *Pagliacci* in Leoncavallo's opera *Pagliacci*.

His performance of '*Vesti la Giubba*,' the clown *Pagliacci*'s lament, was virtually Caruso's signature. In fact, Caruso had no qualms walking three blocks from his Times Square hotel all the way to the Met in full clown costume and being followed by adoring crowds.



Needless to say, Italian-Americans loved him. His success was an encouragement and a source of pride in the midst of their hardships.

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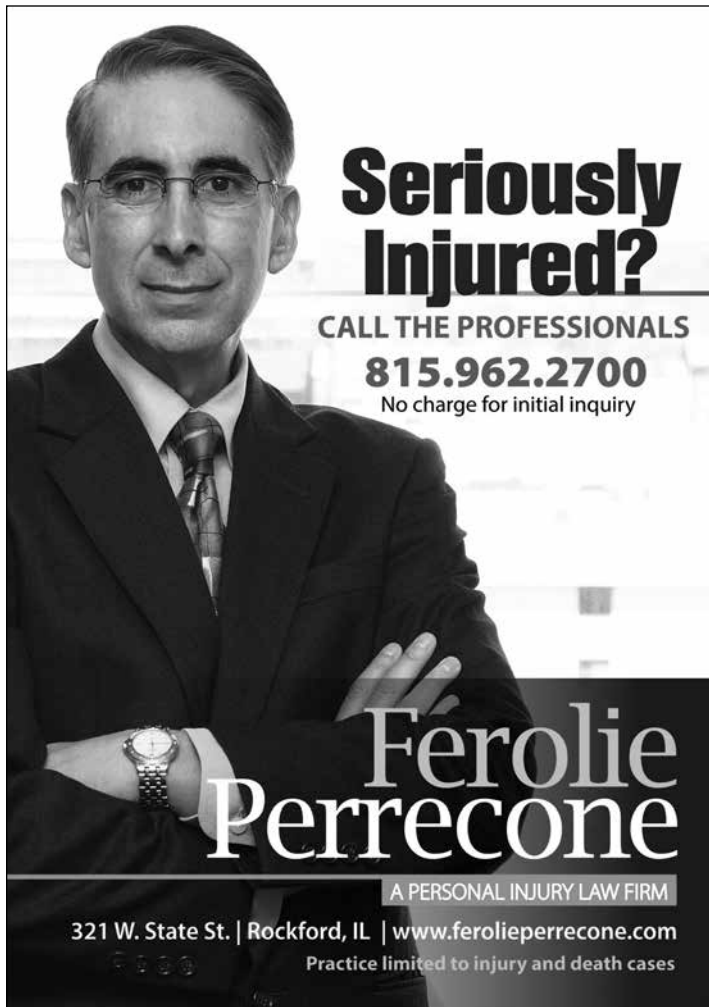
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The Twisted History of Pasta

By Mike Doyle

According to the legend we grew up with, Marco Polo “discovered” pasta on one of his remarkable journeys to China in the thirteenth century. (A recent report indicated reference to noodles in China 4,000 years ago, but who is counting?) While Marco Polo made reference to noodles upon returning in 1271, historical evidence shows that ancient inhabitants of what today is Italy eating pasta long before that. For example:

- The ancient Etruscans made pasta by grinding several cereals and grains with water, then blending and cooking them into a nutritious food product.
- When the Greeks founded Naples, they adapted a local dish, which was made from barley flour pasta, and water then dried in the sun. They called it “*macaria*.”
- In the third century before the Common Era, the Roman Cicero speaks about his passion for “*laganum*,” or lasagna, made from long strips of wheat flour. Also, at the time, Romans invented a tool to make lasagna for pasta (and created the first pasta machine). Most of the wheat used by Romans was grown in Sicily, which had the benefit of rich soil and climate. In fact, Sicily was known as ancient Rome’s granary or breadbasket.
- The word *macaroni* appears in the writings of Romans from the first century. Platina, curator of the Vatican library, wrote in the twelfth century that macaroni and cheese was a legacy from the kitchens of Genoa and Naples.
- Lasagna appears in a thirteenth century book called “The Cooking Pan” and was eaten as pasta strips in enriched broth, as well as another book from that century, “Of the Culinary Art,” in which a recipe shows how to make it.

Pastas various forms and types evolved over the years and became a staple in the diet of poor Italians for its nutritional value and low cost. In 1740, Paolo Adami was granted a license to open the first pasta factory. In the 1840s in Amalfi, a process was developed where a stone mill separated the semolina from the bran. Also, during the nineteenth century, refined cooking of pasta began to appear from the kitchens of nobles. At the same time, eating pasta became common in all levels of society, and offering it to guests became acceptable.

Until then, pasta was always eaten with the hands. But its wide appeal and addition of sauces showed that was no longer adequate. As a result, the fork became the utensil best suited for eating. The traditional preparation to season it with tomato sauce and olive oil was enhanced as wives, chefs and gourmets started



Italian children: “Lazzaroni Eating Pasta,” or the poorest of the poor of Naples eating pasta by hand. Source: Wikimedia.

[commons.com](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lazzaroni_Eating_Pasta.jpg)

adding typical Italian products, such as mozzarella and Parmesan cheese, ham, and other cheese, meats and fish. At the start of the twentieth century, pasta was consolidated as a main ingredient of Italian cuisine.

The last technological development occurred in 1914, when the artificial drying process allowed pasta to be packaged and available to all regions of Italy. The led to the export of pasta to the United States and the rest is history.

Homemade pasta

While it is perfectly acceptable to open a package of spaghetti, there is nothing that compares to the taste of homemade pasta. This is my recipe, and its roots are from my mother’s kitchen. She would roll the sheets of pasta by hand, which is something I have never mastered. I use a pasta machine, which is well used in our kitchen.

- 3 eggs
- 2 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon water
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

Pour the flour into a mixing bowl (or table or counter top) and make a well in the center. Break the 3 eggs into the well. Add salt, water and olive oil. Use a fork to slowly mix the flour and the liquid until well blended. If mixture is too wet, add a little flour. If too dry, add a little water. Spread a light coating of flour on a table or counter top and place the mixture onto it. Firmly knead the dough and continue until the dough ball is consistent in color and texture. Form the dough into a mound shape and cover with a damp towel. (You can also wrap it in clear wrap). It is important for the dough to rest for at least 10 to 15 minutes to allow the ingredients to blend.

Follow the instructions on your pasta machine for set up. It needs to be firmly secured to a table or counter top surface. Once rested, cut off a small piece, the size of a small fist. Settings vary, but find the widest setting on the regulator knob. Lightly dust your work space with flower. Put the crank handle into the roller drive hole and put the dough into the roller slot. As you crank the handle, feed the dough into the rollers. It will flatten as you crank, then fold it in half and roll again. Repeat the process of dusting, rolling and folding as you gradually reduce the width of the roller. The pasta will get longer as you go on. When you have reached the desired thickness, which is No. 1 on my machine, lay the strip on an adjacent surface that is floured or draped with a clean white cloth or sheet. Repeat the process and allow the pasta sheets to dry slightly, about 10 minutes.

Next, attach the cutting head to the machine if not already done. Move the crank handle from the drive hole into the desired cutting head. (Mine has thin noodles or vermicelli, my preference). Cut a sheet of pasta that can be easily handled. Then, lightly floured, carefully start the dough in the cutter as you turn

Continued on Page 13



the handle slowly. As the cut noodles exit the machine, continue to carefully guide the dough into the machine. Lay the freshly cut noodles onto the adjacent surface or allow to dry there or on a rack before cooking. Cook to desired texture and top with sauce.

Source: LaRosa Family recipe

Tomato Sauce (*Sugo*)

I have been blessed by having a Sicilian mother and having married into a Sicilian family. This sauce recipe is the one Nora's mother Carm Caruana Cipolla made every Sunday for decades. We have not made any changes and also regularly double or triple the recipe, which we normally make on Saturday for Sunday dinner. (There are a lot of sauces on grocery shelves. We didn't use any until we tried Rao's Homemade Sauce. It's not from your kitchen - and it's not cheap - but it is an excellent alternative to real homemade).

28-ounce can crushed tomatoes with tomato puree
1 pound can tomato sauce
6-ounce can tomato paste
1 garlic clove, minced
1 can water (use crushed tomatoes can)
¼ teaspoon baking powder

In a large pot, add can crushed tomatoes, then refill can with water and add. Add tomato sauce, tomato paste, garlic and baking soda. Stir and simmer over low to medium heat for 1-2 hours, stirring often. The taste of this sauce is enhanced with meat. Our tradition is to make meatballs when we make the sauce. We also add short ribs, sausage and often chicken breasts, then refrigerate the mixture overnight.

Source: Cipolla Family recipe

Top Ten Italian Dishes

1. *Pasta al Pomodoro* – The simplest of sauces, pasta with olive oil, tomato sauce and basil
2. Pizza
3. *Pasta all'Amatriciana* – *Bucatini* in a sauce with pork or veal cheek. (Recipe below)
4. *Pasta alla Carbonara* – Pasta with *pancetta* (or bacon) and egg
5. *Pasta alla Genovese* – A rich, onion-based pasta made with beef
6. Lasagna and Cannelloni
7. *Tiramisu* (What, not *Cannoli*?)
8. *Risotto al Funghi Porcini* – Risotto made with *Porcini* mushrooms
9. *Zuppa di Pesci* – Soup with a selection of seafood from firm fish to squid, mussels, shrimp and clams
10. *Cotole alla Milanese* – A Northern Italian version of *Pasta con Sarde* (St. Joseph Pasta). Recipe found on page 14.

Source: TasteAtlas.com

Bucatini all'Amatriciana

Here is Federica Paragallo's description of *Bucatini all'Amatriciana* that she prepared for her host family. "You need *Bucatini*, the cheek of a pig (*guanciale*), tomato sauce, *Pecorino* cheese, onions and oil," she said. After sautéing the onions in oil, add the

guanciale "and let it become golden. At this point you can put in the sauce and let it cook." Then boil water in a pot and add the pasta. "It must not be completely cooked because the cooking of the pasta has to be finished in the sauce after you have drained the pasta. Then you add grated *Pecorino*," she said.

Here is another version, with portions of the recipe Federica Paragallo cooked for her host family in Rockford. It is named for the small town of Amatrice, located about an hour northeast of Rome.

1 pound *Bucatini*
4 ounces *guanciale* (or *pancetta*), sliced
½ cup freshly-grated *Pecorino Romano*, plus more for serving
¾ cup strained San Marzano tomatoes, simmered until reduced by half
¼ cup tomato paste
1 medium red onion, cut lengthwise into ¼-inch slices
1/3 cup coarsely-chopped fresh Italian parsley
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
2 teaspoons red pepper flakes
Salt, to taste

Bring 6 quarts of water to a boil in a large pot, and add 3 table-spoons salt. Meanwhile, combine the olive oil, *guanciale*, and onion in another large pot, and cook over medium-high heat, stirring frequently, until the *guanciale* is lightly browned and the onion is softened, about 7 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and red pepper flakes, and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in the tomato sauce, and remove from the heat. Drop the pasta into the boiling water, and cook two minutes less than the package instructions or just before *al dente*. Drain, reserving about ½ cup of the pasta water. Add the pasta and ¼ cup of the reserved pasta water to the *guanciale*, and toss over medium heat until the pasta is well coated (add a splash or two more of the reserved pasta water to loosen the sauce, if needed). Stir in the cheese and parsley. Serve immediately with additional grated *Pecorino Romano* on the side.

Source: Eataly.com

Thanu

4 dozen large eggs
2 pounds Rigatoni
2 pounds Ricotta cheese
2 pounds grated Asiago cheese
2 pounds grated Romano cheese
1 bunch fresh parsley, chopped
1 chicken, cooked and shredded

Beat eggs and put in large bowl. Add parsley to egg and gently mix. Cook the Rigatoni *al dente*. Drain and add to egg/parsley mixture. Layer as follows in greased eight-quart pan: Egg mixture, shredded chicken, Ricotta cheese, grated Romano cheese, grated Asiago cheese. Repeat until all is layered. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for first hour. Baste outer edge with chicken broth if it is starting to dry out. Continue to bake covered another 45 minutes, basting every 20 minutes, if needed. Uncover and bake another 30 minutes. Total baking time varies, but usually 2 ½ hours.

Source: Rosie Scalise Sheridan

Continued on Page 14



Event organizer Joan Gullo speaks to those who came to St. Anthony Church's St. Joseph Altar in 2019

Four St. Joseph Altars set for March

The Rockford area is blessed to have four St. Joseph Altars in March. The tradition that was brought to Rockford by Sicilian immigrants is carried on by these churches:

St. Anthony of Padua – The altar at St. Anthony is in the Parish Hall in the church's lower level at 1010 Ferguson Street. Blessing and viewing of the altar will take place on Saturday, March 14, following the 4:30 p.m. Mass. *Pasta con Sarde*, St. Joseph's pasta, bread and the other traditional offerings will be served from noon to 3 p.m., Sunday, March 15. There is no charge, however, free will offerings will be accepted.

St. Bridget Church – Viewing for the altar will be on Saturday, March 14, from 4 to 6 pm and altar open to the public. On Sunday, March 15, the altar will be blessed at 11:15 a.m., and traditional St. Joseph Day fare will be served from 11:30 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. St. Bridget is located at 600 Clifford Drive, Loves Park.

St. Bernadette Church – St. Bernadette's altar will be held from noon to 3 p.m. Sunday, March 22, in the Parish Center. The church is located at 2400 Bell Avenue.

St. Mary of Sycamore – The St. Joseph's Altar will be held Thursday, March 19, at in the memorial hall of St. Mary's Church, 322 Waterman Street in Sycamore. The altar will be blessed at 5 p.m. and dinner will be served from 5:15 to 7:30 p.m. There is no charge but donations will be accepted.

Amici Italiani troupes seek dancers

If you like to dance and have an interest in folk dancing and preserving our rich Italian heritage, the *Amici Italiani* Dance troupes are looking for you. The *Amici Italiani* Adult Dance troupe is open to anyone 14-years-old or older. For information, contact Rosie Scalise Sheridan at 815-977-4779 or Bea Ricotta at 815-520-1010.

The *Amici Italiani* Youth Dance Troupe is open to dancers between 6- and 13-years-old who are of Italian heritage. For information, contact Anna Mirabile at 815-871-7789 or Pauline Urso at 815-218-0063.

'I leave a piece ... *Continued from Page 2*

"I'm really thankful because I had a good time here, and have (gotten to know) a lot of beautiful people."

On March 13, three students and a chaperone from Harlem High School will travel to Ferentino and stay with host families. They will attend the high school in the mornings and visit sites in Ferentino and Rome in the afternoon. They will meet with Ferentino Mayor Antonio Pompeo and will present him with gifts from the Rockford and Machesney Park communities, then return on March 27.

For information, visit the group's website at www.ourrisca.org.

Museum adds to collection

Bernice Stassi, the daughter of Italian immigrant parents Joseph and Josephine Prinzivalle, recently recorded her family's immigration story for Midway Village Museum's Many Faces, One Community exhibit.

She shared stories of her mother making tomato sauce from scratch, and her grandmother shopping at Cacciatore's Meat Market. Growing up, she attended St. Mary's Church and school; once she was married with a family of her own, there were many activities to attend at St. Elizabeth's Center and St. Bernadette's School. The museum, 6799 Guilford Road, has accepted photos and documents from the Stassi family for their collection, as well as a 1950s graduation gown from St. Elizabeth Center's kindergarten program, and the food mill and strainer used by Josephine to make her homemade tomato sauce.

In other museum news, the Ethnic Heritage Museum is working on new displays and other events. Look for announcements, including the 2020 *Festa Italiana* magazine. The museum is located at 1129 S. Main Street.

St. Joseph's Pasta (*Pasta con Sarde*)

- 1 six-ounce can tomato paste
- 1 large (28- to 32-ounces) can tomato sauce
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Basil, several fresh sprigs
- 1 tomato paste can cold water
- 1 large onion, minced
- 2-3 gloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons cooking oil
- 1 can *Condimento per Pasta con Sarde*
- 1 cup fennel, chopped

Place chopped fennel in small saucepan with water to cover and cook until tender. In a large saucepan, cook garlic and onion in oil. Add tomato paste, water (1-2 cans), tomatoes with the juice. Stir and mix well. Add salt and pepper to taste, basil and can of condiment. Let simmer 1-2 hours until done to taste and desired thickness, stirring often. Cook spaghetti according to directions. Drain and top with sauce and toasted bread crumbs. Makes 8 to 10 servings.



GRIAA HOF dinner



The 2019 GRIAA Hall of Fame and Special Recognition Dinner was held on October 19 at the Venetian Club. Special Recognition went to Rockford native artist Frank Fiorello, who is pictured at left with his family.

In the photo at right, Frank Fiorello is with three of his buddies from South Rockford and West High School. From left, they are Gino LaRosa, Joe Vincere and Louis Gugliuzza



At left, GRIAA chairperson Karen Cantele hands Frank Fiorello his award.



Frank Fiorello and Frank Perrecone, both of whom honored at the Hall of Fame event, chat in the St. Anthony Church garden following Mass on October 20. At right, Frank Perrecone and his family at the HOF dinner.



In the photos below, Frank with GRIAA chairperson Karen Cantele and speaking about his award.



GRIAA's Mediterranean trip



Photos from GRIAA's Mediterranean Splendor trip in September 2019 with stops in Italy, France, Spain and Malta. In the photo above, Joe and Jan Licari, John and Deb Licari, Tony and Brenda Caruana and Dave and Margo Valenti enjoy lunch in Amalfi.

At right is the church in Amalfi.



Sister City's Taste of Italy



Above, the exchange students and their teachers from Ferentino and the RISCA leaders at the annual Taste of Italy, November 2, 2019.



Left, students, hosts and others enjoy the local Italian food at the Taste event

Greater Rockford Italian American Association – GRIAA

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Lisa Frost (left) and her daughter Libbie are painting pillars under the Jefferson Street Bridge. Story, more photos on Page 9.

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2020 Calendar Items

March

14 – St. Joseph Altar viewings, St. Anthony of Padua Church following 4:30 p.m. Mass, St. Bridget Church 4:00-6:00 p.m.

15 – St. Joseph Altars, St. Anthony of Padua Church, noon to 3 p.m.; St. Bridget Church 11:30 a.m.-1:45 p.m.

19 – St. Joseph Altar, St. Mary Church, Sycamore

22 – St. Joseph Altar, St. Bernadette Church, noon-3 p.m.

June

TBD– GRIAA Men's and Women's Golf Tournaments, Mauh-Nah-Tee-See Country Club (check GRIAA.org for information)

July-August

31, 1-2 – 42nd annual *Festa Italiana*, 4000 St. Francis Drive

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John & Kathy Falzone Benny & Kerry Falzone