

## New Books Celebrate Italian Culture

### Two women authors colorfully describe local traditions

*Laura Padron tells how to create St. Joseph Altars*

By Mike Doyle

One of the most endearing traditions Sicilian immigrants brought with them from the Old Country was the “*Tavola di San Giuseppe*,” the altar of food in honor of St. Joseph. The peak of interest in St. Joseph Altars occurred in the mid-1940s when South Rockford was predominantly populated by Italian-American families. One could walk through the neighborhoods, from altar to altar, and visit them in more than 20 homes, a tradition that lasted into the early 1960s.

According to the legend, Sicilians prayed to St. Joseph for relief from famine and drought. When the famine subsided, the grateful people honored him by preparing a feast of food in his honor on an altar in their homes. Not only does it honor him, it provides food for the needy. The beautiful tradition continued into the twentieth century when St. Joseph was asked to intercede in times of war and other troubles. By the end of the 1960s, fewer home altars were being created and, in the early 1970s, Fr. Thomas Zagorski of St. Anthony of Padua Church, located in the heart of South Rockford, asked Sam (Slu) and Mary Pirrello to organize and chair a parish altar. The church has hosted an altar every year since then, the exceptions being 2020 and 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

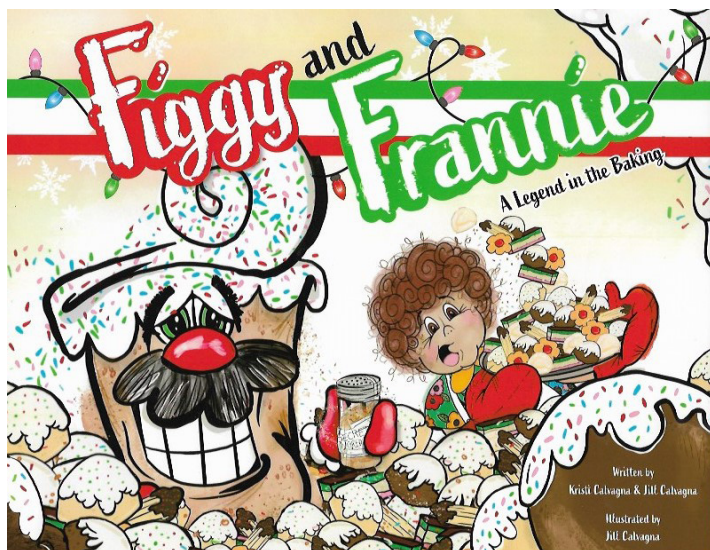
Dozens of volunteers work weeks in preparation for the church’s altar, which spans nearly the entire length of the church hall in the basement. The elaborately decorated tables feature distinct shapes of bread, often in the form of fish or St. Joseph’s staff, colorfully decorated cakes, cookies, fruit, egg dishes and other desserts. Typically, the altar is blessed on the eve of St. Joseph’s Day and the feast is celebrated the following day with parish members, families and friends lining up to receive a plate of *Pasta con Sarde* or St. Joseph’s Pasta. And everyone gets a bag of cookies upon departure.

This year plans are underway for altars to be held at St. Anthony of Padua, March 12-13, and St. Bridget’s, and St. Bernadette’s churches March 19-20.

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*Laura Padron at the St. Joseph Altar in her home in 2021 in Palm Desert, California.*



*Cover of Kristi and Jill Calvagna's book*

### Calvagna cousins' book honors aunt and her fig cookies

By Mike Doyle

For some, it is Mama or Nana, maybe even a cousin. When the holidays approach, most Italian-American families have one family member who organizes the baking of cookies or making of traditional dishes.

For Jill and Kristi Calvagna, it was Aunt Frannie Barcelona. And what was she known for? Fig cookies. Each provides the inspiration for the Calvagna cousins' new children's book, *Figgy and Frannie: A Legend in the Baking*.

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### Hall of Fame Celebration 2021

*GRIAA Hall of Fame and Special Recognition recipients and others gather in the St. Anthony of Padua Church Memory Garden following the Columbus Day Mass on October 10, 2021. More photos on Page 15.*



## Laura Padron ... Continued from Page 1



**Laura Padron,**  
author of *Building*  
*St. Joseph Altars:*  
*A Feast for the*  
*Soul*



**The image of**  
**St. Joseph as he**  
**appears on**  
**the book cover**

About seven years ago, Laura Padron attended her first St. Joseph Altar at St. Anthony Church. "It was just very majestic," said Padron, a former Rockford resident, who has written a new book, *Building St. Joseph Altars: A Feast for the Soul*. "That's the word I use to describe it. On St. Joseph's

Feast Day, we honor the tradition that began in Sicily with the story of the drought and the incentive to give to the poor."

Her interest piqued, she helped to organize an altar at St. Bridget Church in Loves Park. Then she was moved to find a way to share her experience.

Just over a year ago, Padron, a nurse practitioner, moved to California to be closer to her daughter. One day, admiring the snow-covered mountains while driving her car, she was struck with inspiration. "It hit me like a bolt of lightning," she said. "I said 'I am going to write a book about St. Joseph Altars.'"

And not just a book on the subject – a "how-to" book about creating a home altar. Not only is it innovative, it is a link to the original home altars from South Rockford more than 100 years ago. She envisions others having an "a-ha moment" as she did. "There's got to be somebody in South Dakota who really wants to do this," Laura said. "Hopefully, this will help."

To research her book, Laura drew on the wealth of sources in the Rockford area, including GRIAA Hall of Fame members Gene and Shirley Fedele, Colleen and Joan Gullo and Rosie Scalise Sheridan, all of whom have extensive backgrounds in creating altars. They all contributed chapters to the book along with Carl Ambruoso (who designs and constructs St. Anthony's Altar), Jo Wargo (who co-chaired an altar at St. Rita's), Jo Ognibene (cookies and fava beans), Mary Buscemi Gavan (altar traditions), Annette Parrovecchio-Jurgensen (savory dishes), Jill Kapala (children's altars), Jim Riihl (novenas and consecration) as well as others, totaling nearly two dozen.

Rosie Sheridan was impressed with how Laura valued the knowledge and experience of local sources. "I loved that she gathered information from all of these Rockfordians," Rosie said.

Laura was thorough in her fact gathering. "Nursing taught me to chart everything consistently," she said. Through Zoom calls and other contacts, she weathered the COVID pandemic and had a book ready for publication relatively quickly. "It was less than a year from idea to publishing," she said.

Quite an accomplishment for a former Methodist who was born on the South Side of Chicago, raised in Cedarville and moved to Rockford when she was 18. She eventually married a Catholic, converted and all three of her children have Italian god-parents. She started attending St. Joseph Altars at St. Anthony,

*Continued on page 3*

## Calvagna ... Continued from Page 1

"Our Aunt Frannie was our family baker," Jill said. "We have a lot of bakers and cooks in our family, but she was the one who really made platters of cookies for holidays and weddings. She made them for my baby shower. We called her the cookie lady after my daughter, Faith Koch, started calling her that when she was 4."

*Figgie and Franny* is Jill's second book. About five years ago, she collaborated with the late former *Rockford Register Star* editor Tom Wartowski on a children's book, *You Are Like an Acorn*.

Like an acorn, the seed of this book was planted a while ago and took several years to grow. "The idea was sitting in my head for probably four years. Then it took about two more years to do the writing and illustrations, both of which were done with her cousin Kristi.



**Jill and Kristi Calvagna,**  
co-authors of *"Frannie and Figgie:*  
*A Legend in the Baking"*

They were inspired to create a children's book that would allow younger generations to connect with those that preceded them. Their Aunt Frannie was a logical choice for her place in the family as well as her cooking skills and quirky behavior," she said.

"Aunt Frannie loved to dance," Jill said. "She would dance in the kitchen with her house clothes on. She really did enjoy life, and that's what I hope comes across in this book."

Also central to the book is the fig cookie, or *cuciddati*, which is said to have originated in Sicily during the Muslim rule. However, the cookie recipe also has been dated to the Roman occupation of Sicily. It starts with a simple pastry dough that is rolled out in wide strips. The pastry is then rolled around a line of the fig mixture – a ground-up combination of figs, dates, walnuts, spices and orange slices – and is cut into pieces, which are then fluted. Once baked, the cookie is iced and decorated with sprinkles.

Memories of Aunt Frannie making the fig cookies prompted Jill to share the experience. "We started losing a lot of our parents, and our Christmases were looking and feeling differently," she said. "So it became important for us to try and bring it back, especially to the younger generations that have never met Aunt Frannie. We need to hang onto those ideas so they can understand where their family came from."

It's a children's story, which includes a glossary of Italian/Sicilian words. What it does not have is a recipe. "I thought that was something families could do, put in their own family recipe," Jill said.

Jill sees this publication as a keep-sake book, one that will shed light on our Italian-American community and culture. But also one that will resonate with all families. "You don't have to be Italian," she said. "A lot of people have read it and say, 'I have an Aunt Frannie!' Everybody can look at it and see their own family."

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## Expect a long journey to dual Italian citizenship

By Frank Perrecone

Obtaining Italian dual citizenship is a process that at times can be confusing and overwhelming if you proceed on your own. However, assuming you qualify and are willing to spend the equivalent of a first-rate trip to Italy, there are firms that will streamline the documentation process and provide you with the required and completed documents to present to the Italian consulate in Chicago for petitioning for citizenship.

Last July, I participated a webinar about obtaining dual citizenship that was advertised by a familiar Italian-American organization. The program which was conducted by an attorney who is licensed in Italy and the owner of Italian Citizenship Assistance (ICA) with offices in northern Italy and southern California.

For many years I have wanted to obtain dual citizenship but did not want to put in the time to gather certified vital records, translate them to Italian, complete the necessary Italian forms and secure the appointment with the consulate. After researching and finding ICA reputable, I started my dual citizenship journey which is expected to last several years.

Italian law sets forth several pathways to become a dual citizen. The most common is Italian citizen by descent. This means if your Italian immigrant ancestor had children born in the United States before the immigrant became a naturalized citizen, the children and grandchildren likely qualify for citizenship by decent. For example, I qualified because my mother was born in the United States before my Italian-born grandfather became a naturalized citizen. Generally, many second-generation Italian-Americans qualify for Italian citizenship by descent. However, if citizenship is sought by way of a maternal descendant (mother, grandmother or great-grandmother), instead of an administrative process, an Italian judicial proceeding is necessary, which significantly increases the expense.

After I paid ICA half of the quoted fee (more about fees later) for the "Full-Service Package" and provided requested information, I immediately received authorizations to sign allowing ICA to request certified vital records from local, state and federal governmental bodies. The most important official record is the immigrant's U.S. Naturalization of Citizenship document from the federal government. This document provides the basis for establishing Italian citizenship.

ICA sent me copies of all records received. However, a problem arose with my grandmother's birth certificate. She was born in a Louisiana parish that did not register births in 1897. ICA contacted all Catholic churches in St. Charles Parish, requesting her baptism certificate which was found at Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Hahnville. As of the writing of this article, ICA is reviewing my case to determine whether all documents are in compliance with Italian law and ready to be translated into Italian.

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## GRIAA seeks Hall of Fame, Special Recognition nominations

The Greater Rockford Italian American Association is seeking men and women who have shown a tremendous amount of dedication and leadership for consideration for the Greater Rockford Italian American Hall of Fame and Special Recognition. Inductees are nominated by community members and selected by GRIAA's Hall of Fame and Special Recognition Committee. Nominees should be persons of Italian heritage who, through their exemplary lives, have made significant contributions to the community in and through the arts, sciences, government, business, industry, athletics, 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, business or the arts.

Nomination forms are available at the GRIAA website, [www.griaa.org](http://www.griaa.org). It is not necessary to indicate on the nomination form which category for which you are nominating the group or individual. The committee will make that determination on the information provided.

## Laura Padron ... *Continued from Page 2*

which provided the opening to her book. "That's where I start the book," she said, "standing in line at St. Anthony's."

"It's wonderful that she feels compelled and inspired to spread the word about St. Joseph Altars to people who would be willing to take the idea and go with it," Joan Gullo said. "It's a wonderful seed to be planted."

"I thought her idea was fabulous," said Rosie Sheridan. "Her mission is to continue the tradition. The fact that she wrote a book on how to build (an altar) is beyond a dream."

The focus of Laura's book is creating a home altar, which is the place it all started years ago in Sicily. "She is writing about good, old-fashioned St. Anthony Altars," Rosie said. "We are not letting this tradition die."

Asked to describe the message in her book, Laura said, "It's my way of honoring Rockford's Italian culture, and the many experts in that (environment) who are passing their traditions onto the world."

*Laura Padron's book, "Building St. Joseph Altars: A Feast for the Soul," will be published by Fulton Publishing and available on Amazon.*

*For a list of St. Joseph Altars expected to be open to the public in the Rockford area and a recipe for Pasta con Sarde, see Page 12.*



# Shoe designer to the stars

*Rockford native Joseph LaRose found fame in Florida*

**By Mike Doyle**

Image was everything to Joseph LaRose. Always immaculately dressed, he loved fast cars, and you cannot imagine his wavy hair at all out of place. He stayed healthy into his late 80s with 10-block walks every day at 7 a.m., by working out and by watching his diet.

For more than 30 years, he served a very special clientele at LaRose Footwear, a boutique in downtown Jacksonville, Florida. How special? Among his ardent customers/admirers/fans were Jayne Mansfield, Betty Grable, Joan Crawford, Carol Channing, Abigail Van Buren (known as "Dear Abby"), and, incredibly, Jackie Kennedy. If those names are from another generation, try these on for size – Brooke Shields, Cameron Diaz, Mena Suvari and Renee Zellweger.

The shoe designer to the stars was legendary for creating ladies shoes with dramatic color and textures. They were designer, not always comfortable, shoes and LaRose's name was linked with legendary designers like Anne Klein, Helmut Lang, Calvin Klein, Marc Jacobs, and Ralph Lauren.

His store, at the corner of Laura and Duval streets featured a stained-glass piano that Joseph designed. Called the Taj Mahal of women's shoe stores, back rooms and upper floors were crammed with thousands of shoes that Joseph and his wife Gertrude (Trudy) were unable to part with. Following his death at 88 in December 1999, and prior to an Sotheby's on-line auction in March 2001, an appraiser examined the collection and called it King Tut's tomb. Two New Yorkers, Radford Brown and Cesar Padilla, paid \$100,000 for the core of the collection, and 71 pairs of shoes were auctioned off for as much as \$6,000 per pair.

"His boutique was an incredible mix of Wild West bordello with Salvatore Dali," Cesar Padilla said. "In the store, you would just follow the staircase from the bordello and go upstairs to a labyrinth of footwear."

For all of his success and admiration, he came from humble beginnings. The youngest son of Franchesco and Gerlanda LaRosa, he emigrated from Aragona, Sicily, arriving in 1920 with his mother, his 13-year-old brother Vincenzo and possibly his 20-year-old sister Assunta. They joined his father, two older brothers, Gaspare and Salvatore, and two older sisters Domenica and Maria, in Rockford.



*Rockford native Joseph LaRose*

He showed an interest in shoes early in life, spending time with an old shoe maker and, after high school, selling shoes in Rockford and eventually becoming a manager for Wohl Shoes. After serving in the Signal Corps during World War II, Joseph and his wife Trudy moved to Jacksonville and managed the women's shoe department at a store. Helped with a \$1,500 loan (\$175,000 today) from his brother Salvatore in 1949, they opened their store.

Sometime before moving to Florida, Joseph changed the spelling of his last name to LaRose. A clue to that comes from a family story. When Joseph was a teenager, a new sidewalk was laid in front of his brother Gaspare's house on Corbin Street. He is said to have put the name "Joseph LaRose" in the fresh cement.

Joseph and Trudy worked seven days a week in their store, and, over the years, saw it grow into a destination for the jet set. They never had children and rarely traveled, but they enjoyed the finer things, nonetheless.

They lived in upscale Arlington, a Jacksonville suburb, and he drove a yellow Ford Shelby Cobra, "one of the rarest ever made," Cesar said. "He would speed on the highway and just laugh." However, he mostly kept his distance from his family in Rockford.

His designs were revolutionary and could not be found anywhere else. In a lengthy feature obituary published in *The New York Times Magazine* in 2000, it was noted that Joseph would be asked when his shoes went on sale. He responded by saying his shoes were too beautiful to be sold at a discount. And if he wouldn't sell shoes to a customer if he didn't think it was right. "These shoes don't fit your personality," he would tell them.

Harel Waldman, a footwear and fashion designer from Los Angeles who is familiar with Joseph's shoes, said, "I can see any woman in the world and look at their shoes and know where the design inspiration came from," he said. "I can figure out the first domino. Most of the time, it's from the Joseph LaRose Collection."

Padilla and Brown purchased 125,000 pairs of shoes at the auction for their vintage store in New York. "We're still sitting on 25,000 pairs of the best," Cesar said. "We never sold the best; we hid them."

Cesar again described the showroom: You never had seen footwear like that. There was nothing like it in the U.S. or Europe.



*Well-known syndicated advice columnist Abigail (Dear Abby) Van Buren gets personal service from Joseph LaRose*





## Joseph LaRose ... *Continued from Page 4*

It was an unprecedented collection. Padilla, who got to know Joseph and Trudy in their final years, described how he would order custom-made shoes. "In those days, all you needed to do was call the shoe manufacturer. He would custom-make everything, and it was an explosion of color. It was like a Florida boardwalk in the sunshine with convertibles passing by. Everyone is wearing shades."

Key to Joseph's success was timing and location. "His store was open in the 1950s when Florida was at its height as America's resort area," Cesar said.

"You've got the Rat Pack at the Copacabana. There were so many celebrities. This is just before the beginning of international travel. Everybody was coming down to Florida in the '50s, to the resorts and spas. And, if you were driving down in a car, Jacksonville was the first big city you hit."

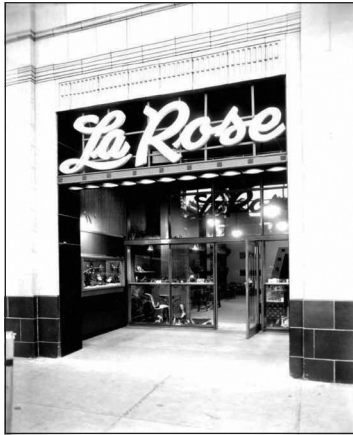
It's no wonder his work attracted so many famous customers. In one story, John Kennedy was speaking at a plaza near his store when Jackie Kennedy stopped in. Joan Crawford was such a demanding customer that she drew an outline of her feet and sent it to him for a custom fit. More than one source reported that Jayne Mansfield was wearing a pair of LaRose boots when she was killed in a car crash in 1967. Also, Redd "Fred Sanford" Foxx bought a pair of shoes for a lady friend.

Following the deaths of Joseph and Trudy, and his collection was auctioned off, LaRose shoes could be found in boutiques and elsewhere, Cameron Diaz purchased a pair of LaRose boots. Mena Survari found a LaRose handbag in a Manhattan store for retro clothes. And Renee Zellweger, wore vintage LaRose footwear in the 2003 film, *Down with Love*, according to [jaxhistory.com](http://jaxhistory.com).

"Joseph is completely relevant today," Cesar said. "People are still referencing his designs; people are still wearing his shoes."

Sources: [jaxhistory.com](http://jaxhistory.com); [mocajacksonville.unf](http://mocajacksonville.unf); [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com)

*Joseph LaRose was Mike Doyle's great uncle.*



**Storefront of LaRose Footwear in downtown Jacksonville, Florida**

## Calvagna ... *Continued from Page 2*

Kristi added that, as one of the youngest of the family, her favorite part of the project has been all of the conversations that have sparked so many wonderful memories. Memories, she said, "That might otherwise have been forgotten."

Jill and Kristi's book, *"Frannie and Figgy: A Feast in the Baking"* is available on Etsy at [RigatoniStudios](http://RigatoniStudios). You can also follow the cousins on Facebook at [@Figgyandfamily](https://www.facebook.com/Figgyandfamily) and on Instagram @ [Rigatoni\\_Studios](https://www.instagram.com/Rigatoni_Studios). See page 12 for a recipe for fig cookies.

## How Italy got its name ... & other things

The roots of Italy's name can be traced back to the southern-most part of the peninsula, Calabria. During the Roman Empire, the name Italy was extended to include the islands of Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica. The name "Italy" may have come from "*Oscan viteliu*" or "land of young cattle." Italians in the south spoke Oscan 500-100 BCE. Another popular theory is that "*Italia*" likely means "calf land" and the original spelling of that was "*Vitalia*," which originated from the Latin "*vitulus*," or "one-year-old calf."

One of the oldest names in Italy is *Enotria*, which comes from the Greek *oinos* or wine. According to Aristotle and Thucydides, the king of *Enotria* was a hero called *Italus*, and Italy was named after him. Another possible source of the name is that "Italy" comes from the Persian word *Atalu*, which means land of sunset. In comparison to ancient Persia, Italy is located in the west. So, to ancient Iranians, the sun set near Italy.

The final theory is that the name comes from the Greek *Aithalia*, which means land of fire, which would describe Mount Etna, the volcano located in Sicily.

### The first bank in the world

The first real bank was created during the Middle Ages in Italy thanks to the fast expansion of the Maritime Republics. One of these was Genoa, where the Banco San Giorgio in Genoa was founded in 1149. The concept of a bank became so successful that it generated huge fortunes. In areas such as Florence, Pisa and Venice, the families of bankers became extremely rich and powerful. Their businesses reached as far as England, France and Spain, and they began lending money to the European sovereigns. Often the sovereigns offered feuds, baronage and other aristocratic titles instead of paying back the money they borrowed. This is how a member of the Medici family could be elected Pope and Lorenzo the Magnificent obtained the government of Florence.

### Cats loved in Rome

Rome alone is home to about 300,000 cats. A person convicted of killing a cat, owned or stray, can face a 10,000 euro fine and up to three years in prison. There are roughly 300,000 feral cats in Rome. In fact, the Rome city council protects them due to their ancient bond with the city, citing that they are part of the city's "bio-heritage." A sanctuary of 250 cats was established at *Lago di Argentina Torre*, where Julius Caesar was assassinated by Brutus. It is also the former site of Pompey's Theatre.

### Fountain of riches

Around 700,000 euro is thrown into Rome's Trevi Fountain each year. The money is then donated to Caritas, a Catholic charity. If you wake up early enough, you may see municipal workers cleaning yesterday's coins out of the fountain.



**Lago di Torre Argentina, a square in the Purione neighborhood of Rome, is a cat sanctuary**



## Celebrating Women's History Month

*March 8, 1980, the anniversary of the founding of International Women's Day in 1911, was designated by President Jimmy Carter as the start of Women's History Week. In 1987, Congress expanded it to the entire month, following a petition by the National Women's History Project. In acknowledgement of the month, the Pappagallo honors the significant achievements of two Italian-American women.*

### Ella Grasso: Groundbreaking politician

By Paul Anthony Arco

As a gifted student, Ella Tambussi Grasso could have done anything with her life. She chose a life of politics. Born in 1919, in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, to Italian immigrants, she graduated from Mount Holyoke College *magna cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa in 1940, majoring in economics and sociology. Mount Holyoke is the oldest member of the historic Seven Sisters colleges, a group of elite, historically women's colleges in the Northeastern United States. Then, she earned a master's degree, and later added four honorary degrees. In 1942, she married a school principal, Thomas Grasso, and the couple had two children.



During World War II, Grasso worked as assistant director of research for the War Manpower Commission of Connecticut. She moved up the state political ranks – she was elected to the Connecticut House of Representatives in 1952, then became the first female Floor Leader of the House in 1955 and in 1958, elected the Secretary of State of Connecticut, the first of three terms. In the 1970s, she served two terms as U.S. House of Representative.

In 1974, Grasso was elected governor of Connecticut – the first woman elected that wasn't the wife or widow of a past governor. Grasso's time as governor was challenging, thanks to fiscal problems, state layoffs and budget woes. But she was also praised for her handling of the Blizzard of 1978, when 30 inches of snow paralyzed the state. Grasso was front and center during the aftermath of the storm, directing emergency operations and closing all roads and businesses in the state to allow emergency workers to do their job.

In 1980, Grasso resigned when she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer; she died in February 1981 at 61. Shortly after her death, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Ronald Reagan. In 1993, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame and the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame has created programs in her name to foster civic engagement and public service among Connecticut students.

### Bonnie Tiburzi: The first to fly

By Paul Anthony Arco

Bonnie Tiburzi grew up in a flying family. Her father was a pilot during World War II with the Air Transport Command, and he later started his own regional airline, Tiburzi Airways. That's when

she decided to follow in her father's footsteps. Young Bonnie started flying lessons with her father at the age of 12 and, by 19, she had earned her pilot's license.

In 1973, Bonnie became the first female pilot hired by a major airline when she joined American Airlines at 24. During her time with American Airlines, she flew as a flight engineer, first officer, and captain on the Boeing 727. Tiburzi was a captain in the Boeing 757/767 domestic and international routes when she retired in 1998.



Tiburzi wrote a book about her career entitled *Takeoff!*, a personal account of how she earned her wings despite plenty of disappointment and heartache along her journey. She described competing in training with only men and military veterans, and being mistaken for a flight attendant, a purser, a bellhop and even a bus driver.

"My being a woman in the cockpit, that bastion of masculinity, was more of a problem for the men than it was for me," Tiburzi wrote in her book. "I was used to male flyers. They weren't used to me."

Throughout her career, Tiburzi received many awards for her accomplishments. In 1974 she received the Amita Award given to Italian American Women of Achievement. Now living in New York, Tiburzi is a motivational speaker. Her American Airlines pilot uniform is on display at the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

## Mimosa the flower of Italian Women's Day

March 8 is International Women's Day in Italy, which is traditionally celebrated with the yellow flower, the mimosa. The civil holiday began as a political event, honoring March 8, 1857, when a strike by garment workers in New York led to the formation of the first women's union. The date also coincides with a strike for "bread and peace" by Russian women in 1917 and a declaration by the Union of Italian Women in 1945 that March 8 be set aside to celebrate womanhood across the country.

While the political aspect has waned in Italy, the day has become one for men to express their love to the women around them. Men started giving the mimosa to their partners, friends, co-workers, and family, as well as to their significant others. They gave these yellow flowers to colleagues, mothers, and sisters. Indeed, the scent of mimosas fills the air. Nowadays, the celebration has evolved and now women also give mimosas to each other. Mimosas became the traditional women's day flower in Italy.

The symbolic women's day flower in Italy is the yellow mimosa, which expresses female solidarity. The origin of the custom is lost, but it probably started in Rome after World War II.

Source: [lifeinitaly.com](http://lifeinitaly.com)





## Madon: A feast for the eyes

*'The Road to the Lemon Grove' an enjoyable donkey ride*

By Mike Doyle

Quirky and clunky with lots of shouting and overacting, *The Road to the Lemon Grove* is not for every movie goer. However, if you grew up with Sicilian or Italian parents or grandparents, it's a good bet that you will enjoy this film. That's because *famiglia* (family) is at the heart of the story.

Among the conflicts are – family vs. family, father vs. son, and father vs. God at the door to heaven. Antonio Contatini (Charly Chiarelli) can't enter heaven until he repairs the relationship with his son Calogero. And to do that, Calogero has to embrace and understand his Sicilian roots. Chiarelli, a Canadian actor, plays the father and son, as well as two other roles. Although the film begins in Hamilton, Ontario, it could take place in any North American city with a sizeable Sicilian immigrant population.

An early scene shows a typical dining room table filled with pasta, arancini and cannoli. The dialogue includes many familiar phrases, such as “*madone*,” “*mangia*” and others that cannot be used here. Another phrase, “cake-eater,” is unique to this particular culture and is similar to the word “*medicani*” that we use to describe non-Italians.

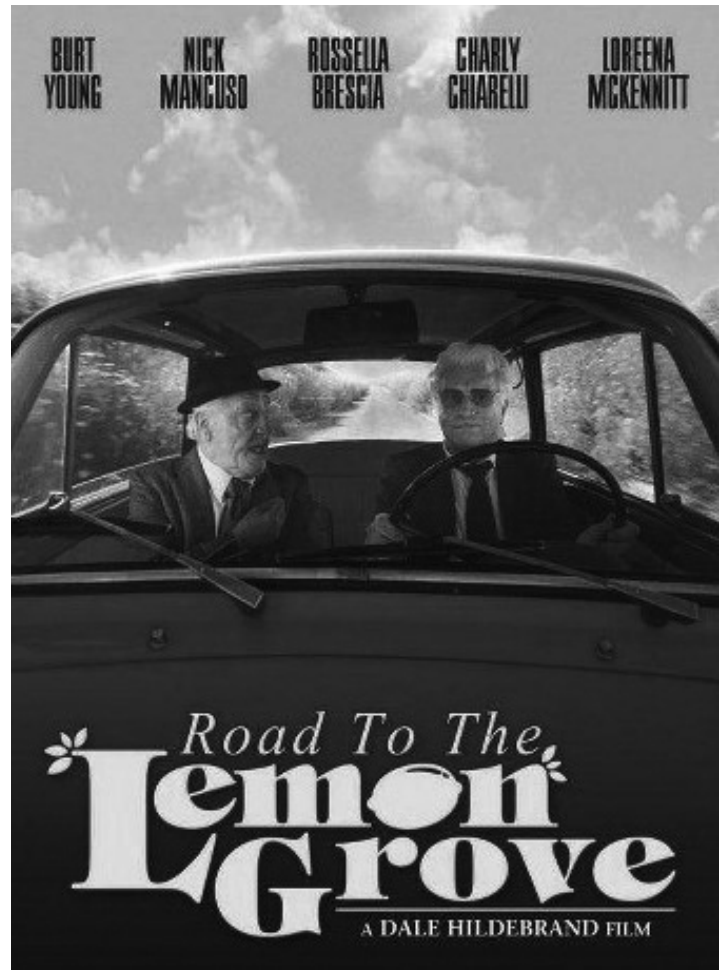
When these immigrants settled in Canada, they noticed that non-Italians ate pasty white bread. Because it didn't look or taste like Italian bread, the newcomers assumed it was cake. So, anyone who wasn't Italian was a “cake eater.”

The film expands this cultural difference in the role of Calogero, a university linguist professor. He explains the origins and differences of words and expounds on the much-documented loss of languages and dialects, such as Sicilian. His example provides a touching memory for many with Sicilian roots.

Sicilian, Calogero explains, has elements of Greek, Arab, Catalan, French, Spanish and Italian. “Consider the word for donkey,” he says. “Because of the dominance of Latin on the Italian mainland, the Italians chose the word *asino*. The Sicilian word for donkey is *sceccu* (pronounced shake-oo.)” *Sceccu* is derived from the Arabic word for sheik, Calogero says, “and was created in derision of the medieval Saracen masters who rode donkeys to villages to collect taxes.”

Central to the plot is a lemon grove in Sicily that is the source of the feud between the Contatini and Pescari families in Terramare. Antonio wants his son Calogero to take possession of the lemon grove and reconnect with his Sicilian roots. When that is resolved, then Antonio will gain entry into heaven. Meanwhile, the Pescaris want to turn the land into a theme park.

*The Road to the Lemon Grove* begins in cold and snowy Ontario, then becomes a feast for the eyes when the story moves to Sicily with stunning shots of Catania, Siracusa and the seacoast. The Duomo and Ortygia area of Siracusa will be familiar to visitors there. Terramare, which translates to land-sea, is a fictional town but is a stand-in for Raculmuto, located northeast of Agri-



gento and about six miles east of Aragona, hometown of many of Rockford's Sicilians. (People from Raculmuto are featured in the scenes filmed in Hamilton). When the film finally shows the lemon grove, visitors to the *Latomia del Paradiso* quarry in Siracusa will recognize the rock formations.

The resolution occurs in the town square where a yards-long table is laden with dishes each family has brought – pasta, sausage, salami, polenta, wine and “200 cannoli.” Since food brings all families together, the conflicts are amazingly reconciled.

Among the other players, Loreena McKennitt, an acclaimed Celtic singer, plays God; Rossella Brescia, an Italian actress and dancer, befriends Calogero; and Burt Young, Sylvester Stallone's brother-in-law in *Rocky*, is the head of the Pescari family. Young, whose real name is Gerald Tomasso DeLouise, boxed in the Marine Corps and had a 17-0 record as a professional fighter.

The film from 2018 won the Cirs Award at the Taormina, Sicily, Film Festival for Best in Cultural and Social Achievement; the Best on Italian-Canadian Cinema and the Excellence in Performance Award at the Italian Contemporary Film Festival; and the Best Comedy Feature at the Edmonton International Film Festival. It is currently streaming on Amazon Prime Video.

Despite its shortcomings, *The Road to the Lemon Grove* is like a ride on a Sicilian cart being pulled by a *sceccu*, enjoyable but bumpy.



## *Bis Bis, Signor Presidente!*

*Italian leader Mattarella elected to rare second term*

**By Rosaria Mercuri-Ford**

The city of Milan rejoiced last fall when the *Teatro alla Scala* announced it would reopen its doors to the lyric season on December 7, 2021, after a long year of inactivity and silence. It was a welcomed reopening as Italy was still dealing with a fourth wave of COVID-19 and struggling to emerge from the disruption caused by the devastating pandemic. The gala event drew throngs of enthusiastic opera lovers and celebrities to the premiere of Verdi's *Macbeth*, directed by the acclaimed Riccardo Chailly.

The excitement at *La Scala* mounted as the full house of 2,000 spectators acknowledged the presence of the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, just before the ceremonial national hymn was to be played. The president, due to terminate his presidency on February 2, 2022, was saluted by five minutes of standing ovations, interrupted by choirs chanting "*Bis Bis*," the Italian call for an encore performance. From the presidential box, Mattarella, accompanied by his daughter Laura, accepted the warm tribute with the usual modesty and, visibly moved, wrapped his hands in sign of thanks.

Sergio Mattarella began his presidential term on February 3, 2015, and has since carried out the professional duties with utmost integrity and firm sense of responsibility. A Christian-leftist politician, and an independent since 2008, Mattarella was born in Palermo in 1941, the son of the anti-fascist politician, Bernardo Mattarella. He went on to become a lawyer, jurist and academic, always earning great respect and approval by the Italian people and the European community.

His decades-long political commitment started in 1983, when he was first elected to the parliament. Through the years, he assumed relevant ministerial roles and chaired important parliamentary committees. In October 2011, he was elected by the parliament to Italy's Constitutional Court, a post that he would hold until 2015, when he became President of the Italian Republic.

The role of the presidency has lately become more relevant, a sort of institutional guarantee in the otherwise fluid, and often chaotic, political situation. The Italian head of state is not only a symbolic, moral figure who embodies the task of protecting and defending the Italian Constitution, he also oversees the legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government; nominates the prime ministers and approves or denies the appointment of the various cabinet members; presides over the Supreme Council of Defense, and is the commander of the Italian Army. Mattarella executed these roles in an exemplary manner and promoted national unity, while presiding over five government coalitions. After the cabinet, led by premier Matteo Renzi (2014-2016) was dissolved, the president nominated three more prime ministers: Paolo Gentiloni (2016-2018), Giuseppe Conte (2018-2019, 2019-2021) and Mario Draghi (2021-present.)

In the final months of 2021, many Italians and political figures did, indeed, wish for a *Mattarella Bis*. His reelection would preserve

the political *status quo* and protect the post of the prime minister in charge, Draghi, himself a potential presidential candidate, thus allowing for a natural completion of the current XVIII legislature (through March 2023) and avoiding early political elections.

Second presidential terms are not the norm in Italian politics, with the only exception being that of Mattarella's predecessor, President Giorgio Napolitano, who served from 2006 to 2015. Those in favor of reelecting the current president clearly understood that a second Mattarella term would guarantee political stability and international credibility, as the nation is still grappling with economic and social difficulties.



*Italian President  
Sergio Mattarella*

Mattarella would have preferred following the rule of the seven-year term, as stated in the constitution of the Italian Republic. Although he had unequivocally expressed his desire to retire at the completion of his term, February 2, 2022, his name kept on coming up as a possible candidate in the weeks preceding the presidential election.

When the government coalition and the great electors could not agree on any suitable candidate, President Mattarella resolved to accept the new nomination. And so, after a long week of inconclusive and mostly perfunctory balloting, Mattarella received the vast majority of the votes on the late evening of Saturday, January 29, 2022. A spontaneous standing ovation erupted in the parliament as it became clear that he had quickly surpassed the quorum of votes required. Later in the evening President Mattarella proceeded to accept the new term to begin on February 3, 2022, with grateful modesty and unwavering commitment.

## **Italy is open – but plan ahead**

As the first European country hit by COVID-19, Italy has had to navigate the pandemic longer than most places, but, as signs begin to point in a positive direction, people are beginning to make plans. Currently, Italy renewed its emergency status on December 14, 2021, and will remain so until at least March 31.

Entry is largely limited to residents of the European Union, in addition to a list of select non-EU countries, including the United States, Canada, Japan and the United Kingdom. As in many places, the entry regulations differ depending on a traveler's vaccination status and whether they've recently recovered from COVID. Since December 6, when rules were tightened, it is difficult for unvaccinated people to carry out every day activities, and masks must be worn at all times, including outside. About 90 percent of the adult population is fully vaccinated, and children are being vaccinated as well.

As of December 23, 2021, anyone flying to or from Italy must wear an FFP2 mask. Other restrictions apply and anyone considering a trip to Italy or any kind of foreign travel may want to consult with a travel agent, said Dick Sturm of Lindstrom Travel. Sturm also suggested that prospective travelers log onto [joinsherpa.com](https://joinsherpa.com), which provides information on the latest travel and health restrictions. This is subject to change.

*Source: [cnn.com/travel](https://cnn.com/travel)*





## The Italian Name Game

By Mike Doyle

What is the history behind our Italian surnames? Sometimes, it is easy to translate. My mother's maiden name was LaRosa or "the rose." My wife Nora's maiden name was Cipolla or "onion." However, did our ancestors tend roses and plant onions? Finding the source of these names is a bit thorny.

A recent Facebook posting noted that a pope in the 14<sup>th</sup> century decreed that all newborns have a first and last name. Even earlier, aristocrats of the Middle Ages reportedly created the use of a first name followed by a last name. Another website reported that the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which was prompted by the Protestant Reformation and ultimately banned the sale of indulgences, ordered priests to record the first and last name of each person. The purpose was to end the practice of marriages between blood relatives. But the practice of adding a surname can be dated to about 1000 in the city of Venice, and, even earlier, the Romans had a reason behind names. Among them:

- Special circumstances: Lucius (born during the day), Savius (born after the death of the mother).
- Hair or skin color: Albinus (white), Rufus (red)
- Outward appearances: Capito (big head), Cincinnatus (curly hair)
- Character: Cato (smart), Frugi (thrifty)

The majority of Italian surnames came from the first names of the head of households with de or di as "son of." For example, DiGiovanni (son of John), and DiTomassi (son of Thomas).

Others things that these early Italians took their names from were:

- Occupation or place in society. Cappellari (hat maker), Lunaro (wool tradesman), Cestaro (basket maker), Scarpetta (shoemaker), Contadina (farmer), Panettiero (baker), Barbieri (barber), Pastore (shepherd), Medici (physician), Conte (count).
- Hometown or regions: Among family surnames in the Rockford area are Messina, Enna, Caltigerone, Lombardozzi (Lombardy), Fiorenza (Florence), Trapini, Marsala and Abruzzo.
- Physical characteristics: Similar to the Roman examples, these include Bianci (white), Verdi (green).
- Nicknames: Similar to character examples: Cicula (grasshopper/chatterbox), Volpi (fox/cunning), Gentile (gentle), Forte (strong).
- Geographic location: Bosci (woods), Montagna (mountain), Cavalla (horse), Torrente (creek or river)

Stories of Italian and other European immigrants having their names changed or Americanized at Ellis Island are common in our folklore. If you recall the famous scene in the *The Godfather*, where the young immigrant Vito approaches the immigration officer there and asks in English for his name. When he can't respond, another agent reads from his tag, "Vito Andollini from Corleone. The first agent says, "Okay, Vito Corleone, over there."



Road sign on the highway to Roccamena indicates direction of Palermo, Camporeale and Corleone, all surnames found in the United States.

Such scenarios have been questioned. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., historian and host of the PBS series, *Finding Your Roots*, has said that in all of the hundreds of stories of immigrants who said their names were changed by immigration officers, he has found no proof that it actually occurred. But that doesn't mean that it didn't.

One of Gates' guests was Chris Meloni of NBC's *Law and Order: SVU*, who wanted to know the genealogy of his name. Meloni's grandfather was from the north of Italy. Gates' researchers were able to find out that, as a newborn, his grandfather had been dropped off at a church, most likely by an unwed mother. Gates surmised that the name Meloni came from the shape of the infant's head, which likely resembled a melon.

Sources: [roemercohorte.de](http://roemercohorte.de), [myitalianfamily.com](http://myitalianfamily.com); "Our Italian Surnames" by Joseph Fucilla

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## 'Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy' returns for second season

A year ago, when we were shuttered indoors because of COVID-19, one of the viewing highlights was CNN's *Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy*. For six Sundays, we were able to be transformed to some delightful culinary locations and stunning dishes delivered with Tucci's biting wit. If you watched the episodes, you were craving more. And CNN has delivered with six new shows, starting at 8 p.m. on March 13.

In the first season, Tucci, a third-generation Italian-American, ate his way through Naples, Rome, Bologna, Milan, Tuscany and Sicily. The debut episode on February 14, 2021, drew 1.5 million viewers and beat out all other cable news networks at that time slot. When the second show drew 1.6 million, CNN greenlighted a second season.

Much had been speculated on where Tucci would visit – fans of the show noticed that he was seen in Venice and Turin – so it's no surprise that those two food destinations are in the new season. Umbria and Valle D'Aosta are on the list as well, with two destinations still unknown.

Umbria is called Italy's *Cuore Verde* ("green heart") and known for rich olive oil, red wine and porchetta, a juicy roast rolled in crushed garlic and herbs. Valle D'Aosta is a small region bordered by France and Switzerland in the far northwest corner of Italy. Fontina and Toma cheeses are favored here, and the area is known for hearty, comfort food, such as *carbonata*, stewed meat with white wine, onions and spices.

Sources: [cnn.com](http://cnn.com); [italofile.com](http://italofile.com); [mashed.com](http://mashed.com)

*Continued from Page 3*

ICA has not scheduled my consulate appointment because their review process is ongoing. The estimated appointment date is Fall 2022 or Winter 2023. COVID-19 has created an appointment backlog at the consulate. My ICA representative has informed me the consulate releases only 12 appointments a week and added that, if I schedule my own appointment, the date may be sooner. Once I am told that all my paper work is ready to present, I will decide if I want to attempt the scheduling process.

ICA's fee in the summer of 2021 for the "Full-Service Package" was \$7,500 to \$8,500, depending on the complexity of the case, plus an estimated \$700-\$900 in expenses. Expenses are for costs paid to secure vital records. My understanding is that the fee includes assistance in securing an Italian passport. ICA also offers a "Step by Step Package," which you gather all your U.S. vital records. That fee was listed as \$6,500 to \$7,500. After reviewing the information, I provided, I was quoted \$7,500, half initially and the remainder due upon completion of all necessary paperwork to present to the consulate. So far, in addition to the \$3,750, I have paid about \$435 in expenses for direct costs associated with securing vital records.

If you are interested in Italian citizenship, ICA offers a complimentary initial evaluation which can be processed through the website at [italiancitizenshipassistance.com](http://italiancitizenshipassistance.com)

## GRIAA Scholarship opportunities

For the past 40 years, the Greater Rockford Italian American Association has provided more than \$750,000 in scholarships, which are presented annually to area Italian American families to defray the cost of a private or Catholic education. For information, visit [www.griaa.org](http://www.griaa.org), then go to the Scholarship Committee, chaired by Ben Todaro and Frank Valentine to view application information.

## 2022 Spring, Summer Festivals in Italy

### May (Maggio)

4-7 – *Calendimaggio*, Assisi. Held annually from first Wednesday-Saturday after May first to greet spring

10-14 – EuroVision Song Contest, Turin

### June (Giugno)

Late June-late August – Arena di Verona Opera Festival, 100-year-old outdoor event

### July (Luglio)

2 – *Madonna Festa Della*, held since 1389 to honor patron saint of Bruna

### August (Agosto)

28 – *Bravo deli Botti*, annual wine barrel race in Montepulciano

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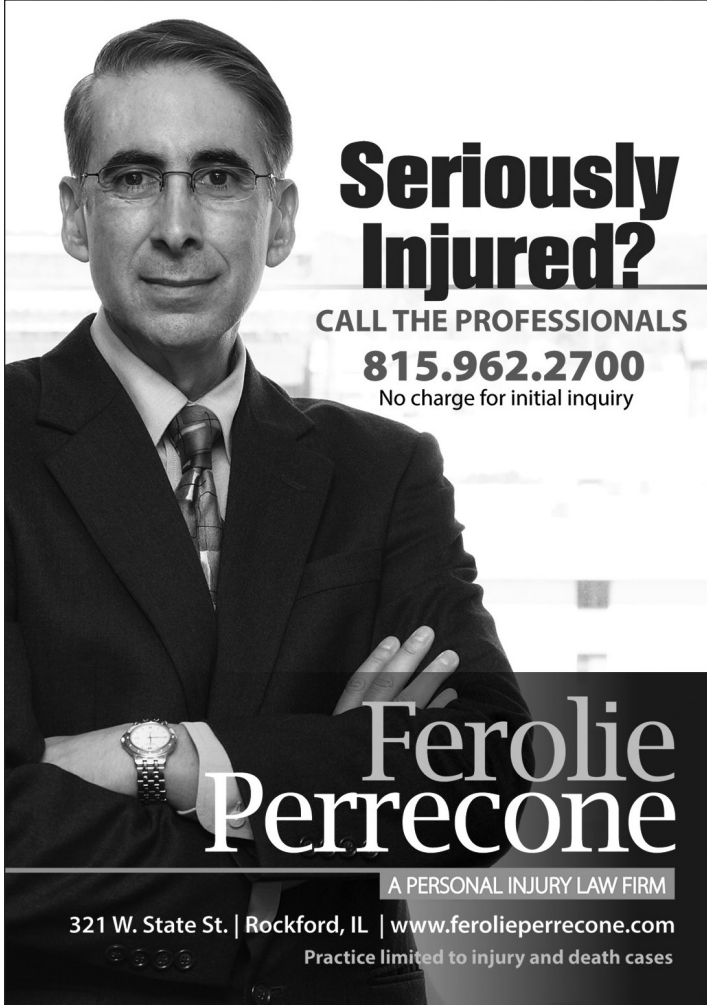
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## St. Joseph Altars

**March 12-13** – St. Anthony of Padua Church, 1010 Ferguson Street, Rockford. Altar viewing and blessing following 4:30 p.m. Mass, March 12 in the church. Carry-out only pasta distribution noon-3 p.m., March 13 in the Parish Hall.

**March 19-20** – St. Bernadette Church, 2400 Bell Avenue, Rockford. Public viewing in Parish Center, 5:30-7 p.m., March 19. Traditional meal at no charge, noon-3 p.m.; also drive-through, March 20. St. Bridget Church, 600 Clifford Avenue, Loves Park. Altar blessing, 4 p.m., March 19. Altar viewing before and after all Masses March 19-20.

### 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* (seasoning for macaroni with sardines)
- 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.

### Toasted Bread Crumbs (*Modica*)

- 2 cups unseasoned bread crumbs
- 1 teaspoon oil
- 1 teaspoon sugar

In a saucepan, heat oil and add breadcrumbs, cooking on low until the crumbs are lightly browned. Stir constantly to prevent burning. Remove from heat and add sugar. Use as topping over *Pasta con Sardi*.

Source: Cipolla Family recipe

### Fig Cookies (*Cuccidati*)

#### Fig Filling

- 2 pounds figs
- 1 pound raisins
- ½ cup walnuts
- 1 whole orange
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon cloves



½ teaspoon cinnamon

2 shots whiskey

Syrup mixture (boil ¼ cup water and ¼ cup sugar. Once mixed, refrigerate until ready to use)

Grind figs, raisins, walnut and orange. Then add all spices, lemon juice, whiskey and syrup mixture.

#### Dough

- 1 pound oleo or margarine
- 1 pound Crisco
- 1 dozen eggs
- 3 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 cup milk
- 4 pounds flour
- 4 tablespoons baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon salt

Beat oleo and Crisco, then add sugar, eggs, vanilla and milk. In a large bowl, mix flour, baking powder and salt. Mix wet and dry ingredients. Mix and knead as bread adding more flour if needed. Dough must not be tacky. Roll out cookies on a bread board sprinkled with powder sugar. Roll out the dough in long pieces, then place a little fig filling down the middle. Close the roll and cut pieces into a slant or desired shape. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes, depending on the size of your cookie.

Source: Rosie Scalise Sheridan

### Italian Easter Bread

- 1 ¼ cups milk
- 1/3 cup unsalted butter cut into small cubes
- 2 ¼ teaspoons (1 package) rapid rise yeast
- 1/8 teaspoon Kosher salt
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 4 cups all purpose flour, plus more for kneading
- 1 large egg, beaten, plus 1 teaspoon water
- 3 dyed Easter eggs raw or hard-boiled
- Colored sprinkles



In a small saucepan, add milk and butter. Heat to 120-130 degrees, stirring until the butter melts. Do not allow the milk to go above 130. In a large mixing bowl, combine yeast, salt and sugar. Add the eggs and whisks together. Add the warmed milk and butter mixture, then add 2 cups of flour. Using a dough hook on a stand mixer, combined mixture on medium speed until smooth, about two minutes. Scrape the sides with a spatula as needed to incorporate the flour. Slowly add the remaining two cups of flour on medium-low speed, scraping the sides as needed. Knead until

Continued on Page 13





the dough is stiff and slightly sticky, about 12 minutes. Place the dough on a lightly floured board or surface and hand knead for 3-4 minutes, adding a little more flour to prevent sticking. Do not use more than ¼ cup of flour. Shape dough into a ball, cover with towel and allow to rest for 10 minutes. Divide into six pieces. Roll each piece to form a 1-inch wide rope, about 14 inches long. Taking 2 pieces, braid the rope, pinching the ends together and then loop into a circle, making sure the ends are securely joined. Place on a parchment lined baking sheet (2 per sheet), providing enough room to rise. Loosely cover the baking sheet with plastic wrap or a towel to rise in a warm area, until it doubles in size, 45-60 minutes. Preheat oven to 350 and set rack in the middle. Whisk together the large egg and 1 teaspoon water. Brush each braided bread the egg wash. If desired, top the bread with sprinkles. Gently place one dyed egg in the center of each braided ring. Do not press into the dough; it will sink as it bakes. Bake one tray at a time until golden brown, about 15-18 minutes. Quickly transfer the bread to a cooling rack.

*Raw or hard-boiled and dyed eggs can be used. Raw egg will be soft-boiled after baking.*

*Source: lifeinitaly.com*

### Chicken Scaloppini in Lemon Caper Sauce

2 large chicken breasts, cut Scaloppini (cut on the bias)

1 cup flour

3-4 tablespoons olive oil

4 tablespoons butter

Salt

Large bunch fresh leaf spinach

2-3 cloves garlic, sliced

Lemon slices (if desired)

¼ cup lemon juice

½ cup chicken broth

¼ cup white wine

¼ cup capers, rinsed

Small bunch parsley, chopped



Cut the chicken breasts into at least two pieces and pound the pieces flatly. In a saucepan, slowly heat 2-3 tablespoons of oil and 2 tablespoons of butter. Place flour in pie pan and dredge the salted breasts on each side. Place floured chicken in saucepan and cook on stovetop over low heat until it has a light golden color (Do not cook thoroughly). Remove chicken and set aside. In the same pan, cook the garlic to just golden. Add spinach and sprinkle of salt, toss, and then cover. Once wilted, remove from pan and set aside, keeping spinach warm. Add 2 tablespoons of butter and 1 tablespoon of oil into pan with lemon slice (if desired). Add lemon juice, chicken broth, wine and capers and cook slowly for 1-2 minutes. Add salt as desired. Add chicken breasts and cook until done, adding parsley just before they are finished. Place chicken over spinach and add sauce from pan.

*Source: Lidia Bastiani, "Lidia's Kitchen"*

### Tuna sauce with pasta

2 cans tuna with oil

½ cup onion, minced

1 teaspoon garlic, chopped

1 can anchovies

1 tablespoon capers, rinsed

1 16-ounce can crushed tomatoes

1 16-ounce can tomato sauce

Salt and pepper to taste

Crushed red pepper, if desired

¼ cup parsley, chopped

Pasta water, if needed

Pasta of choice (great with linguini)

Drain olive oil from tuna cans into saucepan or pot. Add onions and anchovies and cook until onions are soft and anchovies melt, adding olive oil as needed. Add garlic. Add tomatoes, salt, pepper and crushed red pepper and bring to a gentle boil. Lower heat and simmer for 20-30-minutes, then add parsley and tuna and cook another 10-15 minutes. Cook pasta. If sauce is too thick, add pasta water. Add pasta and serve. Tastes great when made ahead so flavors intensify.

*Source: We are Italian: The Recipe Exchange*

### Italian Mac and Cheese

Butter, for greasing dish

12 ounces wide egg noodles

2 cups heavy cream

2 ½ cups whole milk

2 teaspoons all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon salt, plus more for pasta water

¼ teaspoon, freshly ground black pepper

2 cups grated Fontina cheese (packed)

¾ cup finely grated Parmesan cheese (packed)

¾ cup grated mozzarella cheese (packed)

4 ounces cooked ham, dice (optional)

2 tablespoons fresh Italian parsley, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 450. Butter a 13- by 9-inch glass baking dish and set aside. Cook the noodles in a large pot of salted boiling water until tender but still firm to bite, stirring frequently, about 5 minutes. Drain well but do not rinse. Whisk the cream, milk, flour, salt and pepper in large bowl to blend. Stir in 1 cup Fontina, ½ cup Parmesan, ½ cup mozzarella, ham (if using), and parsley. Add the noodles and toss to coat. Transfer the noodle mixture to the prepared baking dish. Toss the remaining 1 cup Fontina, ¼ cup Parmesan and ¼ cup mozzarella in a small bowl to blend. Sprinkle the cheese mixture over the noodle mixture. Bake until the sauce bubbles and cheese melts and begins to brown on top, about 20 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

*Source: giadadelaurentiis.com*



## Taste of Italy VII marks return of Sister City event

Like most local not-for-profit organizations, the Rockford Italian Sister City Alliance (RISCA) struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic but is hopeful of a strong comeback in 2022. With its main purpose to raise funds for high school students from Rockford's Sister City of Ferentino, Italy, RISCA was able to organize a Taste of Italy VI Coupon Book in 2021, which sold for \$20. The group also is grateful for the restaurants and clubs that participated as well as those who made the book a success.

RISCA hopes to complete the comeback with the return to a traditional event, Taste of Italy VII, which is scheduled to be held Sunday, November 6, 2022, at the Venetian Club. As in past years, the event will feature signature Italian dishes from local restaurants and clubs. In addition, the organization is in discussion with Ferentino officials in hopes that a student visit to Rockford can be arranged in time for the Taste of Italy VII.

In addition, RISCA is committed to digitizing its historical documents, pictures, awards and other items so they can be preserved for future generations. The organization also is interested in collecting additional documentation from individuals or families that may be of interest for its archives.

RISCA would welcome individuals who may be interested in supporting the Sister City concept as well as working to promote and preserve the relationship between Rockford and Ferentino. For information, visit the RISCA website at [ourrisca.org](http://ourrisca.org) or email it at [risca2006@gmail.com](mailto:risca2006@gmail.com).

## Dance troupes seek new members

Do you like to dance? Are you drawn to all things Italian? Then we invite you to join us.

Established in 1985, *Amici Italiani* (Italian friends) Dance Troupe currently has groups for adults and youth. And each is seeking new dancers. The adult troupe is for those 14 and older, while the youth troupe is for those between 6- and 13-years old. Even if you know nothing about Italian folk dancing, the troupe leaders will teach you. Practices are scheduled once a week, with new dances performed for the first time at the *Festa Italiana* in August.

Although Italian heritage is not required, *Amici Italiani* is seeking people who want to laugh and have fun. Its main goals are to preserve and share the Italian culture, by educating and entertaining audiences with the color and warmth of the rich Italian heritage of its members. Among the dances performed are various *Quadriglias*, *Saltarellos*, *Mazuracas*, *Tarantellas* and *Codigliones*.

The troupes dance at festivals, community events, parties, weddings and more. A highlight of *Amici Italiani* was representing Italy in the 1994 Soccer World Cup Opening Ceremony at Soldier Field in Chicago.

For information on the adult troupe, call Bea Giammarese Ricotta at 815-520-1010; for youth troupe information, call Pauline Urso at 815-218-0063.

## Carnevale celebrated at Ethnic Heritage Museum

The Italian Gallery of the Ethnic Heritage Museum is featuring the exhibit *Carnevale*, known as Mardi Gras or Carnival in the United States. The event takes place in the weeks leading up to Easter. Italy celebrates *Carnevale* with a winter festival highlighted by parades, masquerade balls, entertainment, music and parties. *Carnevale* occurs on *Mardtedi Grasso* or Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, which is March 2, 2022.

The Heritage Museum Park, open on Sundays from 2-4 p.m., is an historical campus containing the Ethnic Heritage Museum and Graham-Ginestra House. The Ethnic Heritage Museum is a cultural center and museum, featuring six ethnic galleries: -- African, Hispanic, Irish, Italian, Lithuanian and Polish.

The Heritage Museum Park is located in the 1100 block of South Main Street. Masks are required for all indoor activities. The Ethnic Heritage Museum is handicap accessible. There is parking available in the parking lot on the corner of South Main and Morgan Streets next to the Graham-Ginestra House and on Loomis Street by the museum. For more information call 815-962-7402 or visit [www.ethnicheritagemuseum.org](http://www.ethnicheritagemuseum.org).

## Sock Monkey History Day set at Midway Village

In the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, Rockford was known as a knitting center and, by the start of World War I, had five companies producing up to 15,000 pairs of socks a day. One of the leading manufacturers was Nelson Knitting, opened by Swedish immigrant John Nelson in 1870. To make their socks stand out, Nelson Knitting incorporated red yarn into the heels of their socks. Thus, the sock monkey was said to be created by resourceful seamstresses.

Nelson Knitting was located in the 900 block of South Main Street in South Rockford, and among the hundreds of the seamstresses and other workers who produced these iconic socks were Italian immigrants as well as those from other generations.

Recognizing the significance of this iconic item to Rockford's industrial past, the Midway Village Museum will hold Sock Monkey History Day on Saturday, March 12, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visitors will sew their own sock monkey with guided instruction, and have the opportunity to attend an hour-long presentation of the sock monkey doll given by a costumed history interpreter. Tours of the exhibit "The Missing Link: Socks, Monkeys and Rockford's Industrial Past."

Among the events are sock-making workshops from 9-11 a.m., 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., and 2-4 p.m.; a sock monkey gallery presentation from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.; and a tour of the exhibit from noon to 4 p.m.

Costs are \$10 for adults and \$8 for children 5- to 12-years-old. Fees include workshops, tours and presentations. Register at the museum, 6799 Guilford Road or online at [midwayvillage.com](http://midwayvillage.com). For information, call 815-397-9112.





## Photo highlights from Fall 2021 events



Clockwise from right, photos from the GRIAA Hall of Fame Banquet, October 9, 2021, include Hall of Fame recipient Mike Doyle and his wife Nora; Special Recognition recipient for Volunteering, Fran Nelson (third from right) and family members (from left), Wayne Nelson, Mary Nelson, Lisa Keung, Josephine Zeppieri and Kim Kannensohn; Special Recognition recipient for Volunteering, Jerry D'Agostin and his wife Katie with (from left) granddaughters Joey and Zoey D'Agostin; and the Giamalva Family, Lou (second from right), and sons Jeff, Dave and Tom, which received Special Recognition for Business.



Above, GRIAA Chair Mike Maffioli entertains the audience at the 2021 Hall of Fame Banquet at the Venetian Club. At right, shoe wear over the years was displayed on a table representing Palace Shoes.



At left, GRIAA Board Members accept a proclamation from the City of Rockford October 4, 2021, which designated October as Italian Heritage Month. From left, Val DeCastris, Frank Perrecone, Mike Maffioli, Bea Ricotta, Rosie Scalise Sheridan. At right, daughters of former state legislator Zeke Giorgi at a celebration October 10, 2021, in his honor at the Ethnic Heritage Museum as part of Italian American Heritage Month. From left, Barb Vella, Betty Giorgi and Beverly Giorgi Padron.





Greater Rockford Italian American Association – GRIAA

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created by designer  
Joseph LaRose, can  
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*See Page 4 for a story  
about how this Rockford  
native became famous.*

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## 2021-2022 Calendar Items

*All dates are tentative and subject to change*

### March

12-13 – St. Joseph Altar, St. Anthony of Padua Church, Rockford  
(carry-outs available on March 13)

19-20 – St. Joseph Altar, St. Bridget Church, Loves Park  
(viewing only)

### August

5-7 – 43rd Festa Italiana, 400 St. Francis Drive, Rockford

### We want to hear from you. Contact us

Mike Doyle, *Editor* – [odoyle584@gmail.com](mailto:odoyle584@gmail.com)

Frank Perrecone, *Assistant Editor* – [frankaperrecone@aol.com](mailto:frankaperrecone@aol.com)

Paul Anthony Arco, *Assistant Editor* – [paularco@aol.com](mailto:paularco@aol.com)

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