# PAPPAGALLO

Funded by the Greater Rockford Italian American Association - GRIAA P.O. Box 2041 • Loves Park IL 61130 Volume LV111 (58) **Fall 2024**


# Sister City celebration

## Rockford embraces visitors from Ferentino who bring joy, friendship and piece of history

**By Mike Doyle**



*Don Giussepe Principali, priest from Ferentino, presents a relic of St. Ambrogio to the congregants at St. Anthony of Padua Church on August 1.*

Two cities became one in spirit and friendship for 10 days when 21 persons traveled from Ferentino, Italy, to visit their sister city in Rockford, a trip sponsored and organized by the Rockford Italian Sister Cities Alliance (RISCA).

Members of the delegation were welcomed at all turns of the visit from July 29 to August 6, and among the stops were Nicholas Conservatory, Anderson Gardens, *Festa Italiana*, Hard Rock Casino, Rockford's City Hall, the Coronado Theatre and Chicago for a river cruise. The first stop was Keeling-Puri Peace Plaza on July 30, which displays 44 international flags and messages of peace in 60 languages, including Italian.

The message in Italian at the plaza was significant and personal for Ferentino Mayor Piergianni Fiorletta. "I think about all the Italians who came here," he said through his interpreter and granddaughter Rebeca Iacoboni. "I am very grateful that they were welcomed here, and that they were a part of the richness here in America. I am happy about that."

The highlight of the trip came Thursday, August 1 at a 5:30 p.m. Mass, when a gift from the Italian city was ceremoniously presented to St. Anthony of Padua Church. Don Giuseppe Principali, pastor of the Cathedral Church in Ferentino, presented a bone relic of St. Ambrogio, the patron saint of the city. St. Ambrogio was a Centurian in the Roman Legion army who was posted to Ferentino, where he became devoted to the residents and Christianity. Facing persecution, he stood by the people and was put to death by the Romans.



*The delegation from Ferentino, Italy, and representatives of the Rockford Italian Sister City Alliance at the Keeling-Puri Peace Plaza on July 30. The Italian flag is the fourth flag from the left, two flags from the American flag.*

"St. Ambrogio has been so powerful for all people," Mayor Fiorletta said. "When our people came here (Rockford) for the first time, they were protected by their saint, and they prayed a lot to him." That protection spread to places far beyond Ferentino, a city of 21,000 southeast of Rome. "St. Ambrogio was the savior of people that came here and the people who were

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# GRIAA honors two



*Karla Clark*



*Paul Perrone*

*Popular author Karla Clark (left) and IHSA Hall of Fame girls basketball coach Paul Perrone will receive GRIAA' s Special Recognition award at its annual Hall of Fame dinner, October 12, at the Venetian Club. Stories on Pages 4 and 5.*

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*Members of the delegation from Ferentino's Cathedral form a ring around the revered statue of St. Ambrogio at St. Anthony of Padua Church on August 1.*

here," he said.

A relic is a sacred object that is revered by Catholics; it could be the bone of a saint or a piece from religious object, such the wood from the Holy Cross. Father Carl Beekman, pastor of St. Anthony, said that in 2004, a reliquary, or vessel that contained the sacred body of St. Ambrogio, was opened up in Ferentino, revealing several relics.



*The mayors of Ferentino and Rockford, Piergianna Fiorletta (left) and Tom McNamara, respectively in white shirts, clap at the opening ceremony of the 2024 Festa Italiana.*

The church decided to present some of those relics to churches, including St. Anthony. "It was their gift," Father Beekman said. "They wanted to bring it to a place where it would have significance, so it is staying here."

The Relic Mass at St. Anthony's was celebrated by Bishop David Malloy, who was attended by Father Beekman, Don Principali, and St. Anthony Deacon Peter Addotta and delegates from the Cathedral church. Many visitors from Ferentino were in attendance, as well as parishioners and other faithful. Francesco Loi, one of the visiting group members, said, "The Mass was beautiful, with the bishop, the priests from Ferentino and Rockford and the deacon."



*A visitor from Ferentino points out a familiar site on the large photo of the city that hangs at the St. Ambrogio Society Hall.*

The next day, the delegation,

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*Cole Naill (third from left) visited The Forum in Rome with his fellow exchange student travelers.*

## Exchange students from Rockford 'feel special' in Ferentino

**By Mike Doyle**

When Nicholas (Cole) Naill traveled to Ferentino, Italy, Rockford's Sister City, on a student exchange in June arranged through RISCA, he felt right at home. That's because he could speak the language.

"I speak Italian," said the 2024 graduate of Winnebago High School. "My dad served on a ship for two years in Italy and had to learn Italian in order to communicate. He taught me and my brother when we were little." It was a bit of a switch, he said, because "all of the students in Italy speak English very well."

When Cole arrived at the house of his host family, the Zimbellaris, they immediately began to prepare a dinner for him. "The mayor came, and there was tons of food," he said. "A bunch of students from the school there set up a dance for us, so it made us feel special. I didn't expect that at all; I was very surprised and happy."

The hosts brought the students to several places, such as the Amalfi Coast and Positano. "We went to Rome and saw the Coliseum, Trevi Fountain, St. Peter's Basilica," Cole said. "They took us underneath St. Peter's, and we actually saw the bones of St. Peter. That was amazing."

Then there was the food. "It was delicious," he said. "I ate pasta every day. But the (meal times) were different. We had breakfast at noon and dinner at 9 o'clock."

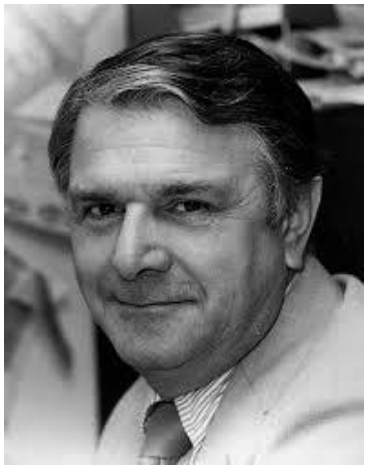
Cole became a fan of two dishes the Zimbellari Family made: Tiramisu and fried zucchini blossoms. "They taught me the (zucchini) recipe," he said. "I tried it at home and it was very good."

This fall, Cole will be attending the University of Illinois and plans to major in finance. He is hopeful that he will be able to spend one of his college years abroad – in Italy, of course. He added that one does not have to speak Italian to enjoy the country. "You can enjoy the culture, the food," he said. "So many of the people speak English very well. It's a great opportunity for anyone."

While the delegation from Ferentino was in Rockford recently, he talked with Rebecca Iacoboni, who had been an exchange student in Rockford. He and Rebecca, the granddaughter of Ferentino's mayor, used the visit to work together and plan to form RISCA Forward. It is their hope to work in their own two countries to find and involve younger people in the sister city exchange program

# State Lottery turns 50, thanks to legendary leader 'Zeke' Giorgi

**By Valeri DeCastris**



*"Father of the Illinois Lottery"*
*Zeke Giorgi*

As the Illinois Lottery celebrates its 50th anniversary this year with events and promotions at community and retail sites, no celebration would be complete without an acknowledgment of appreciation of the late state Representative E.J. "Zeke" Giorgi. The legendary statesman, named to the Greater Rockford Italian American Association's Hall of Fame in 1985, spearheaded the legislation that led to the creation of the popular game.

On December 14, 1973, Governor Dan Walker signed the bill establishing the lottery in Giorgi's Rockford office. Hugely successful but controversial at first, it created many millionaires and contributes 25% of earnings to the Common School Fund – more than $24 billion to K-12 schools since 1985.

The first drawing was held in the summer of 1974 at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield. By the end of that year, 100 million lottery tickets had been sold.

The lottery also funds health, veterans and aged programs, Special Olympics, police memorials, conservation, tourism and economic development. Illinois was the first state to air a live drawing on TV and the first to adopt a scratch-off ticket.

Giorgi, a non-gambler and fierce advocate for working people and education, was born in Ferrentino, Italy, Rockford's sister city. Legendary and extremely popular with both Democrats and Republicans, he began public life as a Rockford alderman and deputy township assessor. Later, he served 28 years in the Illinois House of Representatives, honored as "Dean of the House."

Springfield's Lottery Building and Rockford's State building bear his name. Known for extraordinary constituent service, he was so recognizable that an envelope mailed with only his picture but no address arrived at his Rockford office. Although best known for creating the lottery – and dubbed "Father of the Illinois Lottery" – he spearheaded Rockford's University of Illinois medical school campus, the State of Illinois building, Northern Illinois University Law School, Metro Center, Riverfront Museum Park, Belvidere Chrysler assembly plant, Milestone and Highway I-39, named in his honor in 2003. He died at the age of 72 on October 24, 1993.

His legacy continues in Springfield where his grandson, David Vella, serves in the House of Representatives. Vella credits him as a person who really wanted to do good for people.

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# Sister City ... *Continued from Page 2*

led by Mayor Fiorletta, was recognized and welcomed at the opening ceremony of the 45th annual *Festa Italiana*, the long-running Italian-American cultural event that coincided with the visit of the delegation from Italy.

"We are so unbelievably honored to have you and your entire delegation," said Karen Cantele, co-chair of the Greater Rockford Italian American Association and RISCA board member. "We'd like to thank you for coming, for what has been built and we look to continuing to build a strong relationship with you and your entire community."

Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara, who took part in the opening ceremony, said he was glad to have renewed his friendship with his Ferentino counterpart. The mayor and his wife visited Ferentino in the May of 2024. "We had the most amazing time with the mayor and the Ferentino community," he said. "My wife and I made an amazing connection. I looked forward to the *Festa* to get reconnected."

The connection with Ferentino runs deep in Rockford's Italian-American community. The St. Ambrogio Society, was established by immigrants from Ferentino in 1918. Additionally, the society is the only one of the four located in the traditional Italian-American neighborhood of South Rockford and is only two blocks from the St. Anthony's.

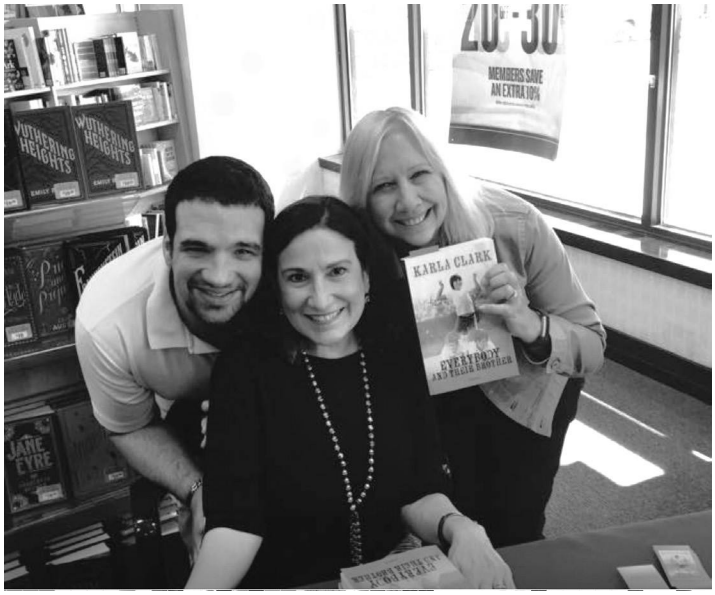
That connection hit home with St. Ambrogio President Mike Sartino, who said he was overjoyed when the group visited the club on Saturday, August 3. "It was great, fantastic," he said. "People came up to me and said it was the best time they had had. They played bocce on our courts and danced in a train outside. They said it was their favorite place, after the casino."

Hard Rock Casino hosted an Italian Night with Italian music

*Continued on Page 9*

# Karla Clark widely recognized for contributions to writing, arts

**By Mike Doyle**




*Karla Clark (center) with her son Jonathan (left) and friend Lori Michalsen, who displays Karla's novel, "Everybody and Their Brother"*

As a writer, Karla Clark has produced works in five forms – adult and middle-grade novels, short stories, picture books and non-fiction. As an artist and art lover, Karla has created paper collages, and she has established an annual art show featuring 30 local artists.

Her contributions to the arts have not been overlooked. Karla received the Boylan Catholic High School Alumni Excellence Award in 2019 and was a Rockford Woman of the Year nominee in 2007. In keeping with such accomplishments and accolades, Karla has been selected to receive Special Recognition in Literature and Arts by the Greater Rockford Italian American Association (GRIAA). She will be honored at GRIAA's annual Hall of Fame and Special Recognition Dinner on Saturday, October 12, at the Venetian Club. The next day, on Sunday, October 13, she will be recognized at the annual Columbus Day Mass at 10:30 a.m. at St. Anthony of Padua Church.

Karla said she was "genuinely surprise and humbled" when she received the news of the honor. "It was a moment of reflection, thinking about my family and the generations before me who shaped who I am," she said. "I felt a strong sense of gratitude and pride. I wish my parents were still here to help me celebrate this honor."

Karla has Sicilian roots on both sides of her family. Her father was Frank Manarchy, which was "Americanized" from Manascalci. Her mother Margaret was a Parlapiano and she remembers her Nana making pasta every Sunday. She is a typical second-generation Italian-American, maintaining the traditions – but not the language – of their grandparents. She is a true product of South Rockford, growing up on Montague Street, attending St. Anthony's school, where she was in the last class before it consolidated into St. Francis School. "We were kind of in our own bubble," she said.

She fell in love with the written word early in life, and, after graduating from Boylan, she studied journalism at Rock Valley College and Northern Illinois University. Family came next and it consists of her husband Scott, sons Jordan (partner Christina and "grandgirl" Isabella) and Jonathan (Jonny); and siblings Linda Cleary, Dana Manarchy, Paula Sentovich (John Sentovich) and Frank Manarchy (Valerie Curry); several nieces and nephews; and a great niece and nephew. When Karla was 40, she returned to writing.

Her first book features an Italian-American family. Although it is located in Chicago and not Rockford, she drew on her own experiences with her siblings. After five years of writing and four of marketing, "Between Courses: A Culinary Love Story," was published. It was the first of her three adult novels.

Since then, she has broadened her writing vista and has been able to reach more readers. The most popular and visually appealing is the picture book series that began with "You Be Mommy." There are three more in that series (and one due next year), and two others, one coming out in December. She also has a non-fiction book in the works.

She explained her motivation to write in different genres came from a desire to challenge herself to reach audiences with varying interests. "Each genre has its own special appeal and allows me to address different themes and topics that I find compelling," she said. "While I enjoy all aspects of writing, the greatest joy comes from seeing how my work resonates with readers and knowing that it has made a difference in their lives."

That is especially true with her picture books. "I am so touched when parents share stories about how the books have impacted their children. That's most rewarding."

She is comfortable in all genres. But all writers need a break. "I consider myself a writer and being an artist is secondary to that," she said. "When I get writer's block, I can go to art. I'm not the best artist in the world, but I have fun with it. I'm glad to have so many talents and the ability to use them. I am so blessed."

Another blessing is having a big Italian family to draw on for comfort, culture and cooking. "There was always a sense of togetherness, with large family gatherings filled with food, laughter and stories," she said. "Being honored by GRIAA for Special Recognition is meaningful to me. It feels like a celebration of my Italian heritage and the values my family instilled in me.

"The strong bonds we shared made every occasion special, and these experiences have left a lasting impact on me. More so, as I have grown older and see that many people don't have a sense of culture and heritage. My family has grounded me and lifted me. And I treasure it!"

# Paul Perrone winningest girls basketball coach at two high schools

**By Mike Doyle**

With 511 victories, Paul Perrone is one of the most successful girls high school basketball coaches in the state. He is a member of the Illinois High School Basketball Coaches Hall of Fame and owns the winningest record in girls basketball at two NIC-10 high schools.

Perhaps his greatest legacy is what he established off the basketball court with his involvement in school and community programs. "As any notable coach would understand, basketball is temporary," Paul said. "You have got to teach kids life skills, about all the things going on in the world, and, the best way to learn, is through active involvement."

For his outstanding achievements on and off the basketball court, Paul will receive a Special Recognition award in Sports at the Greater Rockford Italian American Association's annual Hall of Fame and Special Recognition Dinner on Saturday, October 12, at the Venetian Club. He will then be recognized at the Columbus Day Mass, Sunday, October 13, at St. Anthony of Padua Church.

In his nomination form, Paul's brother David wrote, "Paul has been a role model to his family and the lives he has touched through community programs. (He) believes in helping others, which he has proven in his life."

Paul was appreciative of Special Recognition by GRIAA, saying "It's a tremendous honor coming from the Italian community. The basketball hall of fame honor meant a lot to me, but this is a very special award because it's coming from my own people.

"I grew up in an Italian neighborhood on North Madison Street at a time when the kids used to play outside every day. You'd have 20 kids get together, and we played baseball, football, tennis and we'd fish on the Rock River and in the old lagoon by the log cabin."

Not only did those experiences leave a lasting impression, they provided the spark for his eventual career. "I grew up a block away from the downtown YMCA, and, because I was involved in sports all my life, I decided I'd like to be a part of that. I decided I'd like to be a coach," he said. Early on he was calling plays and organizing systems. He went on to play varsity basketball at Boylan High School, where he set the then-school record of 37 points in a game.

His schooling included Rock Valley College, Rockford College (now University) and Northern Illinois University. The first rung on his basketball coaching ladder was at St. James School, which he attended, then he went on to coach at Harlem High School, eventually leading the boys and girls freshmen teams. He moved up to become head girls varsity basketball coach at Harlem for 14 years beginning in 1991, compiling a record of 213-180.



*Hall of Fame coach Paul Perrone in action on the sideline while coaching Boylan's girls basketball team.*

Paul returned to his alma mater as an assistant to Boylan's legendary coach Steve Goers before taking over the girls basketball program. In his 10 years at Boylan, he posted a 298-86 record with four NIC-10 titles.

While at Harlem, he got his players involved in helping in the community, first with the Red Ribbon Program. The initial focus of the program was drug prevention, which evolved into informing high school students about leadership and personal development. With such character and values, he said, "they will have the power to resist those temptations."

His next volunteer milestone was his leadership of the NIC-10 Leadership Council. "Each school would send a team of 15 students where we would teach them how to be learners and be impactful in their own schools and athletic programs," he said.

Then, over a span of four years, Paul was able to raise about $40,000 for the Poor Clare Monastery in Rockford, some of which helped repair an elevator at the convent of cloistered nuns. "That was really eye-opening for my players," he said.

Paul's coaching career ended when he was not rehired by Boylan because of an internal employment matter. Now retired, he spends most of time with family, especially his grandchildren.

Paul is proud of his Italian heritage – his grandfather Eligio Castano was the first president of the Verdi Club, which is located on Madison Street. He learned how to prepare Italian meals from his mother and has taught the recipes to his daughters Melissa Dunn, Paula Wade and Lisa Falzone and his six grandchildren. That includes gnocchi, risotto, polenta, Italian cookies, *Lenticchie e Salameat* (lentils with sausage) and cannoli. "We still make our own sugo and meatballs in the pan that our parents used," he said.

He said that part of his success had roots in that Italian neighborhood. "One of the great things about being Italian is family," he said. "I wanted all my (players) to support each other. Sometimes, families split and go different ways. It doesn't if you support each other."

# Two steps forward, one step back

## Dual Citizenship journey takes U-turn after two-year wait

**By Frank Perrecone**

Three years after starting the process, and, after a two-year wait for an appointment at the Chicago Italian Consulate, I arrived on the eighteenth floor at 500 North Michigan Avenue on July 30. I brought all of the required documents to present to the consular clerk. Or, at least I thought I did.

When my wife, Jody, and I arrived early at the consulate, I was expecting a formal and dignified setting with an Italian soldier or two providing security. However, the public area of the consulate office reminded me of a Secretary of State driver's license office, but on a smaller scale. It was spartan and not well lit.

The only sense of formality came from the Italian consular seal affixed to a wall and flanked by two flags, one the Italian flag. Work stations consisted of six windows, one for reception, one for citizenship and two each for visas and passports.

I was directed to the citizenship window where, eventually a consular clerk appeared behind the thick glass and told me to wait, since I was early. While waiting, I reviewed all the documents secured by Italian Citizenship Assistance (ICA), the firm I retained to guide me through the process. The documents, which took nearly three years to secure, were: my birth certificate, first marriage certificate and judgment for dissolution, second marriage certificate, my wife Jody's birth certificate, my grandfather's Italian birth certificate, my grandparents' marriage certificate, my grandfather's death certificate, my grandfather's naturalization papers from the United States Custom and Immigration Services (USCIS), my grandfather's naturalization papers filed with the Winnebago County Clerk, my grandmother's baptism record, my grandmother's no-record-of-birth, my grandmother's death certificate, my mother's birth certificate, my parents' marriage certificate, my mother's death certificate, my father's birth certificate, and his death certificate.

Each of the above documents required Certification and an Apostille, with the exception of the naturalization papers from USCIS. Each document was translated into Italian. ICA, on my behalf, requested the certified documents, secured the Apostille for each, and translated them into Italian.

In addition to the above, ICA prepared my application for Italian citizenship, a declaration that I never renounced Italian citizenship, and a declaration that my grandfather never renounced Italian citizenship. These three documents needed to be signed in the presence of the consular clerk.

After a short wait, I was called to the window. The clerk requested my money order in the amount of $323.30 payable to the Consulate General of Italy. She then requested individual documents and closely inspected each. One by one, each document passed her meticulous inspection, with the exception of the Judgment for Dissolution of Marriage with Certificate of Dissolution. She asked in a rather stern voice, "Where is the 'Divorce No Appeal' document?" I've been an attorney for over 43 years and have never heard of such a document. She told me I'd have to supplement my application with the document before my application would be considered. That meant I would have to return home to continue, yet again, the tedious process that began so long ago.




*Frank Perrecone at the Italian Consulate in Chicago*

Once back in Rockford, I contacted ICA and provided my current representative with the result of my appointment. She confirmed that I needed the Divorce No Appeal document and that the representative before her should have noticed that the document was missing. The reason it was missing is because Illinois Circuit Clerks do not maintain or issue Divorce No Appeal certificates. As I understand now, the ICA representative should have also requested the clerk's official docket entries for my divorce case, which would show there was no entry reflecting an appeal.

A few days later, I secured the necessary documents from the Winnebago County Circuit Clerk's office. I then sent those records to the Illinois Secretary of State's Office in Chicago for Apostilles. After I receive the documents back, I will send them to the Italian Consulate in Chicago and wait to hear if my documents pass this phase of scrutiny. If not, I should be able to further supplement my citizenship application with additional documentation. It is my understanding that once consular staff deems my application complete, Italian authorities have two years to decide whether citizenship is conferred.

Needless to say, the Italian government does not make it easy to acquire citizenship by descent. In fact, it's nearly impossible to secure an appointment with the Chicago Consulate. Once secured, the appointment isn't for two years. For those considering dual citizenship, be prepared to spend a lot of time and effort in the collection, certification and translation of documents. And be prepared to supplement your application with additional documents. Once consular staff deems your application complete, it's another two years to hear back.

Even though many first-, second- and third-generation Italian-Americans qualify for Italian citizenship by descent, obtaining it is a long, tedious and arduous journey. My recommendation is only start the process if you are in it for the long haul.

# *Buon Natale!*

## Italian workers began tradition of Christmas tree in New York's Rockefeller Plaza in 1931



***Dressed in overalls and jackets, wearing work boots and hats, Italian workers line up on Christmas Eve 1931 at the site of Rockefeller Plaza for that week's pay at the Midtown Manhattan construction site. Many of them chipped in to purchase the first Christmas tree at the site, which has become a annual tradition.***

A well-known Christmas holiday tradition began nearly 93 years ago at a New York construction site with a skinny balsam fir tree decorated with cranberry, garlands made from the tin foil of dynamite blasting caps, tinsel and tin cans and paper for ornaments made by workers' families.

It was erected by Italian construction workers, who were excavating the site of the future Rockefeller Center. It was 1931, at the height of the Great Depression, and these immigrant workers were fortunate to have jobs, as dangerous as they were. One of the workers was Cedidio Perruzza, who came to the U.S. in 1901 from the village of San Donato Val di Comino, Italy, located west of Rome in the Central Apennines. Perruzza, like most of his countrymen from that region, took a job in excavation. Their demolition jobs were dangerous and filthy and they often worked under the fist of Irish contractors, who endured their own discrimination a few decades earlier.

Perruzza's story appeared in the book, "An Unlikely Union: The Love-Hate Story of New York's Irish and Italians" by Paul Moses, and was referenced in a New York Times story in 2015. To brighten the construction site, for at least a short time, Perruzza had an idea. "My grandfather took up a collection amongst his men to purchase a tree," said his grandson, Steve Elling of Barrington, Massachusetts. "(Then he) picked up a tree and brought it there."

From the beginning, the 20-foot tree became a gathering place as workers lined up in front of it to get their weekly paychecks, starting in 1931. Another tree was erected the next year, and in 1933 came the lighting of the first official tree, a 50-footer, and the start of a "holiday beacon for New Yorkers and visitors alike, according to the Rockefeller Center website. A skating rink was added in 1936 in the plaza, located between West 58th and 51st streets and 5th and 6th avenues in Midtown Manhattan.

Last year's tree was a 50-foot Norwegian spruce that was festooned with 50,000 lights. The tree-lighting ceremony, which officially kicks off the Christmas season in New York, is witnessed in person by thousands and is watched by millions live on NBC-TV. The 2024 tree-lighting ceremony will be held Wednesday, December 4.

And to think all this started with an idea and the generosity of Italian immigrants. According to the rockefellercenter.com, the tree was "from the beginning, a gathering place and reflection of what was happening in the world around it." It is a reminder that the towering, glittering, sparkling tree had humble beginnings thanks to the resourceful, big-hearted workers channeling the spirit of people who migrated to the U.S., who pooled their resources and began a treasured American tradition.

*Sources: nytimes.com; rockefellercenter.com; orderisda.org; sonsofitaly.com; niaf.com; Wikipedia.com*

**2024 Hall of Fame and Special Recognition Award Banquet**
**Saturday, October 12th, 2024**

**Venetian Club, 2180 Elmwood Rd. Rockford Please join us to honor our 2024 inductees:**

***Special Recognition: Karla Clark – Literature and Art***
***Paul Perrone - Sports***

**We encourage all Hall of Fame members to attend and be recognized.**

**Please visit www.GRIAA.org to print your reservation form or Email Karen Cantele at kkcantele22@gmail.com**

***Reservations are required***

***Table Sponsors are available for $100 Please email kkcantele22@gmail.com**

**********

**Please join us for the 2024 Columbus Day Mass**
**Sunday, October 13th**
10:30 a.m. at St. Anthony's Church
1010 Ferguson St., Rockford, IL

*All members of the Hall of Fame, Past Inductees and their families, are invited to be a part of the entrance procession at Mass. Please arrive at 10:15 a.m.*

# Nick LaRocca recorded first jazz record

## Son of Sicilian immigrants blended sounds of New Orleans and popularized music originally known as 'jass'

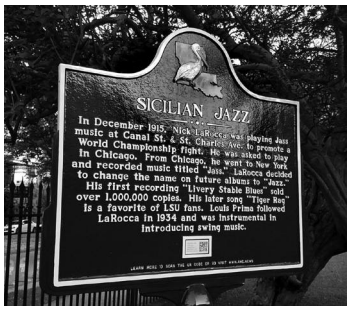
**By Mike Doyle**

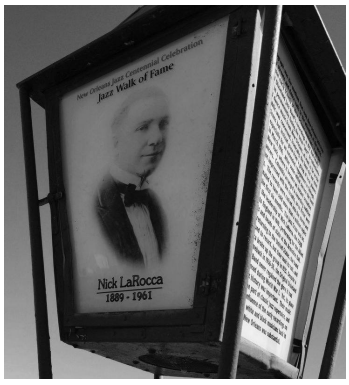
Nick LaRocca, the son of Sicilian immigrants, had such an influence on the introduction of jazz to our culture more than 100 years ago that he has two historic monuments in his native New Orleans. In addition, his trademark blend of improvised dance music in the Crescent City resulted in one other, Louie Prima, to become famous as well.

In his later years. Nick LaRocca took credit for being the "Father of Modern Jazz." While that has been disputed, he did help to popularize jazz, and his jazz band was the first to make a recording of the distinctively American music style.

Dominic James "Nick" LaRocca was born April 11, 1889, to Girolamo and Vita (De Nina) LaRocca. Both parents emigrated from Sicily; his father from Salaparuta and his mother from Poggioreale. The villages, located 3 ½ miles apart in the Belice Valley of Trapani province, were both destroyed in a 1968 earthquake. Salaparuta was rebuild in a different location, but Poggioreale was abandoned and is known as Italy's most charming ghost town.

Although the LaRocca Family was poor, Nick's father had ambitions for his son to become successful. But Nick became infatuated with the sounds of brass bands and secretly taught himself to play the coronet. Soon, he had a day job as an electrician and a night gig playing music.




*At left, the State of Louisiana erected this memorial in the French Quarter to commemorate Nick LaRocca for his influence in jazz, original known as "jass."*
*At right, LaRocca is memorialized on the Robert Nims Jazz Walk of Fame on Delarounde Street in New Orleans.*

The sound he favored came from the streets of New Orleans. As a 16-year-old, he led a children's band with violist Henry Young, and played with other local musicians, most notably playing often with Papa Jack Laine's Reliance Band beginning in 1912. The lineage of the earliest jazz musicians and be linked



*Jazz pioneer Nick LaRocca*

to this marching band, which was the first to blend European, African and Latin music.

LaRocca, playing the trumpet and coronet, called his music "jass," and he was playing it in December, 1915, at the corner of Canal Street and St. Charles Avenue to promote a world championship fight. While there, he was asked to play his music in Chicago. Several other musicians were recruited, most of whom also played in the Reliance Band, and they joined LaRocca in Chicago in 1916 to form the Original Dixieland Jass Band. They were Eddie Edwards, Henry Ragas, Tony Sbarbaro, Larry Shields and LaRocca.

The band became popular in Chicago and that continued when it moved to New York. On February 26, 1917, at the Victor Talking Machine Company Studio in New York, LaRocca's band made the first jazz recording, "Livery Stable Blues," which featured horns that imitated the hoots, neighs and moos of farm animals as well as the rhythms and street-born instrumentation that became hallmarks of jazz. Also recorded was "The Dixieland Jass Band One-Step." Later in 1917, the band replaced "jass" to jazz in its name.

The two pieces were released in May, 1917, initially as a novelty. Prior to the band's move to New York, other New Orleans bands had played there, but they played vaudeville houses and were not taken seriously. "Livery Stable Blues" was first marketed as a novelty, but it became a surprise hit and American audiences liked the new music form called jazz.

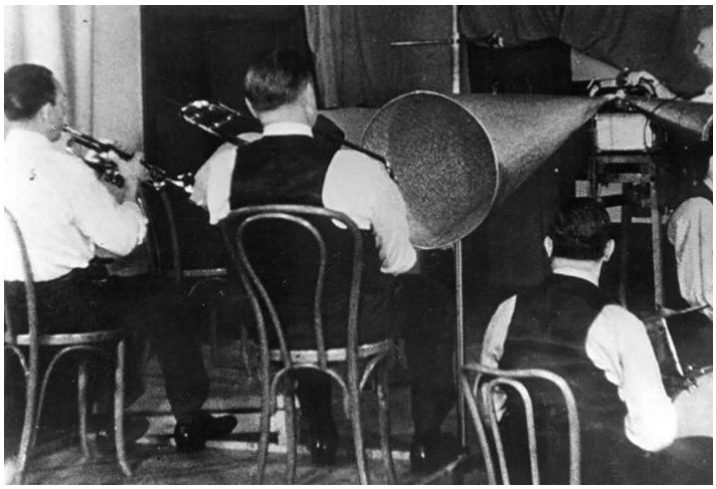
On March 25, 1918, in the same Victor Studio, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded LaRocca's "Tiger Rag," which has become a jazz standard and one of the most covered of its genre with hundreds of versions. Artists who have recorded versions include Benny Goodman, Frank Sinatra, Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, Bix Biederbeck, Louie Armstrong, the Mills Brothers, even Gene Autry and the Beatles.

In 1928, LSU's band played it as a pre-game fight song at football games and it has been heard at dozens of other colleges and high schools. The "Hold That Tiger" refrain is universally recognized.

Mirroring the fate of popular bands even to this day, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band had hard times. Band members became restless, then LaRocca suffered a nervous breakdown in 1924. In 1925, LaRocca returned to New Orleans to run a

*Continued on Page 9*

## Nick LaRocca ... *Continued from Page 8*



***Nick LaRocca (left) and his band make the first jazz record. LaRocca plays his coronet into a funnel-like metal horn that concentrates sound waves and sends vibrations to a stylus that cuts into a wax master disc.***

contracting business. The band had a brief comeback in the late 1930s, and in the 1950s, LaRocca attempted to cement his legacy as the sole creator of jazz. He wrote letters to newspapers and radio and TV shows stating his case, but that only tarnished his credibility as well as his reputation and career.

LaRocca died February 22, 1961, and, despite the downturn in popularity, he has been recognized for his influence on jazz. In homage to his roots in the French Quarter, Nick has a monument in the French Quarter at the corner of Esplanade Avenue and Decatur Street across from the New Orleans Jazz Music Museum. And across the Mississippi River in the Algiers neighborhood of Orleans Parish, you can find his second monument as part of the Jazz Walk of Fame.

In an interesting twist, another great jazz artist, Louie Prima, was born in Salaparuta, the hometown of LaRocca's father, and raised in New Orleans. While there is no evidence that Prima was directly influenced by LaRocca, he had to have been familiar with the style and substance of LaRocca's ground-breaking music. Prima was one of the first to popularize swing music.

*Sources: Wikipedia; allmusic.com; theadvocate.com; hmdb.org; musicapple.com; adp.library.ucsb.com*

## Sister City ... *Continued from Page 3*

and more, said RISCA chair Dina Getty: "They were able to dance and sing. There we so many things that went into every day. I think we exhausted them."

Looking back, Dina said there were many working parts to such a visit with several people to consider. "We thought it was an impossible task, but it couldn't have worked out better," she said, adding that the community stepped up during the entire visit. "I am grateful to our many generous sponsors who made this experience happen. The extensive planning was done in partnership with the City of Rockford, Winnebago County and the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. My deepest gratitude to our Sister City RISCA board members and volunteers who gave so much of their time to this historical visit. Rockford is a community we can all be proud of."

## South America has most residents of Italian descent

Between 1880 and 1914, more than 13 million people emigrated from Italy to other parts of the world. Italian-Americans like to think that most sailed to the U.S. to become an important addition of our melting pot, but demographics show that seven South American countries have the greatest percentage of Italian descendants among the top 15.

The No. 1 country on the list is Argentina, the ancestral home of two of the world's most famous people – Pope Francis and soccer legend Lionel Messi. Between 1879 and 1960, two million people arrived in Argentina, where more than half of the population, 62 percent, of has Italian roots. It is followed by Uruguay with 44 percent, Paraguay with 37, Venezuela 16 and Brazil with 15. France is sixth with eight percent, then Switzerland at 7, the U.S. at 5.4, then Colombia, Canada, Australia and Belgium at 4, Chile at 3.5 and the Dominican Republic and El Salvador at 3.5.

In the U.S., New York has the greatest percentage of Italian descendants with 11.97 percent, followed by Massachusetts 11.62, Pennsylvania 10.97, New Hampshire 9.71, Delaware 8.08, Vermont 7.02, Ohio 6.05 and Illinois, eighth with 5.75.

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# Scholarship opportunities for Italian-American students

Several scholarships are available for students of Italian-American descent ranging from elementary and high school to college and post-graduate schools.

**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 2023 *Festa Italiana*, more than $805,000 in scholarships has been presented. Visit www.griaa.org, then onto the Scholarship Committee, chaired by Frank Valentine. Scholarship information can be viewed and printed by clicking on Application Form.

**Columbian Club Charitable Foundation**

Several scholarships of various amounts are awarded to graduating high school seniors and undergraduate/graduate students of Italian descent who are permanent residents of the state of Illinois. Scholarships are also available for undergraduates in music education and graduate students in law, medicine, and dentistry. The deadline for application for 2025 has passed but underclassman can go to the website for information for the 2025-26 scholarships. Contact the foundation at www.columbianclub.org.

**Sons of Italy Foundation, Illinois**

Several scholarships will be awarded to students of full or partial Italian ancestry graduating from public or private high school. Financial need, scholastic record, activities showing character and leadership are the criteria. Personal statements and faculty recommendations are required. The deadline for application was not available in time for publication, but the 2024 deadline was March 7. For information regarding 2025 scholarships, contact the Illinois Sons of Italy Foundation, 9447 W. 144th Place, Orland Park, IL, 60462or by email at osia.org.

**National Italian American Foundation**

Sixty to 70 scholarships from $2,500 to $12,000 are awarded annually to undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate, medical and law students. Applicants must be of Italian descent and members of NIAF. Application for the 2024-25 academic year opens December 1, 2024, and deadline is March 1, 2025. Information is available at www.niaf.org/scholarships.

# 2024-25 Fall, Winter Festivals in Italy

**September *(Settembre)***

12-22 – Scansano Grape Festival, famous for Morellino wine

**October *(Ottobre)***

11-13 – Sagra del Pistachio (Pistachio Festival), Bronte, Sicily

**November *(Novembre)***

16-Dec. 1 – Sagra del Tartufo Bianco, white truffle festival, San Miniato

**December-January *(Decembre-Gennaio)***

8-January 1 – Umbria Winter Jazz Festival, Orvieto

**March *(Marzio)***

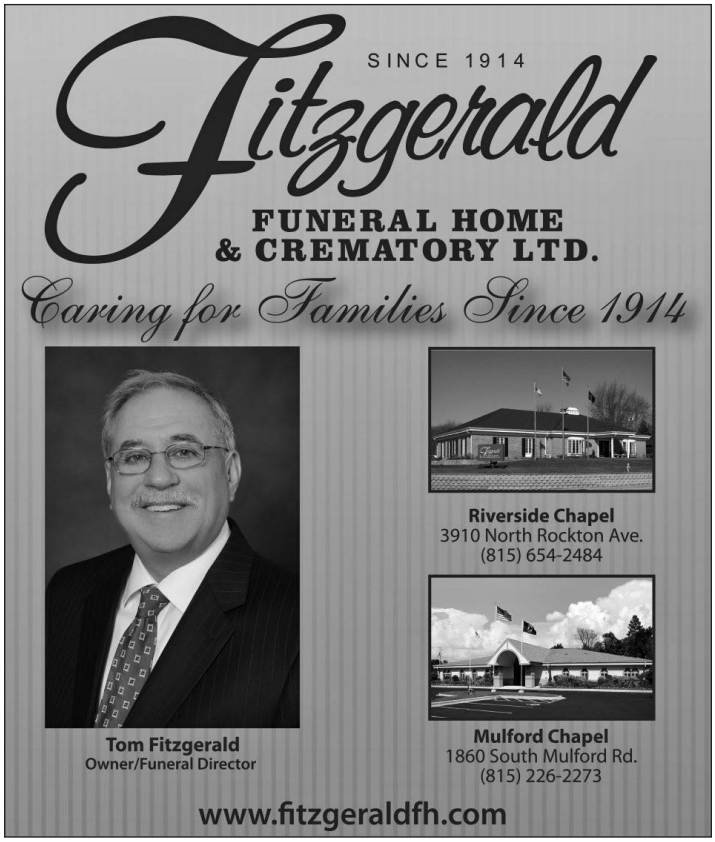
2-4 – Ivrea Carnavele, featuring groups throwing oranges

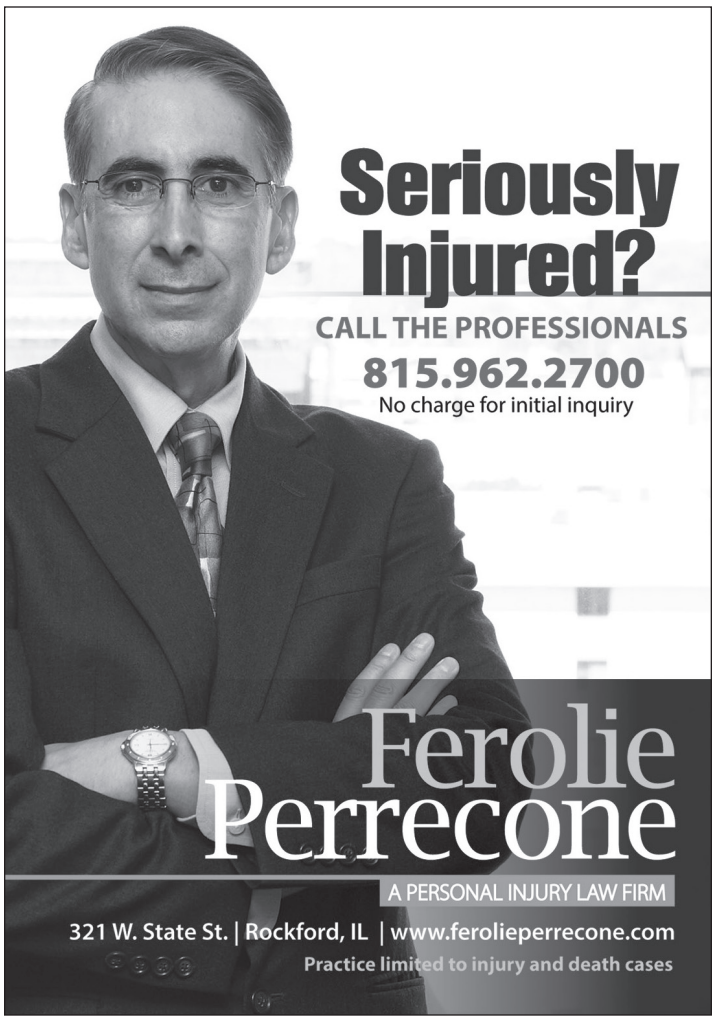
# *Curiosita Italiane*

## Little known facts about Italy

- Italy is home to the greatest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, with 55.
- The Leaning Tower of Pisa actually leans at about a 4-degree angle.
- Italy has more varieties of cheese than any other country in the world, with over 500 different types.
- Venice, one of the most famous cities in Italy, is made up of 118 small islands.
- Italy is the world's largest producer of wine, accounting for about one-third of global production.
- The Italian name for Italy is *Italia*, derived from the ancient name *Italica*.
- The Colosseum in Rome is one of the most famous ancient structures in the world and could hold up to 80,000 spectators.
- Italy is the birthplace of the Renaissance art movement, which began in Florence in the 14th century.
- Italy has two independent states within its borders: Vatican City and San Marino.
- The world's smallest internationally recognized state, Vatican City, is located entirely within Rome.
- Italy is the world's leading producer of olive oil, accounting for around 20% of global production.
- The Italian national sport is bocce.
- The first known university in Europe was founded in Bologna, Italy, in 1088.

*Source: Abruzzesi Del Mondo post on Facebook*






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# Three special recipes make a complete meal

To make our recipe pages more personal, this issue we are featuring dishes that were provided by persons whose stories appear in this issue. It so happens that the submitted recipes provide a complete meal – appetizer, salad and main course.

The appetizer comes from Nicholas (Cole) Naill, whose story about his student-exchange trip to Ferentino in June features a meal prepared by his host family. When Cole returned home, he made *Fiori di Zucca Fritti* (Fried Zucchini Blossoms) with the recipe he learned in Italy from Nonna Carla. We are printing the recipe as sent to Cole by Nonna Carla, which means it is in Italian.

Locally acclaimed author Karla Clark, who will receive Special Recognition honors at the annual GRIAA dinner in October, provided her Italian Salad recipe.

And Paul Perrone, who also will be honored by GRIAA with Special Recognition for his coaching career, talked about several family recipes but settled on *Lenticchie e Salameat*, (Lentils with Italian Sausage). He said this is a family favorite.

We hope you enjoy these selections, and, perhaps, we could make this a regular feature.

## Italian Tossed Salad

2 heads Romaine lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces
½ head Iceburg lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces
1 head of Red Leaf lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces
½ seedless cucumber, sliced
2 tomatoes, coarsely chopped
½ cup pitted and sliced Kalamata olives
½ pimento-stuffed salad olives
¼ cup chopped Vidalia or sweet onion
½ can quartered artichoke hearts (reserve half of the juice for dressing)
2 cooked Italian sausages, sliced, or 12 slices of Genoa salami, julienned

### Vinaigrette Dressing

Half of the juice from canned artichokes
¼ cup of extra virgin olive oil
¼ cup of balsamic vinegar
¼ cup of red wine or apple cider vinegar
¼ cup of water
½ to 1 cup of grated or shredded Asiago cheese
½ to 1 cup of mild Giardiniera (optional—rinse through a strainer to remove excess oil)
Salt and pepper and garlic powder to taste

### Homemade croutons

1 loaf of Italian or French bread cut into cubes

In a large bowl, mix the bread cubes with ¾ cup extra virgin olive oil. Coat well. Place bread cubes on cookie sheet and sprinkle liberally with grated Parmesan cheese, salt and pepper, and if desired, garlic powder. Bake or broil in oven, watching carefully. When browned, turn over and brown completely. Dress the salad with the vinaigrette right before serving. Add the croutons on last. Can also add crumbled blue cheese if desired.

*Source: Karla Clark Family recipe*

## Fried Zucchini Blossoms

***Fiori di Zucca Fritti***



*Acqua gassata ghiacciata, farina quanto basta, sale fino, un po' di zucchero, girare con la frusta. Questa pastella è buona per tutte le verdure, dopodiché pulire bene il fiore dopo che è pulito mettere dentro la mozzarella asciutta con le acciughe infine richiudere per mettere nella pastella e friggere. - Nonna Carla*

12 zucchini blossoms
3 ounces sparkling water, iced
½ cup flour
¼ teaspoon fine salt
¼ teaspoon sugar
8-12 small slices of Mozzarella cheese, cut to size of flower
12 small pieces of anchovy

Mix iced sparkling water with flour as needed. Using a spoon, combine the mixture with fine salt and sugar and mix until the batter falls slowly from the spoon. This batter is good for all vegetables but especially the zucchini flower. Clean the flowers well, then add Mozzarella and a small piece of anchovy. Close the flower, place in the batter and fry! *Buon appetito*!

## Lentils and Special Italian Sausage

***Lenticchie e Salameat***

2 bags lentils
1 onion, chopped
1 tablespoon butter
Extra virgin olive oil
1 cup red wine
2 cups chicken broth
2 teaspoons tomato paste
2 shakes of garlic powder
1 pound sweet Italian sausage

Start by placing two bags of lentils and chicken broth into a crock pot and cook on high for 2-1/2 hours. Then in a pan brown onion in olive oil and butter. Cut sausage into 1-1/2-inch pieces and add to pan. Add cooked lentils and wine and simmer for 3 minutes. Cover lentil mixture with chicken broth, then add two teaspoons of tomato paste and garlic powder. Boil for 30 minutes, then simmer for two hours. As mixture cooks down, add chicken broth for desired texture.

*Source: Perrone Family recipe*

## Cherry Tomato Bruschetta

8 pieces country or crusty bread
10 ounces cherry tomatoes
1 sprig fresh basil
1 garlic clove
Extra virgin olive oil
Salt to taste

Cut bread into 1/2 -inch slices. Toast in medium-medium low heat until just slightly charred. Rub each piece with a garlic clove, including the edges. Cut cherry tomatoes into small cubes. (This helps remove excess liquid that will make the bruschetta soggy.) Place tomatoes in a sieve over a large bowl, add a few pinches of salt and let sit for five minutes. Add drained tomatoes to a bowl, Tear basil leaves into small pieces. Add a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil. Assemble mixture on top of the toasted bread, topping with an extra pinch of salt and more olive oil.

*Source: italianrecipebook.com*



## Sausage Stuffed Zucchini Boats

4 medium zucchini, cut in half lengthwise
1 pound Italian sausage
1 teaspoon olive oil
1 small onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, minced
2 medium vine-ripened tomatoes
Salt and freshly-ground pepper
½ cup Parmesan cheese, finely grated
½ cup Mozzarella cheese, shaved
½ cup bread crumbs
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Using a metal spoon, scoop out the flesh from the interior of the zucchini, so they resemble boats. Chop the zucchini flesh and set aside; place zucchini boats in a casserole dish or dishes. Add the olive oil to a sauté pan over medium heat, then add the sausage and cook for 4 minutes. Add the garlic, onion, chopped zucchini flesh, tomatoes, salt and pepper and cook until softened. In a medium bowl, mix the Parmesan and Mozzarella chesses, parsley and breadcrumbs. Spoon in and mound the sausage mixture into the zucchini boats; sprinkle the breadcrumb mixture over top. Place in oven and bake until golden brown, about 20 minutes.

*Source: foodnetwork.com*

## Rollatini of Fish Fillet with Tomatoes

½ stick butter
½ lemon, sliced thinly
1 cup white wine or broth (chicken or vegetable)
1 cup breadcrumbs
Small bunch fresh parsley, chopped
Small bunch fresh thyme, chopped
Lemon zest
Scallions or other onion, chopped
Olive oil
Salt
Fillet of sole or another white fish
Grape tomatoes

Cut butter into 1-inch squares and place in glass dish with sliced lemon and white wine or broth. In a medium bowl, mix breadcrumbs, parsley, thyme, lemon zest and scallions. Add just enough olive oil to moisten breadcrumbs and add salt. Place spoonful of breadcrumb mixture on each lightly salted filet, then roll to the widest end of the fish. Place that side down in the glass dish, then top with breadcrumbs. Place tomatoes around the fillets and add any juice as well as a swirl of olive oil. Bake at 400 for 20-30 minutes.

*Source: "Lidia's Kitchen:" Lidia Bastianich*

## Tuna Stuffed Tomatoes

1 5-ounce can tuna packed in oil
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
½ large celery stalk, diced
½ cup onion, diced
1/8 teaspoon celery salt
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
2 large ripe tomatoes
1/8 teaspoon kosher salt

Place undrained tuna in a bowl, use fork to break up the tuna. Add mayonnaise, diced celery, celery salt and pepper. Core tomatoes with a paring knife, then use a spoon to scoop the seeds out, leaving a small layer of pulp next to the skin. Sprinkle kosher salt inside the tomatoes. Scoop the tuna mixture into the hollowed-out tomatoes, pressing down gently as the tomatoes are filled. Garnish with minced parsley, if desired. Best served chilled.

*buon appetito !*

# *Amici Italiani* Adult, Youth Troupes look forward to 2025 dance season



**Siblings GiaMaria and Johnny Fandel of the *Amici Italiani* Adult Troupe perform on the Main Stage at the 2024 *Festa Italiana***



**The dancers in the *Amici Italiani* Youth Troupe are ready to take the stage at the *Festa Italiana* Village.**

Both *Amici Italiani* Dance Troupes performed on the main stage at the 2024 *Festa Italiana* in August and entertained audiences, despite the high heat and humidity. The summer season has come to an end and the dancers and instructors are looking forward to planning for 2025.

Practices for the Adult Troupe begin in late February-early March, 2025, on Tuesday nights from 7-9 p.m., and new dancers are always welcome.

"We will teach the new dancers," said director/instructor Bea Ricotta. "They don't have to know the dances; they don't have to be Italian. We want people who want to have fun. This is a great group."

Bea added that the camaraderie is: "awesome. They are going to make life-long friends. Many of our youth dancers come back and help. (One dancer) was in our children's group, then took time out, had kids, and now she's back. It's wonderful."

Adult troupe is open to dancers 14-years-old and older. Stephanie Ricotta Kiebles and Johnny Fandel are instructors with Bea. For information on joining or scheduling a performance, contact Bea at 815-520-1010.

The *Amici Italiana* Youth Troupe, open to those 6- to 14-years-old, is seeking an additional adult volunteer to help from June to early Augusti in 2025. Rehearsals are on Tuesdays from 5-7 p.m. and one Thursday in preparation for *Festa Italiana*. Directors Pauline Urso and Anna Mirabile seek an individual who can be on time, assist with the dances, manage the costumes for the dancers, and communicate with parents.

For information on joining the troupe or becoming volunteer, contact Pauline at 815-218-0063.

# Steve Salvato to offer genealogy searches at EHM

Steve Salvato, an expert in Italian-American family histories, will conduct a genealogy workshop at the Ethnic Heritage Museum from 1-5 p.m., Saturday, October 5. Light Italian refreshments will be served.

Steve, who has hundreds of thousands of names in his database, provides this service for no charge. He originally started researching his family's history, then expanded it to Sicily, then all of Italy. He also will help those of any nationality to start a search.

In October 2016, Steve was inducted into the Greater Rockford Italian American Association's Hall of Fame for providing this service over the years. He regularly sets up shop with his computer in the Cultural Tent at *Festa Italiana* to help as many people as he can.

The Ethnic Heritage Museum is located at 1129 South Main Street. For information, call 815-962-7402.

# Italian battalions a part of museum's WWII Days

World War II Days, the Midwest's largest gathering of re-enactors with more than 1,000 participants, will turn Midway Village Museum into a military encampment and mock battleground on September 28-29. An estimated 1,000 participants representing the many nations involved can be found, and, in past years, Italian regiments have taken part.

Last year's event included two Italian units – Battalion *Alpini Sciatori Monte Cervino* and 11.SS FG Trupp-11 (military police). The event features dozens of military vehicles, battles with pyrotechnics, as well as skirmishes, demonstrations and many displays, in addition to more than 40 model World War II airplanes.

Among the permanent displays at Midway Village is an exhibit on several local families who made their way from Italy. The museum is located at 6799 Guilford Road in Rockford. For information, call 815-397-9112.

# Photo highlights from 2024 spring, summer events

## Celebrating St. Joseph with altars







Above counterclockwise; Father Ricardo Hernandez with volunteers and parishioners at the blessing of St. Bernadette's altar; Crystal Wolford and her son Nolan Crozier make a cauliflower tower for St. Bridget's altar; Holy Family's first altar was created by Carl Ambruoso; Colleen Gullo attends to, from left to right, Haylee Saldana, Leo Verona and James Tysiak who represented the Holy Family at St. Anthony of Padua's altar.



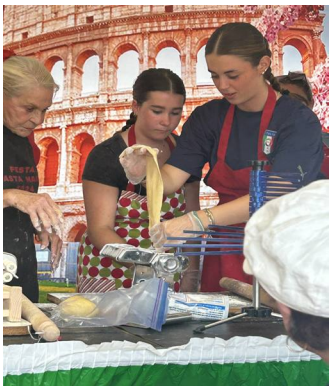
## HKFF bocce champs



*At left, the Helping Kids and Families Fund held its 20th bocce tournament on June 22 at the St. Ambrogio Club. The winning team was Coconut Shrimp – Siesta DiFrancesco, Andy and Rebecca Bawinkel and Vito Bertolino.*

## 45th annual *Festa Italiana*

*Food and music were two highlights of the 45th annual Festa Italiana, August 2-4. At right, Carol Minardi (left in photo) gets help from granddaughters Emily Minardi (center) and Morgan Anderson at the pasta-making demonstration. (Below) The Blooze Brothers literally blew away the large audience at its Saturday night performance with Jake and Elwood sharing the stage with Kimberly Johnson.*





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*Ferentino Mayor Piergianni Fiorletta and his granddaughter Rebecca Iacoboni read the plaque at Keeling-Puri Peace Center describing the history of Sister Cities, Rockford and Ferentino.*
*Story Page 1.*

PAPPAGALLO

GRIAA Greater Rockford Italian American Association

# Fall 2024 Calendar

**October 5** – Family genealogy workshop conducted by Steve Salvato, 1-5 p.m., Ethnic Heritage Museum

**October 12** – GRIAA Hall of Fame Banquet, Venetian Club

**October 13** – Columbus Day Mass, 10:30 a.m. and celebration of GRIAA honorees following in the Memory Garden, St. Anthony of Padua Church

**November 3** – RISCA Taste of Italy, noon, Venetian Club

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