

Rockford native and softball legend Kathy Veroni honored for community service

By Paul Anthony Arco



Kathy received a 2025 Humanitarian Award from the National Fastpitch Coaches Association

Kathy Veroni grew up playing softball in the parks of Rockford in the 1960s. Little did she know, however, that her love of the sport would take her places far beyond her hometown in northern Illinois.

Veroni was born in Rockford and was a member of the first graduating class at Boylan High School (1964). Four years later, she earned a bachelor's degree in physical education from Illinois State University and then a master's degree from Michigan State University.

She attended high school before girls were allowed to play sports which finally happened in 1972, thanks to Title IX.

She later went on to become the head coach for the Western Illinois University women's softball team for 34 years. By the time she retired in 2005, Veroni led the Westerwinds to 869 wins, 11 conference championships and eight NCAA national tournaments. She retired as one of the top 15 winningest coaches in NCAA history.

There's more. Veroni is a member of four halls of fame – The National Fastpitch Coaches Association, Illinois State University Athletics, Western Illinois University Athletics and the Illinois chapter of USA Softball.

Recently, Veroni returned to Rockford where she was

recognized by the Illinois House of Representatives on being awarded the 2025 Humanitarian Award from the National Fastpitch Coaches Association.

"She's an Italian hero," says Veroni's friend, Bernice Marinelli. "Kathy is a cheerleader for others. She takes a personal investment in things that come her way. If you have a problem, Kathy has a solution. She's about success."

The recognition meant the world to Veroni, who was surrounded by several friends and family members at the special reception.

"It was more than just a coming home for me," she says. "I was grateful for the Mayor and everyone else who participated in this celebration. It was very humbling."

Celebrating her Italian roots

Veroni is deeply proud of her Italian roots.

Her paternal grandmother came from Italy with Veroni's father. And her maternal grandparents arrived from Sicily 125 years ago. Many of Veroni's relatives made their way to the United States for a better life.

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Joining Kathy Veroni at reception (L to R) State Representative Dave Vella, Mayor Tom McNamara, County Board Chairman Joe Chiarelli and Anna Abate Reader.



Kathy Veroni ... Continued from Page 1

Growing up, Veroni and her relatives on her mother's side – including many cousins – had Sunday dinner together.

"Family is our legacy," she says. "We made a commitment to family. In my case, it was quite a team willing to make sacrifices for each other and blend together."

Veroni fondly remembers summer picnics when family gathered to break bread and play softball; her grandfather running around the bases while her aunt played catcher.

Veroni came from an athletic family. In the 1940s, her mother, Josephine Veroni, played softball for Roper Industries in an industrial Rockford league. Her dad, Jim Veroni, played travel baseball and even had a tryout with the New York Yankees.

As a child, Veroni was the all-day catcher for boys who took batting practice at Welsh Elementary School on Rockford's west side. "Back then, I had no mask, no chest protector and we used just one ball," she says, laughing. On hot summer days, Veroni would finish her chores before heading to area parks to play pickup games with other girls through a Rockford Park District program.

Since Veroni had no high school team to play for, she joined an amateur team, the Rockford Comets, who competed around the state. The team was formed by Jim Johnson and Bob Bloom, who coached the team because their wives wanted to play competitive softball. "They were like mentors," Veroni says. "They were leaders, people who cared and didn't criticize us."



Kathy Veroni speaking at reception held in her honor in December.



Two legends - Rockford Peaches star Ange Armato and Kathy Veroni.



Rosie Scalise Sheridan, Kathy Veroni and Bernice Marinelli

She also suited up for the Pekin Lettes, the longest-running fastpitch softball team in the country. Veroni played catcher, shortstop and second base.

In addition, Veroni founded and coached the women's semi-professional Macomb Magic softball team from 1979-1985. The team competed in five nationals and two Olympic Sports Festivals. Veroni has authored three books and written for several softball-related publications, including the Softball Coaching Bible.

Of all her success, Veroni misses coaching her players at Western Illinois University, where the team bonded over the love of the game and the friendships they formed.

"I loved to play and I wanted my college teams to have that same experience," she says. "To have the crowds, the success, to have journalists write about them. Nothing was more

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When Rockford Sang in Italian: Remembering the Italian Choral of the 1950s

By Karla Clark



Cono Laloggia and Theresa Parlapiano

In the years after World War II, Rockford's Italian American community was rich with music, faith, and fellowship. Families gathered often. Churches anchored neighborhoods. The Italian (Sicilian) language was still heard regularly at dinner tables and social halls. And on Tuesday nights at the old St. Elizabeth Center on South Main Street, a group of young Italian Americans came together to sing the songs of their heritage. They were known simply as the Italian Choral.

Comprised of about 30 young men and women, many fresh out of high school, the Italian Choral was active throughout the 1950s and became much more than a singing group. It was a place where friendships formed, traditions were passed down, and lifelong memories were made.

One of the original members was Annette (Stassi) Giancesin, who joined the choral at age 18, right after graduating from high school. Like many young Italian Americans of that era, Annette was eager to stay connected to her culture and to other young people in South Rockford's close-knit community who shared her background.

Every Tuesday evening, the group met at St. Elizabeth's. Practices were regular and structured, but they were also joyful. There were more girls than boys, Annette recalls, but the imbalance never seemed to matter. Music brought everyone together.

The choral performed at nursing homes and sang for the Poor Clare nuns on South Main Street, sharing Italian songs

that stirred memories and lifted spirits. Their repertoire included beloved classics such as Santa Lucia, O Marie, and Funiculi, Funiculà, as well as selections from Italian operas. The songs were sung proudly, in Italian, from typed lyric sheets carefully kept in black notebooks.

The group came together thanks to Sister Maria Imaculie of St. Elizabeth's, who recognized both the musical talent and the cultural importance of such a choral. She asked Miss Bertha McGuire, the respected music teacher at Montague School, to direct the group. Miss McGuire led the singers and accompanied them on piano, providing musical guidance while encouraging their enthusiasm.

As time went on, leadership of the choral changed hands. Angelo LaLoggia later directed the group, followed by Alex Las Casas. Under Las Casas' direction, the group adopted more formal performance attire. The girls wore long red skirts with white peasant blouses, a look that reflected pride in their Italian roots. Before that, performances were simpler, with girls in skirts and blouses and boys in shirts and trousers. Either way, the focus was always on the music and the camaraderie.

And camaraderie there was plenty of.

"It turned into a social group as much as a music group," Annette says.

Some of the young men in the choral had cars, which meant freedom and adventure. On weekends, the group often traveled

Continued on Page 3



Italian Choral Picnic



Italian Choral ... Continued from Page 3



Joe Callea, Cono LaLoggia, Jimmy Fuca and Nick Rotello (left to right) at White Pines Park

together to White Pines State Park in Oregon for picnics. Sausage was grilled, Italian dishes were shared, and laughter carried through the park. Some of the men were already married and brought their wives along, blending new marriages with old friendships.

There were also dances and social gatherings, further strengthening the bonds among members. It was a rare and special time when faith, culture, and social life overlapped so naturally.

The choral was filled with talent, and one voice stood out in particular. Theresa Parlapiano LaLoggia was known for her beautiful singing voice and often performed solos. Her talent added depth and emotion to the group's performances and left a lasting impression on those who heard her sing.

The Italian Choral even played matchmaker. Two marriages grew out of the group: Theresa Parlapiano married Cono LaLoggia, and Donalee Daminco married Joe Callea. These love stories became part of the choral's legacy, woven into its music and memories.

"It was great to have such a nice group of friends, both boys and girls," Annette remembers. "It was such a fun group to be a part of."



Top row (left to right): Theresa Parlapiano, Joe Callea, Lillian Abruzzo, Vita Giaccone and unnamed. Middle row: Jennie Mistretta, Rose DiGiovanni, Annette Giansin. Lower right (left to right): Mike Callea, unnamed, and Helen LaRosa. Cono LaLoggia is on the far left taking a picture.

Annette remained with the choral for five or six years. Eventually, as happens with many young groups, life moved forward. Members married, started families, and responsibilities grew. Gradually, the group drifted apart.

Yet the impact of the Italian Choral never faded.

For those who took part, it represented a time when being Italian American was lived out loud through song, friendship, and shared meals. It preserved language, honored tradition, and gave young people a place to belong.

Today, as organizations like the Greater Rockford Italian American Association continue the work of celebrating and preserving Italian heritage, the story of the Italian Choral stands as a reminder of what community can look like when people gather not just to perform, but to connect.



Italian Choral Picnic



Kathy Veroni ... Continued from Page 4

exciting than to watch them walk out onto the field and play together as a team.”

Veroni says seven million girls play softball around the country now between schools, clubs and travel teams. For her, it started right here in her hometown. “Rockford provided summer programs and other opportunities for girls like me and continues to do so,” she says. “The future is bright.”

Enjoying retirement

Veroni has called Macomb, Ill., home for the past 48 years. These days, Veroni keeps plenty busy. She’s a master gardener, involved in the Grow Illinois Food Together (GIFT)



Kathy was a member of the Rockford Comets, an amateur team who competed around the state.



Kathy coached the Western Illinois University softball team for 34 years.

garden, which provides thousands of pounds of food annually to the Macomb community. She also dabbles in woodworking, often donating pieces for charity events.

Veroni recently compiled family photographs she used for a 22-minute film, which included interviews with family members and music as a backdrop. The video is a keepsake



Kathy was not only a player and a coach. She has written three books and contributed to several softball-related publications.



Kathy Veroni is a member of four softball halls of fame and is one of the top 15 winningest coaches in NCAA history.

for her family. In fact, seven generations of family members got together a few months ago to watch the film. Veroni says there wasn’t a dry eye in the room.

Bernice Marinelli isn’t surprised. She’s the owner of Anam Care, an assisted living home for dementia care in Rockford. Marinelli admits she had some trepidation starting a venture as a female business owner. That’s where Veroni came in. She helped Marinelli create a promotional video which was used to educate families about the need for assisted living.

“Kathy is a wonderful coach and not just in sports,” Marinelli says. “She helped me to validate my skills, knowledge and commitment to helping people suffering from this disease. Kathy really helped launch my first couple of years in business. That’s who she is as a person.”



Italian American Heritage Month Celebration 2025



GRIAA partnered with Artale Wine Co. to host an Italian Wine Tasting Event.



Members of GRIAA attended the City Council Meeting to receive the Proclamation - GiaMaria Fandel, Michele Fandel, Johnny Fandel, Michael Maffioli, Bea Giammarese Ricotta, Carl Ambruoso



Chairperson Michael Maffioli displays the proclamation from the City of Rockford

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Seeking citizenship in a changing legal landscape

My Italian citizenship journey enters the courts

By Frank Perrecone

To my knowledge, no one else has chronicled the Italian citizenship process from the very first step to the present day in an ongoing series. This article marks my seventh contribution to *Pappagallo* documenting my pursuit of Italian citizenship by descent.

Much has unfolded in the past six months. The professional translator in Italy who converted my supporting documents from English into Italian appeared before a *Giudice di Pace* (Justice of the Peace). There, the translator swore under oath that the translations were accurate and complete. Italian law requires this certification before a citizenship lawsuit can move forward.

Following that step, my Italian attorney filed in court the citizenship petition in Palermo, Sicily because my Italian grandfather was born in Corleone. The initial hearing is scheduled for May 19, 2026. I am not required to attend the hearing. The evidence in the case consists of the documents that were collected over the past several years.

Here's the foundation of the claim. When my mother was born in the United States, her father—my grandfather—was an Italian citizen. Because she was born to an Italian citizen, she acquired unrecognized Italian citizenship by *jure sanguinis*, or “right of blood.” When she later gave birth to me, that same line of citizenship passed to me. This unbroken lineage is essential, but it does not automatically confer the full rights and privileges of Italian citizenship. Recognition is the key. To obtain it, one must either apply through an Italian consulate or petition an Italian court.

As I explained in an earlier article, a recent reinterpretation of Italian law sharply limited consular applications. These restrictions effectively close the administrative path for most of us. As a result, judicial recognition became the only viable option for many. In another past article, I explained how a recent Italian immigration reform law passed in May 2025 effectively forecloses Italian citizenship by descent to most first and second generation Italian-Americans, subject to few exceptions. And the new law prohibits third generationers from citizenship by descent.

The exception I am proceeding under is that my case should be decided on the law in force before May 25, 2025 because I had started the citizenship process before the new law was enacted. I initially submitted a citizenship application with supporting documents to the Chicago Italian Consulate at the time of my July 30, 2024 appointment. In December 2024, I was advised to withdraw the application and request return of the supporting documents because my application would have been

denied at the consular level due to the reinterpretation of Italian law.

The court petition the lawyer filed on my behalf lays out the legal basis for citizenship. It asserts that my mother acquired Italian citizenship by descent from her Italian-born father and that I, as her child, also acquired Italian citizenship by descent. Based on this uninterrupted line, the petition requests a judicial order formally declaring me an Italian citizen *jure sanguinis* as a descendant of my grandfather. Further, it requests the court to consider my case under the old law.

According to Italian Citizenship Assistance (ICA), the firm guiding me through this process, the judge on May 19, will likely take the case under *riserva*. That means the court may reserve additional time to review the submitted documents before issuing a decree or decision. I have been informed by an Italian attorney that this process could take a year or two. Alternatively, the judge could postpone or reschedule the hearing. An attorney from the Italian Ministry of the Interior will appear on behalf of Italy, although I am told that citizenship cases in the Italian courts are not usually contested.

The issues to be decided are whether my documents establish an unbroken line of Italian lineage and whether my case should be decided based on the immigration laws prior to May 25, 2025.

I paid approximately \$1,600 for the court filing fee and related expenses. Since beginning this journey in 2021, I have spent about \$10,600 overall. ICA provides the Italian attorney as part of the services already paid for.

Readers interested in the earlier installments of my articles can find them at GRIAA.org. Click the “Committees” link, then click the “*Pappagallo*” link. Begin with the Fall 2022 issue and continue through Fall 2025 to follow the full journey so far.

Given Italy's recent tightening of citizenship laws, I remain hopeful—but realistic. I believe my claim is strong, yet I recognize that recognition is never guaranteed. I choose to stay optimistic while accepting that Italian citizenship, even with an unbroken bloodline, is not a certainty.



Frank Perrecone at Chicago Italian Consulate in July 2024



Nonno's Garden

By Bea Ricotta

Do you remember your Nonno's garden? A place where time seemed to slow, and every leaf told a story. A place where there are neatly tended rows, rich with the scent of earth and basil – and tradition. Thick tomato vines leaning on their stakes or cages, their fruit glowing red in the late afternoon sun. Between them grew glossy green peppers, zucchini blossoms, sturdy eggplants, and a variety of aromatic herbs all thriving under Nonno's careful hand. The soil is dark and fertile fed with care and the wisdom of generations.

Nonno may no longer be here walking among his plants -- pruning and tending to them. But, now, it's your turn to bring back Nonno's garden. Carry on this tradition through your own garden. Raise vegetables to serve in Nonna's old recipes.

Join us and learn tips to growing the vegetables and herbs as Nonno did. GRIAA is presenting a demonstration chock full of information and tips regarding growing tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, *cuccuzza* and the herbs basil and oregano. This fun discussion includes a tour of Didier greenhouses.

Saturday, June 6, 2026 *

Didier's Nursery,

4601 W. State St., Rockford, IL 61102

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No more than 30 attendees accepted.

Registration will end when class is full.

Cost – no cost but donations welcome.

* This date falls on Customer Appreciation weekend.

There will be discounted prices on several items including the plants that will be discussed.

Check GRIAA out on Facebook and www.GRIAA.org for updates!

Questions? Text 815/520-1010

St. Anthony Church St. Joseph Altar Information

Blessing of Altar and Best time to view:

Saturday, March 14, 2026

St. Joseph Altar:

Sunday, March 15, 2026, from Noon until 3PM

NOVENA SCHEDULE:

Friday March 6	2:00 - 2:30PM	In Church-Livestreamed
Saturday March 7	3:30 - 4:00PM	In Church-Livestreamed
Sunday March 8	2:00 - 2:30 PM	In Church-Livestreamed
Monday March 9	2:00 - 2:30 PM	In Church-Livestreamed
Tuesday, March 10	2:00 - 2:30 PM	In Church-Livestreamed
Wednesday, March 11	12:00 - 2:30PM	In Church-Livestreamed
Thursday, March 12	2:00 - 2:30PM	In Church-Livestreamed
Friday, March 13	2:00 - 2:30PM	In Hall
Saturday, March 14	3:30 - 4:00PM	In Hall

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NFL coach Nick Sirianni celebrates Italian heritage

By Paul Anthony Arco

Football runs deep in Nick Sirianni's blood.

The head coach of the Philadelphia Eagles, Sirianni was born in New York, the son of Fran and Amy Sirianni. Fran was a middle school science teacher and the former head football coach at Southwestern Central High School in West Ellicott, New York, where Nick graduated in 1999.

Sirianni's brother, Mike, is the head coach at Washington & Jefferson College. His brother, Jay, is a former head coach at their alma mater, Southwestern Central High School (Jamestown, NY), where their father also spent nine years in the same role and served as the school's head track coach for 46 years. Under Jay, Southwestern Central won New York state titles in 2008 and 2009.

Fran's family hails from Calabria, Italy. Sirianni's wears his Italian heritage with pride, often wearing the Italian flag on his clothes during Eagles' games.

But Sirianni isn't the only member of the Eagles with strong Italian roots. Dom DiSandro, the team's security chief, also comes from an Italian background. Sirianni and DiSandro were honored by the National Italian American Foundation for their positive impact on the community while representing their Italian heritage. "I've done a good job hiring other Italian coaches," Sirianni joked during the foundation's annual dinner.

It's not always been an easy road, however, for Sirianni. Fans and members of the media were calling for his job, as recent as the 2024 season. But the team stuck with their coach, and it paid off in a big way.

Under Sirianni, the Eagles are 59-26 in the regular season and now have a Super Bowl title to boot. Sirianni has led the Eagles to the playoffs in each of his first four seasons as head coach, including winning two division titles, two conference championships. Last year, Sirianni and the Eagles beat the Kansas City Chiefs 40-22 in Super Bowl LIX – the second championship in the organization's history.

The 2024 season was one to remember for Eagles fans. Philadelphia scored the most points (145) in NFL postseason history and finished with an 18-3 record including a 10-game regular season winning streak.

Sirianni played wide receiver at Division III Mount Union in Alliance, Ohio, and was part of three national championship teams. He graduated with a degree in education. Sirianni played one season for the Canton Legends of the American Indoor Football League before focusing on a coaching career.

Before reaching the NFL coaching ranks, Sirianni spent five years at the collegiate level as the wide receivers coach at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and defensive backs coach at

Mount Union, his alma mater, helping the Purple Raiders win a national title in 2005.

Prior to joining the Eagles, the 45-year-old Sirianni served as an NFL assistant coach for Indianapolis, Los Angeles Chargers and Kansas City.

Sirianni and his wife, Brett, have two sons, Jacob and Miles, and daughter, Taylor.

After winning the Super Bowl, Sirianni gave credit to the many coaches, players and family that have helped him over the years achieve his greatest goals in football.

"You can't be great without the greatness of others," he said.



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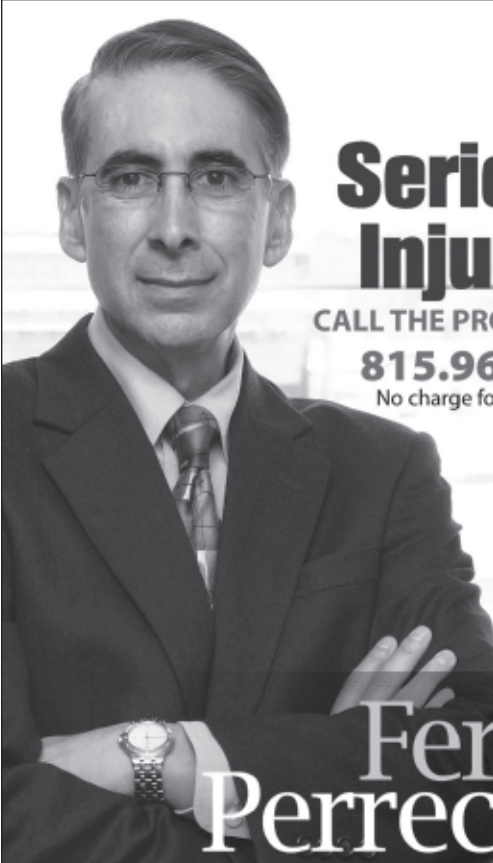
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LaSala Family



Maffioli Family

2025 Columbus Day Mass and Ceremony at the Columbus Statue in the Garden at St. Anthony's Church



GRIAA members at the Columbus Statue in the Garden



Paul, Mike, Dawn and Ann Maffioli



Greater Rockford Italian American Association – GRIAA

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2026 Calendar

Holy Family's Altar: Saturday, March 14 & Sunday March 15

St. Bridget's St. Joseph Altar

Saturday, March 21st, Altar Viewing 4:00pm-6:00pm (before and after Mass on Saturday) and Sunday March 22nd, Altar Viewing 6:30am-1:30pm (before and after all Mass on Sunday)

St. Anthony Church

Blessing of Altar and Best time to view: Saturday, March 14

St. Joseph Altar: Sunday, March 15 from Noon until 3PM

Festa Italiana July 31st, Aug. 1st and Aug 2nd

We want to hear from you. Contact us

Frank Perrecone, *Co-Editor* – frankaperrecone@aol.com

Paul Anthony Arco, *Co-Editor* – paularco@aol.com

Karen Cantele, *Assistant Editor* – kkcantele22@gmail.com

Karla Clark, *Contributing Writer* – karla.clark@comcast.net

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