Ambassador

A Publication of the National Italian American Foundation

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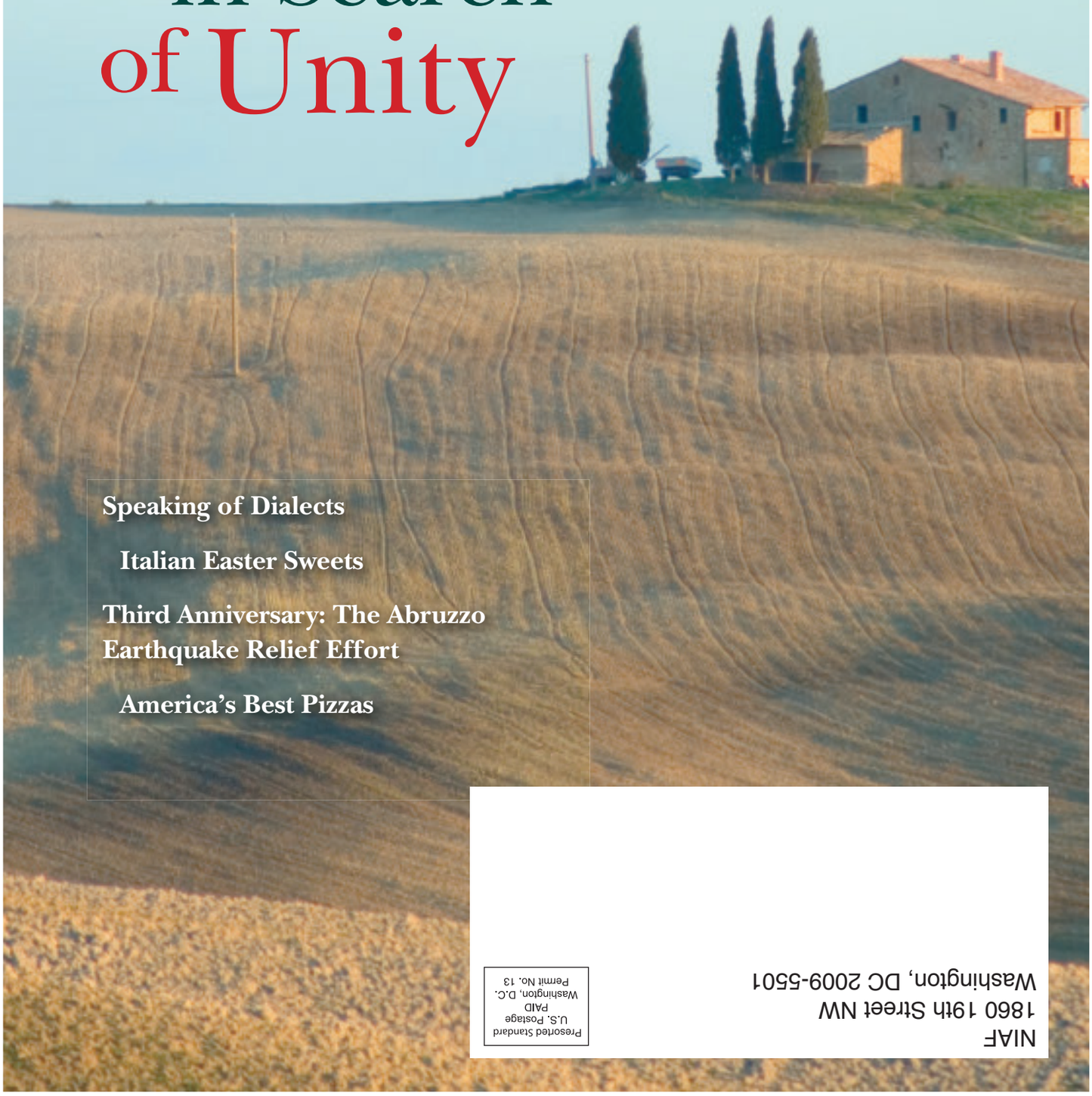
Touring Italy in Search of Unity



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Features

On the Cover:
Landscape in Tuscany, one of Italy's regions where Cristina Del Sesto travelled in search of "unity" in the final days of Italy's 150th Anniversary year.

Sections

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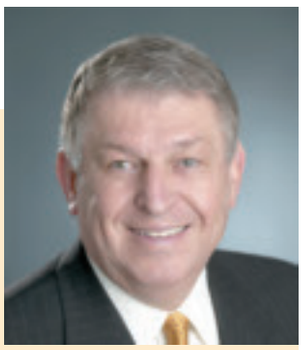
From the NIAF Chairman



With warmer spring weather arriving, it's only natural to embrace a brighter outlook on life that emerges this time each year. And there's plenty to be optimistic about at the National Italian American Foundation.

First and foremost, I'd like to introduce John Viola as NIAF's new Chief Operating Officer. John brings a wealth of experience and knowledge in the management of non-profit organizations. His professional expertise coupled with the love of his Italian heritage suits him perfectly for this position.

Meanwhile, just around the corner, on April 12, the Foundation will be hosting an unforgettable 2012 East Coast Gala at Cipriani 42nd Street, the Italian Renaissance-inspired landmark in New York City. Then, NIAF's West Coast Gala returns to The Golden Gate City on June 21 for a memorable evening at the world-renowned Fairmont San Francisco. Make plans now to attend one or both of these wonderful NIAF celebrations. They will be grand opportunities for catching up with good friends and sharing our Italian roots, but also, in so many ways, your participation will help NIAF fulfill its mission of promoting and preserving our culture and heritage.

You'll find another reason for optimism in this issue's third-anniversary retrospective of the NIAF Abruzzo Relief Fund. You'll recall that on April 6, 2009, a devastating earthquake struck the Abruzzo region of Italy and destroyed much of the city of L'Aquila. In response, NIAF spearheaded a coalition of organizations and partnered with the U.S. Department of State to establish a unique relief effort. With unprecedented generosity, NIAF members and supporters helped to fund the rebuilding of some of the campus and the restoration of normalcy at the University of L'Aquila that is evident there today.

Also in this issue, you'll find a behind-the-wheel tale about test racing a Ferrari 458 Italia, a fascinating profile of Nobel Prize-winning molecular geneticist Mario Capecchi, a travel piece exploring Italy and Italian attitudes at the end of the nation's 150th Anniversary, and a scholarly look at the regional dialects of Italy.

Finally, on behalf of NIAF, I'd like to sincerely thank our many members and friends who, despite recent years of a troubled economy, continue to support the important work at NIAF.

Please spread the word to your friends and relatives who currently are not NIAF members and let them know why it's crucial for the preservation of our heritage and for the sake of the next generation of Italian Americans that they join us now.

Jerry Colangelo, NIAF Chairman

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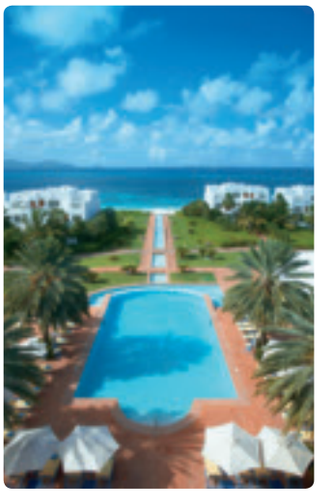

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Reader Feedback on Previous Issue of Ambassador

Italy's National Cuisine

Pizza, Artusi and a National Cuisine...As for pizza, please see the "Rules for Neapolitan Pizza Making" as established by the Association of La Vera Pizza Napoletana. In America, freedom is our right and rightfully we exercise it! Should we extend our rights to freedom also to pizza making or to indiscriminately change taste, textures and recipes of our traditions? Evolution within the traditions is acceptable, but can a national cuisine, as Artusi correctly tried to identify, prior to an incorrect popular image of regionalism, evolve outside a nation's boundaries?

— Tony May
New York, N.Y.

Christ in Concrete

Joseph Luzzi's excellent piece on Pietro di Donato stirred fond memories for me, though I would argue that Donato was neither unsung nor unlikely. "Christ in Concrete" is usually referred to as a minor American classic, but in my life it was and is major. I grew up in a neighborhood overwhelmingly Italian and Jewish on the southeast side of Cleveland. On one side were the Geracis, downstairs the Salamones, and on the other side the Positieris. My Jewish family was surrounded...

Donato's great accomplishment, as Prof. Luzzi notes, is writing a book in English as if it had been translated from Italian. . . . In no small part, "Christ in Concrete" moved me to self teach (autodidatto) Italian, which led me to the presidency of Il Cenacolo di Cleveland, an 85-year-old literary society, conducting our meetings in Italian.

— Harold Ticktin
Shaker Heights, Ohio

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NIAF Secretary John Calvelli, NIAF President Joseph Del Raso, then Deputy Chief of Mission and Charge' d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Rome Elizabeth Dibble, and chief of Italy's civil protection agency Guido Bertolaso meet.

NIAF's John Calvelli and Joseph Del Raso in earthquake-devastated L'Aquila

Rebuilding L'Aquila

A Third Anniversary Retrospective of NIAF's Abruzzo Relief Effort

By Don Oldenburg

On Monday morning, April 6, 2009, at 3:32 a.m., residents of the mountainous region of Abruzzo, were shaken from their sleep by a violent earthquake. With a magnitude of 6.3, it was the worst earthquake to strike the nation since the devastating 1980 Irpinia earthquake near Naples. Within days, the number of dead climbed to 308; about 65,000 people had to abandon their destroyed or structurally unstable homes to find temporary housing.

At the epicenter, the medieval university town of L'Aquila bore the earthquake's full brunt, with some 11,000 buildings destroyed or damaged, and the majority of its population displaced. And, at the heart of the historic district, the University of L'Aquila lay in ruins. Fifty-five students died. Most of its buildings, some dating to the 16th century, were seriously damaged and unsafe.

"The earth movements were first vertical, then horizontal, and then twisting. The electricity was off, the darkness and the lack of physical balance were making any decision about what to do impossible," recalls Anna Tozzi, an associate professor at the university.

At daylight, Tozzi witnessed the full extent of the nightmare. "The view was tragic everywhere, heaps of rubble," she says. As prorector for the International Relations at the university, she was responsible for locating the university's 177 foreign students and fielding frantic telephone calls from their parents. "All the foreign students were safe."

Within a month, NIAF President Joseph V. Del Raso and NIAF Secretary John F. Calvelli travelled to Italy to meet with Italian and U.S. Embassy officials in Rome and accompanied then Deputy Chief of Mission and Charge' d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy Elizabeth Dibble on the first official U.S. visit to the devastation in L'Aquila.

"When we arrived at the site, in the 'closed zone' in the city," says Del Raso, "the first place the car stopped was one of the collapsed buildings where eight students perished. It was a feeling like I never had before because you could still feel the death in the destruction. You realized there was a significant loss of life. In the main square of town, there were still pieces of building falling. It was very sobering."

Recalls Calvelli, who would spearhead NIAF's relief effort: "Everyone was living in tents. Many of the buildings in the center of the city had to be abandoned. People's laundry was still hanging in the windows where they'd just left it."

NIAF had immediately taken the lead in forming a coalition of Italian American organizations, universities and individuals in a fundraising relief effort

that would raise nearly $800,000 to assist victims and communities affected by the earthquake—primarily, it was decided, in L'Aquila. During the trip, Del Raso and Calvelli learned just how important the University of L'Aquila was to the city. "It was the heart and soul of the city of L'Aquila," Calvelli says. "It could be compared to many of our university towns in the United States. If you take the university out of those towns, those towns would die. So, the feeling was that we needed to do what we could to help the university get back on its feet and help the students."

By May 2009, the U.S. Department of State had joined forces with NIAF in a public-private partnership to deliver a generous American response to support the people of Abruzzo and the city of L'Aquila.

"L'Aquila is a historically important and architecturally magnificent city that was ravaged by the earthquake," says Kris Balderston, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's Special Representative on Global Partnerships who directed this partnership for the State Department. "In the aftermath of the 2009 earthquake, the NIAF and Department of State partnership combined NIAF's unsurpassed fundraising efforts with the U.S. Embassy's long-term institutional relations with the Italian government and institutions to help the people of Abruzzo. The focus was the historic L'Aquila University, to restore its role as an important academic, social and economic engine for the region."

In July 2009, Italy's then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi hosted the 2009 G8 Summit in L'Aquila to underscore the need for its reconstruction. At his first such summit, President Barack Obama said, "I'm confident that L'Aquila will be rebuilt, its splendor will be restored, and its people will serve as an example for all of us in how people can rise up from tragedy and begin anew."

While reconstruction has gone slowly in the three years since the earthquake, NIAF's partnership with the U.S. State Department has been crucial. Besides direct aid to the university, it instituted an "Adopt-a-Scholar" project that helped to provide scholarships to 52 displaced University of L'Aquila students to continue their studies at U.S. universities. And, last summer, it completed construction of an earthquake-resistant, international student center built with $250,000 in donations.

"Our building is complete and they're using it," says Calvelli. "It's the end of our official effort, the capstone three years later literally accomplished. We are the only organization that has a completed building there..."

Representing the NIAF-State Department partnership, Calvelli revisited L'Aquila last August. Though encouraged visiting the student center, he was stunned to see the same laundry still hanging in windows of abandoned buildings. "It is jarring," he says. "A large portion of the city is still uninhabitable. There is still a significant amount of work that needs to be done."

Anna Tozzi says that while she and the university are grateful for what NIAF and the U.S. State Department have accomplished, she is frustrated by how slow the rebuilding of L'Aquila is taking. "The town must be reconstructed soon," says Tozzi, who assisted in coordinating the relief effort. "The Italian people, especially those born and living in ancient towns, have strong links with the town. Our roots are cut. No churches, no offices, no shops, nothing is in the center."

Meanwhile, the NIAF-State Department partnership's success and influence will have an impact beyond Abruzzo and Italy. "NIAF and the wider Italian American community play a crucial role in maintaining the strong and positive United States—Italy relationship," says Balderston. "This project highlighted the impact of the United States' diverse communities and the untapped potential of the estimated 62 million of first- and second-generation diasporas living in America on our diplomacy and development efforts abroad."

Balderston says the collaboration helped to create the foundation for the International diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA) which Secretary Clinton announced in May 2011. "NIAF worked with the State Department to communicate the best practices of this partnership model," he says, "and help other diaspora communities mobilize in similar ways."

Key to the partnership's success, says Del Raso, was that it didn't just drop off hard cash and leave. "It was more showing solidarity to one of our best allies. As Italian Americans, it was showing the strong ties we have to our cultural and familial heritage. This is just like anything a good neighbor would do for another neighbor . . . . We brought the human capital to the table." ▲

The U.S. Embassy's Elizabeth Dibble and NIAF's John Calvelli and Joseph Del Raso with Italian rescue workers

Mary Ann Esposito is the host and creator of the PBS series "Ciao Italia," the longest running cooking show in America. Look for her new cookbook "Ciao Italia Family Recipes."

Italy's Traditional Easter Sweets

By Mary Ann Esposito

Did you know that *Pasqua* (Easter) is a bigger holiday than Christmas in Italy? Everywhere there is a refreshing sense of new beginnings and nothing symbolizes this more than the humble egg.

Eggs have huge meaning and their significance is expressed beautifully in Italy's sweet and savory Easter confections. Starting with *ciambelle*, those twisted rings flavored with anise and decorated with colored eggs, either purple (for royalty) or red (for Christ's blood). Even the shape of the *ciambelle* has significance since there is no beginning or end. The rustic country style *casatiello* is an impressive looking Neapolitan stuffed bread studded with eggs and ham. In Sicily, the *pupazze*, "dolls" made from bread dough with an egg nestled at the top for the doll's face are an endearing and vanishing bread tradition.

All over Italy, there is the stately *torta Pasqualina*, the Easter pie made with layers of dough, 33 to be exact (the age of Christ), each one spread with cured ham, salami, cheeses and hard-boiled eggs.

And if this was not enough to make a statement about the importance of eggs, there are those gigantic chocolate Easter eggs wrapped in beautiful paper and housing special treats inside.

Easter Monday, *Pasquetta*, Little Easter, Italians take to the countryside to enjoy the warm weather and all those delicious egg-based leftovers.

Buona Pasqua!

Ciao Italia—Mary Ann Esposito

Recipes from
"Ciao Italia Family Classics"
by Mary Ann Esposito.

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Neapolitan Stuffed Easter Bread

(*Neapolitan Casatiello*)

The casatiello is a savory filled Neapolitan Easter bread that my nonna Galasso made from memory. For her, it held all the symbolism of faith. *Casatiello* derives from "case," that in Neapolitan dialect means "cheese" because of the use of cheese in the dough and in the filling. The rising dough meant the promise of new life; the shape of the bread symbolized a crown and the eggs meant rebirth.

There are many variations of this stuffed bread but it is one of those antique recipes not made at home anymore and Neapolitans are likely to buy them at their local bakery. That is a pity.

Makes one large 10½-inch round loaf

Ingredients:

Dough
1 package active dry yeast
2 cups warm water
4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
⅓ cup grated Pecorino cheese
⅓ cup extra virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon coarse black pepper ➤

Filling
½ chunk provolone or scamorza cheese, cut into cubes
½ pound chunk salami, mortadella or ham cut into cubes
Salt to taste
Grinding black pepper
4 eggs

Directions:

- Preheat the oven to 375°F.
- Grease a 10-inch tube pan with a removable bottom and set aside.
- Dissolve the yeast in ½ cup warm water and allow it to get foamy looking.
- Heap the flour on a work surface or add it to the work bowl of a stand mixer.
- Add the yeast, olive oil, salt and pepper and work it into the flour. Add enough additional warm water to make a soft ball of dough. Cover and let it rise for 1½ hours in a warm place, or until it doubles in size.
- Punch down the dough and break off a large orange-size piece and set aside.
- Knead the remaining dough and roll out into a large 18 x 14 inch rectangle and scatter the cheese and salami over the surface to within an inch of the edges. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.
- Starting at the longest side, roll the dough up as for a jellyroll making sure to tuck in the ends and place it in the tube pan. Tuck the two ends together.
- Cover and allow to rise for about 1 hour or until the dough is ¾ the way up the sides of the pan.
- Place three of the eggs randomly on the top of the dough, pressing them in to anchor them.
- Divide the saved piece of dough into 6 equal pieces and roll each piece into a 4-inch long length. Use two pieces to make a cross over each egg.
- Beat the remaining egg with a fork and brush the surface of the dough.
- Bake for 45-60 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool on a rack, then run a butter knife along the inside edges of the pan to loosen the bottom and remove it. Turn the bread out. Serve warm cut into wedges.

Braided Easter Egg Breads

(*Ciambelle*)

Makes 4

Ingredients:

1 package active dried yeast
½ cup warm water (110˚F)
½ cup warm low fat milk (110˚F)
8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
½ cup sugar
12 eggs
4 ½ to 5 ½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons salt

Directions:

- Dissolve the yeast in the water in a stand mixer or large bowl. Let the mixture proof for about 5 minutes. Small clusters of chalky-looking bubbles should appear on the surface. Pour in the milk. With a fork, beat three of the eggs in a small bowl. Set aside.
- On low speed or by hand, mix in the butter, then the eggs and sugar until the mixture is well blended.
- Add three cups of the flour along with the salt and beat on medium speed or mix by hand. The mixture will be soupy. Begin adding enough of the remaining flour to make a soft but not sticky dough.
- Turn the dough out onto a floured work surface and knead it for 3 - 4 minutes, until a smooth ball of dough forms. Let the dough rest on the work surface for 10 minutes, covered with a towel or inverted bowl. Knead the dough again for 5 minutes until smooth and no longer sticky.
- Lightly spray a large bowl with cooking oil spray or lightly coat with butter. Gather up the dough, place it in the bowl, and turn to coat in the butter or oil.
- Cover the bowl tightly with plastic wrap and let the dough rise until doubled in size, 2 - 2½ hours.
- When the dough has risen to approximately two times its size, punch it down and divide it into eight equal pieces. Roll each piece under the palms of your hands on a lightly floured surface until it is an 18-inch long rope. Braid two ropes together and close the ends to form a circle. Place the braids on parchment-lined baking sheets. Tuck two eggs into each braided bread, pushing them securely down into the dough.
- Cover and let rise until double.
- Preheat the oven to 375°F
- Beat the remaining egg with a fork and brush the tops of each bread. Bake for 35 - 40 minutes or until golden brown. Cool on racks.
- For a finishing touch, glaze the breads with confectioners icing and sprinkle with colored sugar. ▲

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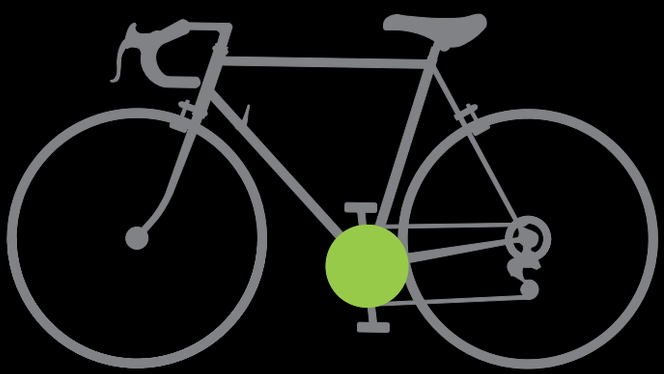

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Alessandro Di Mariano Filipepi, called Sandro Botticelli (and restorer from 19th century). "Madonna with Child" ("Madonna della loggia"), circa 1466-1467; oil on panel. Collection of the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

Botticelli in Your Own Backyard

Italy's Renowned Uffizi Gallery Sends "Angels" to America

By Jenifer Mangione Vogt

"A man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of inferiority, for not having seen what it is expected a man should see."

—Samuel Johnson

With Samuel Johnson's motivating quote accompanying the introductory message from four U.S. museum directors, the grand exhibit, "Offering of the Angels: Tapestries and Paintings from the Uffizi Gallery," began its much anticipated tour in the United States last November. Never before has an entire exhibit built solely from the world-renown Uffizi's magnificent collection been in the United States.

So, yes, consider this is an exhibit you should see. And, as the museum directors put it, even if you can't go to Italy, Italy is coming to you.

You will have plenty of opportunities to see it. "Offering of the Angels" is scheduled to remain on display at its first U.S. stop, the Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale, until April 8. It then moves to the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown, Pa., from April 21 through August 10. The third showcase will be the Chazen Museum of Art in Madison, Wis., from August 24 to November 25. On December 7, the show will travel to the Telfair Museum, Jepson Center for the Arts, in Savannah, Ga., where it will remain until March 31, 2013, before returning to Florence.

Thoughtfully curated by Uffizi Director Antonio Natali, the exhibition showcases 43 paintings and two tapestries from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the 15th to 17th centuries. It includes works by such masters as Sandro Botticelli, Parmigianino, Alessandro Allori, Luca Giordano and Lorenzo Monaco.

The exhibition made its transatlantic journey through the efforts of the Palm Beach-based nonprofit Friends of the Uffizi Gallery (*Amici degli Uffizi*), created in Italy in 1993 in response to a bombing attack on the Uffizi Gallery. The organization grew, promoting "the Medici family's long-standing tradition for all of Florence and the world to enjoy the artistic treasures," says Lisa Marie Browne, its executive director. "The hope is that . . . more people throughout the United States will understand the value of preserving and restoring the amazing treasures housed in the Uffizi for future generations."

With "angels" in the title, expect lots of angels in the art. And there are. But, thematically, the exhibition hinges on the Christian concept of the Eucharist, the belief that bread can be transformed into the body of Christ, and that by consuming that bread sin is forgiven. That's the reference to "offering" in the title, as translated from the Italian "Il Pane," or "bread."

The remarkable art in this show is accessible, however, to visitors of any faith—with "faith" being the operative word. "It's more than just the Eucharist. It's about artists who are depicting the subject of great faith," explains Irvin M. Lippman, executive director of the Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale.

Drawing on the challenges and victories within the realm of faith, on such universal themes as ➤

Pietro Liberi, "Annunciation," circa 1670; oil on canvas. Collection of the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

birth, death, love, sacrifice, suffering and victory, these masterpieces depict Old Testament images as well as scenes from the life of Jesus Christ.

The exhibit's first work, as installed in Fort Lauderdale, is Jacopo Da Empoli's "The Creation of Adam" (1632), which depicts God giving life to Adam. Nearby is Tintoretto's "The Sacrifice of Isaac" (ca.1550), portraying an angel interrupting Abraham as he is about to carry out God's command to sacrifice his only son.

Pietro Liberi's "The Annunciation" (ca. 1670) portrays the moment when an angel startles the Virgin Mary. As with all of these paintings, it has been restored to its original splendor that will leave viewers awe-struck by its sheer beauty, the masterful skill of the painter, the brilliant depth of color, the ethereal quality of this poignant event, and the historic significance of the work.

The 11 nativity paintings alone would make this exhibit worthwhile. These works illustrate the deep bond of love between Mary and the infant Jesus, as depicted in the Botticelli's masterpiece, "The Madonna and Child" (ca. 1466).

The exhibit's remaining segments deal with The Last Supper, The Crucifixion and The Resurrection. One of two tapestries depicts "The Descent from the Cross" (ca. 1546). Woven by Nicola Karcher from a drawing made by Il Salviati, it displays an astonishing intricacy of the weave and details within the border, including images of Christ's face.

Bruce Katsiff, executive director of The James A. Michener Art Museum, says that whether it's Egyptian, Greek or Roman, "art was basically in service to religion. The Renaissance was the zenith of the Christian art and portraits. This show has excellent examples of art in service to religion . . . . It really is a fabulous exhibition."

Katsiff adds that the exhibit's importance is witnessed in numbers. During its showing in Barcelona in 2009, he says, it attracted 700,000 visitors. And more than 1.6 million people visit the Uffizi itself each year, he says, adding that the Uffizi is on the "Smithsonian Life List: 28 Places to See Before You Die."

The show also proves to be illuminating educationally through its visual tutorial on the restoration of Titian's "The Madonna and Child with Saint Catherine of Alexandria" (1550 to 1560). Besides the actual painting, the Uffizi displays reproductions of the various stages of its restoration.

"Offering of the Angels," ultimately, transports the viewer to a solemnly beautiful realm where religious devotion and faith are paramount, and a period of time that found God at the center of the universe. It's an inspiring journey.

Next stop come mid-April: The James A. Michener Art Museum, 45 minutes north of Philadelphia and an hour from New York City.

"Botticelli in my own backyard!" says Doylestown resident Gina F. Rubel, president and CEO of Furia Rubel Communications Inc., who's serving as Museum Liaison to Italian and Italian-American Communities for the Uffizi exhibit.

Rubel is especially excited because she visited the Uffizi with her parents when she was 6. She remembers the tears in her father's eyes as he gazed upon Botticelli's "Birth of Venus." Had her father not passed away recently, she says, "He would have been one of the first through the Michener doors" on April 21.

Philadelphia-based Consul General of Italy Luigi Scotto also looks forward to the exhibition's arrival. "As I always say, Italy is a cultural super power," he says. "When you mention Botticelli, Tintoretto, Parmigianino . . . all these artists are Italian, but their legacy belongs to the world and the universe."

Jenifer Mangione Vogt is a marketing communications professional and art and Italian culture writer. Visit her blog at www.fineartnotebook.com. ▲

Cristofano Allori, "Christ Served by the Angels," beginning of the 17th century; oil on canvas. Collection of the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

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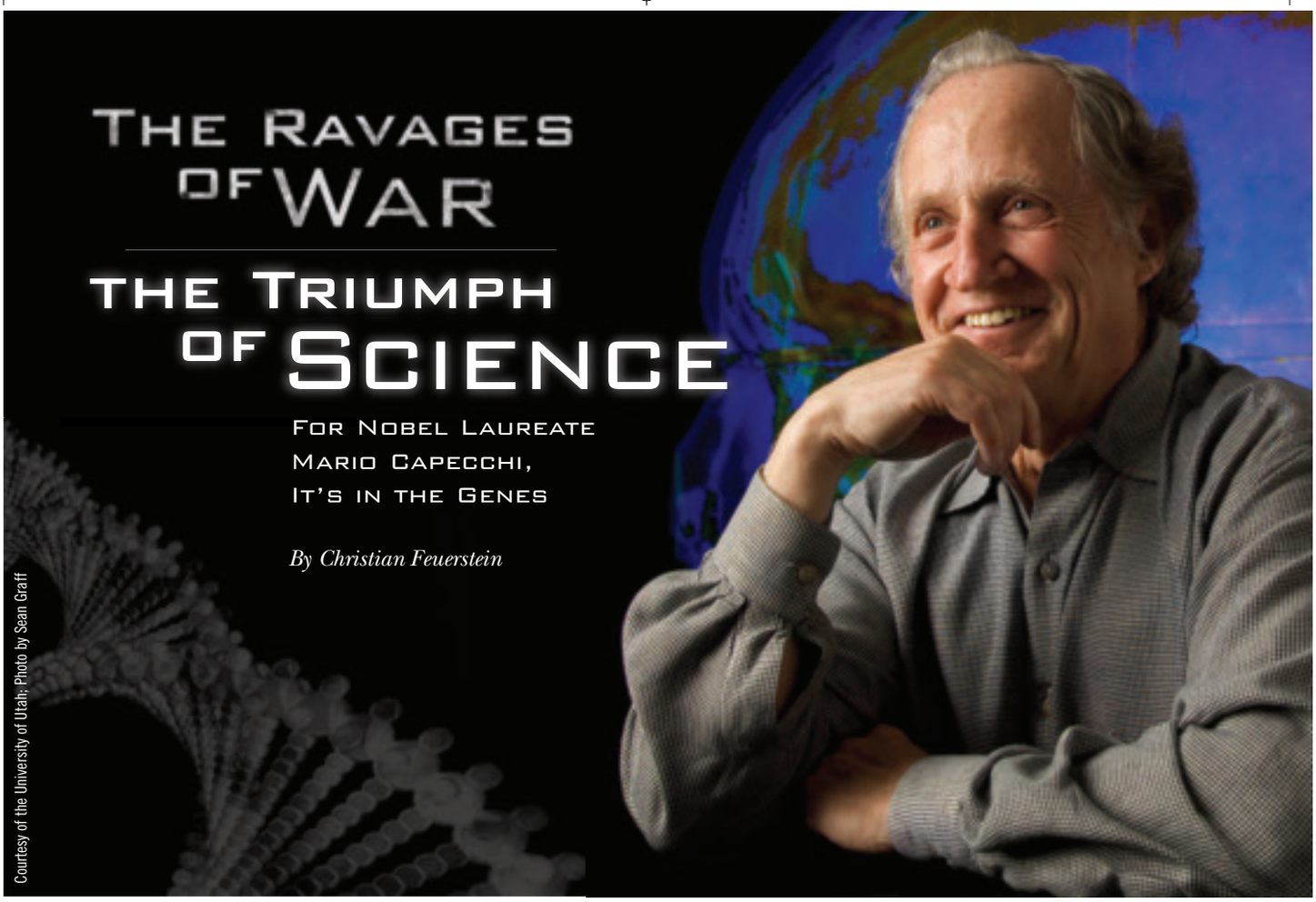
The Ravages of War
the Triumph of Science

For Nobel Laureate Mario Capecchi, It's in the Genes

By Christian Feuerstein



Courtesy of the University of Utah; Photo by Sean Graff

Some people, having achieved the highest honors that their profession can bestow, retire. They kick back, knowing that their legacies are secure and that their places in history are assured.

Dr. Mario Capecchi is not that type of person. "One thing I'm doing too much of is travel," he sighs. As he's just come back from a conference in Hawaii, it's hard to feel bad for him. But the 74-year-old has a full plate, including running his own lab at the University of Utah, being a Howard Hughes Institute researcher, and teaching at the Annual Short Course on Experimental Models of Human Cancer at The Jackson Laboratory this summer.

Capecchi is a giant in genetic research. He pioneered the knockout mouse, a mouse model for genetics that has one or more genes selectively turned off, or "knocked out." By observing mice without a working gene, scientists can determine that gene's function. In addition, some knockout mice develop diseases that affect humans, allowing scientists to study the disease's progression—and, of course, treatment.

This work has garnered Capecchi many honors, including the 2007 Nobel Prize for Medicine or Physiology.

For anyone, climbing to such heights in the sciences is laudable and aspirational. For Capecchi, however, it was nothing short of miraculous. He started his life as a "war orphan," wandering the streets of Reggio Emilia, suffering from typhoid, and starving.

The Horrors of War

Mario Capecchi was born in Verona, Italy, in 1937, to poet Lucy Ramberg and Italian Air Force officer Luciano Capecchi. Theirs was a passionate love affair, but Lucy ruled out marriage.

Ramberg came from a wealthy and cultured family. She and her two brothers were raised in a magnificent villa in Florence, with private tutors. She was fluent in six languages and was a lecturer at the Sorbonne in literature and languages. It was there, Capecchi says, that she joined with a group of poets and artists who openly opposed Fascism and Nazism. This would have devastating consequences for Ramberg and her son.

By 1937, Ramberg was living in the Italian Alps, but the growing power of the Nazis overshadowed life there. Readying herself for the worst, she sold most of her possessions and gave the proceeds to an Italian peasant family in the Tyrol, to take care of infant Mario, if necessary.

In 1941, the nightmare began. German officers came to the chalet and arrested Ramberg. This is one of Capecchi's earliest memories. "My mother had taught me to speak both Italian and German," he recalls, "and I was quite aware of what was happening. I sensed that I would not see my mother again for many years, if ever." ➤

Capecchi went to live with the Italian family that Ramberg had made arrangements with. He lived on their farm for one year, but even on the farm World War II intruded. When the Allied forces landed in southern Italy and proceeded northward, "bombings of northern Italian cities were a daily occurrence," Capecchi says. "One hot afternoon, American planes swooped down and began machine gunning the peasants in the field," he recalls. "A bullet grazed my leg." The young Capecchi got a lifelong scar from this incident, but worse was to come.

The money that Ramberg had put aside for his care ran out. The family put Capecchi on the streets. He was 4 ½ years old.

The next four years were a brutal exercise in survival for Capecchi. "I headed south," he says, "sometimes living on the streets, sometimes joining gangs of other homeless children, sometimes living in orphanages, and most of the time being hungry." He headed to Reggio Emilia, where he knew his father lived, but his father proved to be abusive, violent. Capecchi ran away after three weeks and wound up in a hospital for children suffering from malnutrition or typhoid, where his daily diet was "a bowl of chicory coffee and a crust of old bread." Unbeknownst to him, a miracle was on the way.

Rescue and America

In 1945, American troops liberated Munich. Ramberg had survived her captivity there and set out to find her son. She scoured the country for a year before finding him at the hospital on his ninth birthday.

Capecchi didn't recognize his mother. "In five years," he says, "she had aged a lifetime." Ramberg brought him a complete Tyrolean outfit, including a small hat that Capecchi still has, and two boat tickets to America sent to her by her younger brother Edward. Though never would she tell him of her wartime experiences.

Mother and son traveled to the commune Edward had helped found in Pennsylvania called Bryn Gweled. There, Mario focused on healing and "converting … into a productive human being."

Capecchi entered a nearby Quaker school where academics came easily to him. His uncle Edward, a physicist who had worked out the theory of the electron microscope, used "subliminal indoctrination" to show him the value of science. Between that and the commune's emphasis on social justice, Capecchi went to Antioch College, in Yellow Springs, Ohio, intending to major in political science.

Soon after, Capecchi gave up on politics, finding little science in political science. He switched to a double major in science and math, excited about a developing new science: molecular biology.

He entered graduate school at Harvard University at the behest of James D. Watson himself, who told Capecchi that he'd be ". . . crazy to go anywhere else." Watson, the 1962 Nobel Prize winner and co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, was a demanding researcher. "We never had to worry about what was on his mind," Capecchi laughed. "He was extremely critical."

Capecchi earned his doctorate in biophysics in 1967. He was a senior fellow at Harvard, and then a faculty member at the Harvard School of Medicine. Finding a lack of synergy, he decided in 1973 to go to the University of Utah in Salt Lake City where he embarked upon the work that changed biology forever.

Mario Capecchi (front right), at age 16, on an educational trip to Mexico "shadowing" a medical doctor.

"We're Glad You Didn't Follow Our Advice"

With the recent emergence of recombinant DNA technology (combining different DNA molecules from different organisms or species), the stage was set for Capecchi's breakthrough. Through his research, he discovered how homologous recombination, or gene targeting, can be used to introduce genetic modifications in an organism through the use of embryonic stem cells. This technology would allow for mutations in any desired gene. The significance of this technology is that it gives a scientist the ability to choose both which gene to mutate, and how to mutate it. A scientist would have virtually complete freedom on how to manipulate the DNA sequences in an organism's genome. This would allow scientists to evaluate, in detail, the function of any gene.

Capecchi applied for a National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant to fund his experiments. NIH came back with a flat "no," and advised him to turn his attentions elsewhere. Capecchi decided to go ahead with the experiments and show his results in the next round of NIH grant funding four years later. "In science," he says, "truth always wins out, as long as whatever you do is reproducible...If I hadn't had any results, you'd never have heard of me!"

By 1984, Capecchi had unmitigated success. In 1987, he applied the technology to mice, and two years later he developed the first mouse models with targeted mutations. Because of Capecchi's experiments, gene targeting technology has allowed scientists to engineer mouse models for cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, and more. It has revolutionized the study of human disease, which the NIH acknowledged by agreeing to fund further experiments. The NIH award letter said, somewhat sheepishly, "We're glad you didn't follow our advice."

Mario Capecchi at his laboratory at the University of Utah

Courtesy of the University of Utah; Photo by Tim Kelly.

Courtesy of the National Science & Technology Medals Foundation; Ryan K Morris

President George W. Bush presented Mario Capecchi with the 2001 National Medal of Science.

The Difference Between Scientists and Rock Stars

For his work on gene targeting, Capecchi shared the 2007 Nobel Prize for Medicine or Physiology. Stockholm, Capecchi says, is beautiful, but the social rounds of being a Nobel laureate were exhausting. "It's a 12-day party," he says. "Every laureate comes to the hotel in a limousine … you have to know what to wear, how to shake hands with royalty. Every day started at about 7 a.m. and lasted until about 3 in the morning.

"But, here's the difference between scientists and rock stars—two days later, Bruce Springsteen arrives at the hotel. The whole crowd—shoom!" he laughs, mimicking the crowd's hasty retreat from Nobel laureates to the musician.

Capecchi is still conducting research, but also has taken a page from his mother's life and is exploring artistic creation as well. Both his wife, Laurie Frasier, and his daughter, Misha, he notes approvingly, are artists. He mostly works in stained glass. "Science and art are not all that different," he says. "It takes a lot of imagination to somehow express it."

He thinks the future of genetics is in complex systems. "Biology is much more complex than we initially realized," he says. "I am a holistic person. Right now, we're working on one gene at a time. Now I'm looking at how to handle larger data sets, how to handle complexity."

His punishing travel schedule is connected with his work with complex systems. His trip to Hawaii was for a meeting of psychiatrists. "One thing [his lab] is getting involved in is psychiatric disorders," he says. He was there to talk to researchers about a mouse model for obsessive compulsive disorders.

One thing Mario Capecchi seems unable to do is rest on his considerable laurels. "Essentially, I'm an optimist," he says. "I'm still enjoying running a lab, enjoying a sense of discovery. I'm happy thinking about problems—exploring it, and trying to solve it."

Christian Feuerstein is a writer, editor and production artist living outside of Baltimore, Md. ▲

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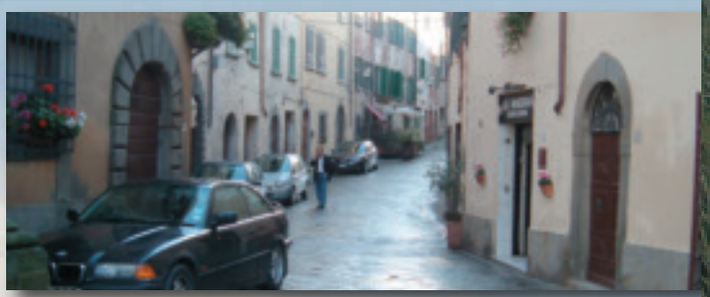

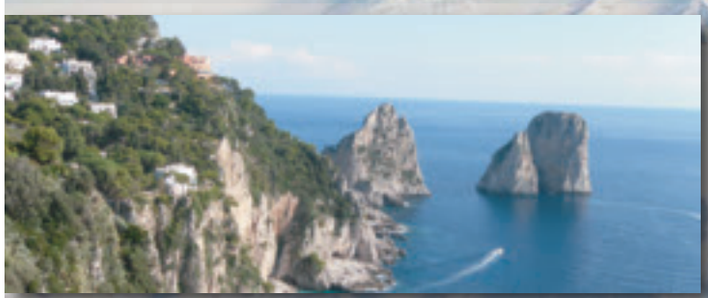

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Touring Italy in Search of Unity

From Ischia to Siena, as Many Opinions as Italians

By Cristina Del Sesto

Cristina Del Sesto

Morning fog settles in the Tuscan hillside near Spannocchia

Authority has been making Italians uneasy for centuries so we have developed an arsenal of countermeasures, from flattery to indifference, familiarity, complicity, apparent hostility and feigned admiration.

–Beppe Severgnini

The concept of unification is a bit foreign to Italians who celebrate individualism with every beat of their heart. While the 150th Anniversary of the country's unification was the official celebration throughout 2011, unofficially the revelry was and will always be more about the country's culture. It's for the passion that has propelled Italy's people to outlive governments over thousands of years. Besides, to Italians, unification is in its infancy.

So, on a recent trip to Italy, closing out the anniversary year, I was curious about what unification meant in different regions and among people from varying socio-economic backgrounds—from a *contessa* to a taxi driver.

Has unification been a good thing? Do they wish a king was still in charge? Does it really matter? My adventure began in the South of Italy.

Ugo Niutta

We touched down in Napoli. My *cugina* and I had decided to take this trip with our four children to learn more about our ancestors, the country and the people they left behind. Mario Calabrese picked us up at Capodichino airport, which is officially called Ugo Niutta and is referred to as neither. We would be dropped at the port, Molo Beverello, where we'd take a hydrofoil to Ischia, our great-grandmother's birthplace.

Mario weaved in and out of midday traffic while we bantered about the Republic. It is impossible to talk to an Italian about the present without ➤

Cristina Del Sesto

La chiesa del Soccorso a Forio, one of Ischia's two famous landmarks located on a bluff overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea.

getting into the past. By past I don't mean 200 or even 300 years. Italians think B.C. Perhaps it is their collective awareness of ancient history that makes them so irreverent. Their survival has depended not upon strictly following the law but on their ability to maneuver around it because the rules are constantly changing.

In his book "La Bella Figura: An Insider's Guide to the Italian Mind," Corriere della Sera columnist and author Beppe Severginini explains the Italian character. "Italians are a moral people but our morality, like our law, has to be tailored to fit," he writes. "We have an à la carte approach. Everyone selects what he or she wants, according to conscience and convenience…. It's our distrust of authority, cultivated over centuries of foreign domination." Elsewhere, he elaborates: "Obedience is boring. We want to think about it."

So, what does Mario the taxi driver think? "I'd prefer a king because I'd rather be lining one pocket of a monarchy than many pockets of a Republic," he said, with no hesitation, no rancor or sarcasm, only good humor and confidence. "Ciao," he said. "Don't forget to tell your friends about the best *cicerone* in Napoli."

Ischia

We arrived at Le Rose Residence and gratefully into the care of hotel owner Fausto Silvestro, who could tell that we were completely disorganized and needed his help. Italians love to help. Unlike their French and Swiss neighbors, Italians relish chaos. The spontaneity of it all sends them into a peculiar euphoria.

We needed an eye doctor for the pre-teen's mysteriously bloodshot eye and an orthodontist for his braces that bent while chewing pizza crust at Molo Beverello. The toddler was about to have an accident and, rather than waiting for us to check-in, he ran outside to pee in the garden (very naughty). The teenagers were sullen. They'd never experienced jetlag. We needed a plan to get to our great grandmother's town of Forio. And we were hungry. We were all given bathing caps, the unofficial uniform of Ischia spas. Fausto's pool has a great view of Vesuvio.

Italian driving is much like its government, suggested Ricardo Colbrelli, our taxi driver to Forio. We were swerving on narrow mountainous roads. "Everyone wants to go in different directions: right, left, back, forward. It's chaos," he said. "We have six communities just in Ischia alone. Each has different ideas."

The ideas on this small island include secession. As recently as 1975, the town of Panza tried to become an independent commune. "That's nothing," said Colbrelli. "I'm from the north. They still don't think the south is part of Italy."

We made it to La chiesa del Soccorso a Forio on a bluff overlooking the sea. It dates back to the 16th century and combines Greek-Byzantine, Moresque and Mediterranean architecture and visually tells the story of a land that has been invaded by many, including Saracen pirates. Then we returned to Fausto at the hotel where we spoke of politics and memory.

"I understand why many people would contemplate the anniversary of unification and provocatively say they prefer a king but, anyway, we have one still whether or not we call it a monarchy," he said. "Cicero reminds us that memory is weakened if not exercised and we must help younger generations learn about not just the Republic but all of our history. In the course of about 3,000 years, there have been many civilizations and each has left a track, and so my concern is for us making sure to leave something positive behind."

I suddenly remembered that somehow, somewhere, we left behind our elegant room key with the hand-worked leather fob. All Fausto could say was "*marrone*," which literally means "chestnut" but there was a twinkle in his eye. He made certain we made the ferry to Capri.

Cristina Del Sesto

Some weekends, attorney Marco Federico guides tourists around Capri

Capri

In a glut of ostentatious tourists, La Musa B&B is a humble oasis. Costanza and Romolo Celentano picked up where Fausto left off. An afternoon on a gozzo was the recommendation. Captain Marco

La chiesa del Soccorso a Forio

Cristina Del Sesto

Federico by week works as a lawyer in Naples. By weekend, he's at the helm of his father's Caprese fishing boat Aquarius leading nautical tours that circumnavigate the island and its many grottos. "I prefer a corrupt democracy to a monarchy for sure," he said. "The idea of a democracy is a good one. It is the people who are the problem." But by problem he didn't mean he thought that anything should or could be changed. Captain Marco believes that a corrupt democracy is not such a bad thing. People are people after all. And when you are delightfully bobbing in the Tyrrhenian Sea off the coast of this island—a resort since the Roman Republic—one tends to agree.

Pietravaino and Garofoli

My paternal grandfather's family and my maternal father's family come from two villages in Caserta that are not that far apart. Garibaldi and the King of Savoy Vittorio Emanuele II met in Teano in 1860, a few miles from Pietravaino, where Garibaldi gave the newly freed Southern Italy Kingdom to him as a present.

Many Italians, and no doubt Americans, too, are not aware that Garibaldi came to America in July 1850, and stayed for a year working at a friend's Staten Island candle factory. Ten years later, as the American Civil War was starting, he offered his services to President Lincoln but rejected the offer of a major general's commission. He wanted to be in charge of all U.S. forces. After Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Garibaldi wrote to the president: "Posterity will call you the great emancipator, a more enviable title than any crown could be..."

Ironically, Garibaldi may have caused my ancestors to leave Italy for another kind of emancipation. Unification impacted the economy of the south for the worse, not the better. The port of Naples, in particular, suffered tremendously.

In Garofoli, we made an emotional visit to a dusty street where almost everyone shared our surname. Our family of sweet chestnut (*marrone*) farmers had left this remote mountainous outpost in the municipality of Roccamonfina for a better life. Unlike in Ischia, I could understand why they'd left here, but what I couldn't fathom is why anyone had remained.

Spannocchia

One of the top eco-resorts in the world, this 1100-acre organic farm in central Tuscany has guests joyfully contributing to the compost pile. While we were visiting, Giusseppe Ficara, renowned classical guitarist and professor at Rossini National Conservatory of Pesaro, performed music from the Risorgimento. Giusseppe Mazzini, the "Soul of Italy" and a leading figure in unification, was a very good guitarist, too. "It is a great revelation," Ficara said. "Not only for the classical guitar community but also for younger generations, for our history and love for our great country."

Ficara recalls that for decades after 1870, unification was celebrated annually on September 20. "After a meeting between Mussolini and the Pope, Mussolini agreed to cancel the feast and the celebration," said Ficara. "Fascism is over, but we still don't have this September 20th feast. It is like cancelling Bastille Day in France." ➤

Cristina Del Sesto

Contessa Francesca Fumi Cambi Gado, after a day of exploring an ancient cave on her Siena estate, with husband Vincent Lualdi

Ficara is patriotic. His grandfather, at the age of 17, was one of the Ragazzi del '99 who fought in 1916 against the Austrians to free Lombardy and the Venice region. "Now those ingrates would also like to be freed of Rome! All southern Italy cemeteries are full of tombs of boys who died to free the northern Italians," he said. "Culture is the only possible bridge to a real unification of Italy."

Siena

We arrived in Siena in time for the four days of the Palio, arguably the oldest horse race in the world. Siena is also home to the oldest surviving bank: Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena. This Tuscan city, according to legend, was founded by Senius, son of Remus and nephew of Romulus. Thus, there are she-wolfs suckling twins all over town. We met with Contessa Francesca Fumi Cambi Gado, an art historian and author, and explored the cobwebbed Etruscan caves on her property.

"The Republic is recent in a country that lives on a daily basis with the ancient," she said. "The king was ousted for a president with exactly the same rule and power but presidents are less cultured and educated. Italy is still made up of city states and, so, the same five or six families are running the country."

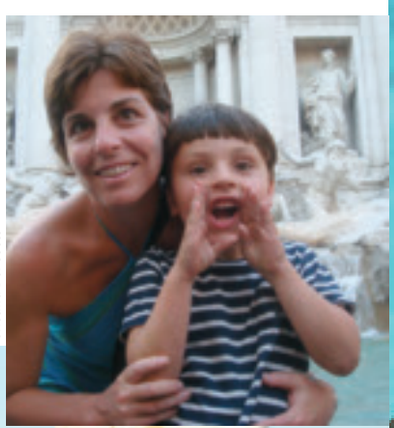
By virtue of the Contessa using her title, it's obvious where she stands. Unification abolished formal recognition of nobility. "Italians don't think much of government and rules," she continued. "Governments change, rules change, our lives go on."

Roma

The Lazio region, and particularly Rome, was a good place to say so long. Janus is the god of beginnings and transitions in ancient Roman religion and mythology. And it is Janus who really reigns over Italy.

We paid $10 for one scoop of gelato and threw coins over our shoulder at the Trevi Fountain to ensure we'd be back. The toddler almost dove in and the *arma dei carabinieri* tooted. The two-faced god looking to the future and the past would remember us and still be there waiting along with his Janus-headed populus: Italians united only in heart, soul and culture.

Cristina (Buonanno) Del Sesto, at the Trevi fountain with her son, Ian (4), is a former Washington Post reporter and author. ▲



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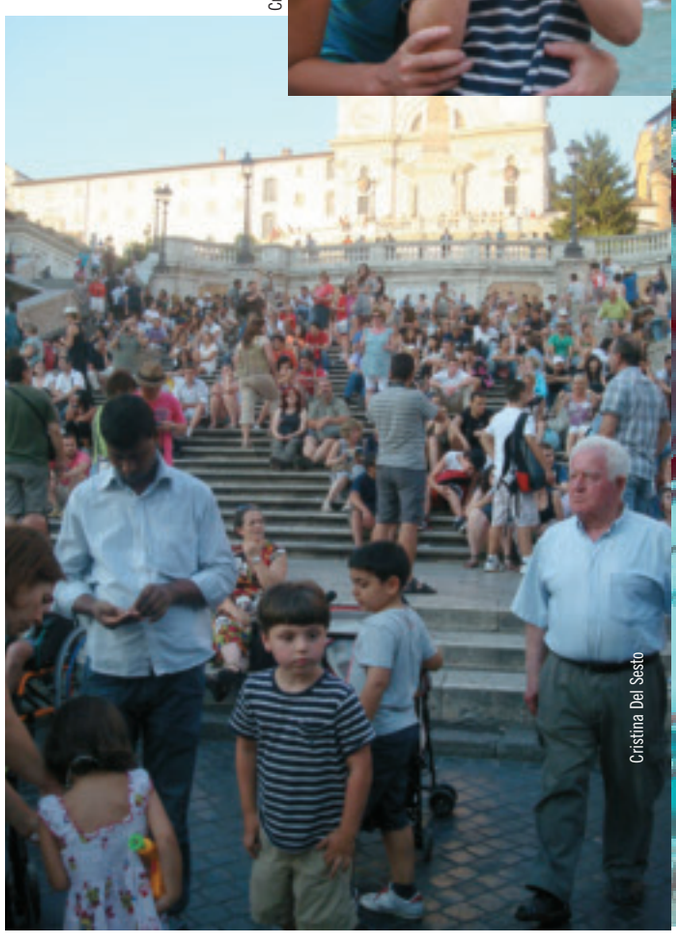
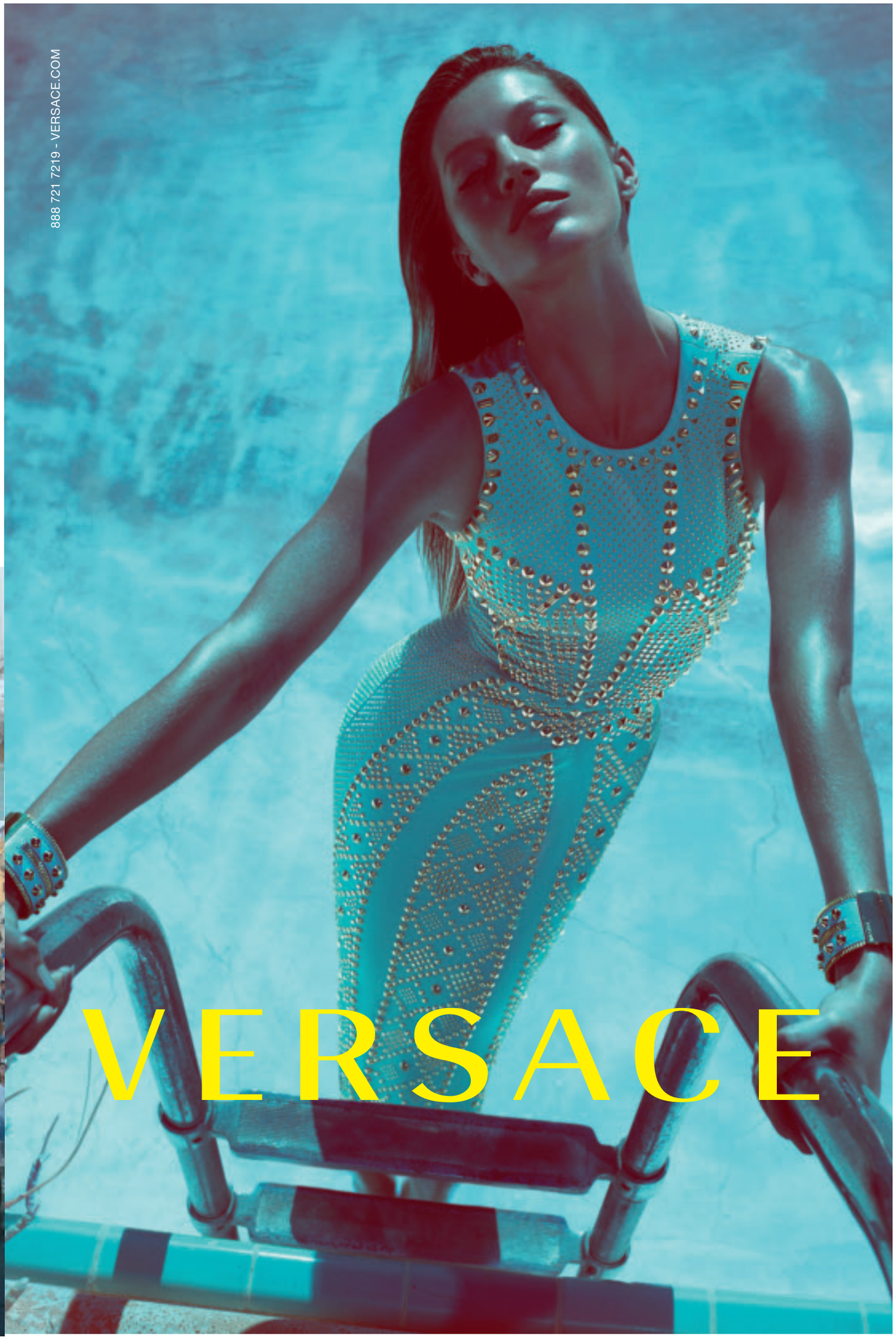


Cristina Del Sesto

The small village of Garofoli, near Roccamonfina, where the author found most residents on this street shared her ancestral name

Cristina Del Sesto



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NIAF NEWS
A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL ITALIAN AMERICAN FOUNDATION

NIAF's Board Members' Retreat in Palm Beach

Princess Béatrice de Bourbon des Deux Siciles and Dolores Del Raso

Officers and members of the NIAF Board of Directors met in Palm Beach, Fla., on Saturday, January 28, for a working retreat to discuss the Foundation's plans for 2012. In conjunction with the retreat, on January 27, the NIAF leadership and spouses attended a black-tie dinner at the Palm Beach home of former NIAF Board Member John J. Cafaro. Featured guest at the soirée was Princess Béatrice de Bourbon des Deux Siciles.

The evening of January 28, NIAF Board members joined ambassadors, elected officials and other dignitaries at the 55th Annual International Red Cross Ball. Held at Donald Trump's private Mar-A-Lago Club in Palm Beach, the white-tie-and-tiara cocktail reception and dinner, considered one of the highlights of the Palm Beach social season, supports the Red Cross' mission of nearly 100 years.

NIAF Vice Chair Hon. Patricia de Stacy Harrison with Frank and Dottie Giordano

Lisa and Salvatore Salibello, NIAF Executive Vice President, and Nuccia McCormick

NIAF Board Member Joe Della Ratta, Nick Mileti, Bernadene Rand, and NIAF Board Member Kenneth J. Aspromonte

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Board Member Joseph M. Della Ratta, Nuccia McCormick, Marie Silvani, NIAF Southeast Regional Vice President Robert Silvani, and NIAF Board Member Kenneth J. Aspromonte

NIAF Board members Dr. Antonio Giordano, Frank Giordano and Matthew DiDomenico Sr.

NIAF President Joseph V. Del Raso (left) and Princess Béatrice de Bourbon des Deux Siciles (right) join the Cafaro family—Ohio State Sen. Capri Cafaro, Renee Cafaro, Janet Cafaro (seated) and John J. Cafaro at the Cafaro's Palm Beach home.

Nuccia McCormick, NIAF Board Member Linda R. Carlozzi, Aileen Carlucci, Dory DiDomenico and Anne Del Raso

NIAF 2011 Christmas Concert

Many guests enjoyed hors d'oeuvres, wine and holiday cheer at NIAF's 2011 Christmas Concert at Casa Italiana Hall at the Holy Rosary Church in Washington, D.C. The festivities included a wonderful performance by Torino-born singer, musician and actress Simona Rodano.

Italian singer Simona Rodano sang "Joy to The World" in three languages.

Longtime NIAF volunteer Dora Santacroce and NIAF Executive Vice President Dr. John Rosa

Angelo Dundee

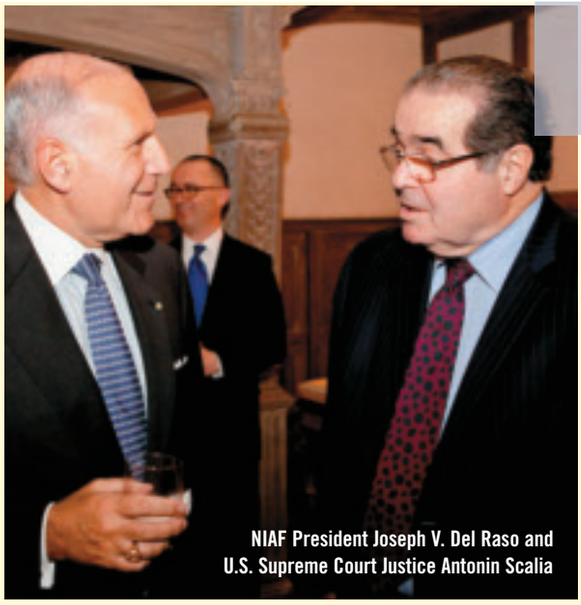
NIAF notes with sadness the passing of famed trainer of boxing champions Angelo Dundee, a longtime friend of the Foundation. During NIAF's 25th Anniversary Awards Gala, in 2000, he and legendary heavy weight champion Muhammad Ali were honored with NIAF's "One America Award," presented by President Bill Clinton.

Lido Civic Club Honors Mike Rizzo and Angelo A. Puglisi

The Lido Civic Club of Washington, D.C., held its Past Presidents' Night Gala on January 21, 2012, at Washington Golf and Country Club. Sponsored by NIAF, the annual black-tie event this year honored Mike Rizzo, Executive Vice-President and General Manager of the Washington Nationals, and NIAF Council member and Lido Civic Club member Angelo A. Puglisi.

NIAF Board Member Kenneth J. Aspromonte, who played for the Washington Senators from 1958-60, spoke at the gala.

Lido Civic Club President Phillip Finelli reads the inscription on the award honoring Angelo A. Puglisi.



Photos by the Embassy of Italy

NIAF President Joseph V. Del Raso and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia

Italian Embassy Hosts Italy's New Prime Minister

Italy's new Ambassador to the United States Claudio Bisogniero honored Italy's new Prime Minister Mario Monti at a dinner at Villa Firenze in Washington D.C., on February 9. Prime Minister Monti was in Washington to meet with President Obama.

Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero and Minister Mario Monti

Former Ambassador Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata, now Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano.

NOIAW Honors Anita McBride

On January 11, 2012, The National Organization of Italian American Women hosted an Epiphany Celebration, "Three Wise Women," to honor NIAF Board Member Hon. Anita Bevacqua McBride at Maggiano's Little Italy in Washington, D.C. McBride is an Executive in Residence at the Center for Congressional and Professional Studies at American University and the former Chief of Staff for First Lady Laura Bush. The event also honored food writer Domenica Marchetti and attorney Dena Feeney.

Anita Bevacqua McBride speaking at the NOIAW dinner

Anita Bevacqua McBride and her family

NIAF Board member Hon. Anita Bevacqua McBride, NIAF Treasurer Gabriel A. Battista and NIAF Executive Vice President Hon. Patricia de Stacy Harrison

Announcing Spring 2012 Travel Packages to Italy!

The National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) continues its popular travel programs to Italy by offering four nine-day/seven-night tours departing from John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) in New York City beginning in March 2012:

- Campania…A Land That Will Capture Your Heart" visits Agropoli, Amalfi, Anacapri, Avellino, Benevento, Capri, Caserta, Naples, Paestum, Pompeii, Positano, Salerno and Sorrento.
- "The Enchanting Hill Towns of Umbria & Eastern Tuscany" tours Arezzo, Assisi, Cortona, Montalcino, Montepulciano, Orvieto, Perugia, Pienza, Siena and Todi.
- "Grand Tour of Sicily 2012" goes to Agrigento, Catania, Cefalu, Etna, Erice, Monreale, Noto, Palermo, Siracusa and Taormina.
- "The Jewels of the Riviera with a touch of Piedmont" visits Cinque Terre, Genoa, Monte Carlo, Nice, Pollenzo, Portofino, Rapallo and Santa Margherita.

Trips include round-trip flights from New York (JFK) to Rome, breakfast and dinner daily, and English-speaking tour manager. Airfare and all current departure taxes and fuel surcharges also are included. Costs range from $2,649 to $3,069 per person based on double occupancy and month of departure. Contact Marianna Pisano at mpisano@unitours.com or call 800-777-7432. When making reservations, mention the promo code: NIAF.

Take a 10-day Mediterranean Cruise in 2012

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

NIAF is offering the following special events in the coming months. Visit www.niaf.org to learn more!

March

Frank Sinatra Tribute Show
Friday, March 16, 2012
"An Evening of Laughter, Memories and Music of Frank Sinatra," starring comedian Tom Dreesen, who shares memories of over 14 years as Frank Sinatra's opening act. At the Wigwam Resort, Ariz.; 6 p.m. Italian Festa Buffet ($25 per person); 8 p.m. Tribute Show ($50 per person). For tickets, contact Molly at 602-224-2344 or mcaldwell@jdmaz.com.

NIAF Second Annual Chairman's Golf Invitational
Saturday, March 17, 2012
Join NIAF Chairman Jerry Colangelo along with sports and media stars for the second annual Chairman's Golf Invitational at the Wigwam Golf Resort, Litchfield Park, Ariz. Registration 8 a.m.; shotgun start 9 a.m. Sponsorships available. For more information, visit www.niaf.org/azgolf or contact Kyla McKenna at kmckenna@niaf.org or 202-939-3117.

April

East Coast Gala
Thursday, April 12, 2012
Don't miss this exciting evening at the legendary Cipriani 42nd Street in New York City. Reception 6:30 p.m.; Dinner 7:30 p.m.; 89 East 42nd Street, New York, N.Y. Visit http://www.niaf.org/events/2012/nyc. To purchase tickets, contact Jerry Jones at 202-939-3102 or jerry@niaf.org.

June

West Coast Gala
Thursday, June 21, 2012
Location: The Fairmont San Francisco Hotel, San Francisco. For more information, contact: Jerry Jones at 202-939-3102 or jerry@niaf.org.

NIAF Golf Tournament Kick-Off Reception at The Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum
Date: TBA
Time: 6 p.m.- 9 p.m.
46th Street and 12th Avenue in New York City
Contact: Nick Caiazzo at nicholas.caiazzo@wilsonelser.com

August

NIAF 8th Annual New York Golf Tournament
Date: TBA
Location: Old Westbury Golf & Country Club.
46th Street and 12th Avenue in New York City.
Contact: Nick Caiazzo at nicholas.caiazzo@wilsonelser.com

As the leading Italian American organization in the United States and Italy with more than 100,000 supporters, the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) works to promote the culture and heritage of Italian Americans. We're branching out to help you connect with us online—go to www.niaf.org

NIAF
THE NATIONAL ITALIAN AMERICAN FOUNDATION
www.niaf.org

By Marco R. della Cava

Our Fearless Reporter Tests a Ferrari 458 Italia at Top Speed ... So You Won't Have To

Ferrari

If there is one brand that literally screams Italy across the globe, it is Ferrari. Born in 1947, when a 49-year-old former Alfa Romeo race car driver named Enzo Ferrari decided to strike out on his own, the company synonymous with blood-red *belle macchine* has since gone on not simply to dominate top-flight racing but also captivate popular culture.

Ferraris mean and demand wealth. Ferraris embody and bestow elegance. Without so much as a hint of a major advertising campaign, the fabled Prancing Horse logo effortlessly conjures up images of daring piloti of yore as well as style-conscious celebrities of today. Guided by its erudite, Columbia University-educated chairman, Luca di Montezemolo, Ferrari now aims to be as familiar a name as Armani, with its own modernist boutiques in world capitals and even its own Ferrari World amusement park in Abu Dhabi. The message is simple. If you can't own a Ferrari, you can at least purchase a piece of the dream, from a $1,000 leather briefcase to a $35 baby bib.

But are the cars themselves worthy of such hype, or have they forsaken their blood-and-guts heritage forged in the fires of the Mille Miglia and become mere mobile platforms for a marketing juggernaut? As a longtime automotive writer, I'm as familiar with Ferrari's storied '60s dream machines (typified by the shark-like GTO, which can fetch $20 million or more at auction) as its mass-market miscues (including the oft-maligned 400i, a four-seat automatic, and the Mondial, a boxy family machine that today sells for as little as $30,000). So it was with great curiosity that I showed up on a cloudy fall day at Infineon Raceway in Sonoma, Calif., to drive the company's latest mid-engine marvel, the 458 Italia.

The invitation was proffered by Ferrari of San Francisco, whose Tuscan villa-themed dealership appears to have materialized out of the Italian countryside (it was for a long time the only U.S. dealership owned outright by Ferrari SpA). A few dozen area clients and prospective clients had gathered to hear from driving professionals about both the intricacies of Infineon, with its radical elevation changes, and

THEN AND NOW

From "The Limit: Life and Death on the Grand 1961 Circuit." Getty Images

Phil Hill after clinching the world championship at the Italian Grand Prix in a Ferrari race car.

Dito Milian/gotbluemilk.com

the subtleties of the quarter-million-dollar 458, which by all pundit accounts is a quantum leap beyond the company's last eight-cylinder snake, the F430. (A note for die-hard Ferraristi: Admittedly, Ferrari himself was enamored of models that carried his 12-cylinder power plants, but in the decades since il commendatore's death in 1988, at the age of 90, some of the finest creations coming out of his factory in the Modenese suburb of Maranello pack eight cylinders, including the iconic F40 made from 1987 to 1992.)

Ferrari itself offers North American owners of its cars the chance to drive them at their limit during multi-day Ferrari Driving Experience sessions at Mont-Tremblant in Canada (warm weather retreats at the race track run around $10,000) and in Aspen

Ferrari of San Francisco organized a one-day driving event at Infineon Raceway in Sonoma, Calif., for clients and prospective clients.

Dito Milian/gotbluemilk.com

(winter driving techniques are imparted for around the same price; see experienceferrari.com). But Ferrari of San Francisco president Greg Minor felt there was an opportunity to please existing owners and intrigue new ones with a far less expensive (he prefers not to disclose the price) one-day track event that could provide an inkling into what these cars are capable of as well as an insight into the heritage and tradition that's packaged in each Ferrari. And with consumer demographics shifting, this sort of indoctrination is more critical than ever.

"Given the economic climate, baby boomers are thinking twice about how they use disposable cash and, indeed, about when they retire, which affects a brand like ours," says Minor. "Add to that the fact that there are significantly fewer Gen Xers than Boomers, and you've lost a big chunk of the market you traditionally draw from."

Ferrari itself is well aware of that fact, which explains two new models in particular. The California is the first Ferrari to wear a retractable hardtop, and is aimed squarely at the female demographic; and the FF is the company's first four-wheel-drive machine with four seats, an unapologetic effort to attract family-oriented buyers with a penchant for skiing.

"We are moving more toward consumable luxury," says Minor, pausing to look over his ➤

Dito Milian/gotbluemilk.com

Writer Marco della Cava after pushing a Ferrari 458 Italia to the limit at Infineon Raceway

shoulder at Infineon's front straightaway. "Then again, out here is where you experience any Ferrari in its true best form."

After a classroom session showing us the proper braking and apexing points (the ideal spot where a race car should clip a turn for maximum exit speed), two dozen of us, helmets in hand, marched out to the pits as the rain began to fall. There sat a dozen impossibly red 458s, looking less like a fleet of cars than a squadron of ostentatious fighter jets, low-slung, full of angled sheet metal and just plain wonderfully aggressive.

For the better part of the afternoon, the same pattern would repeat itself to gradually increase our comfort levels with the car, the track and, most importantly, speed. With a pro instructor leading, each of us would take turns at the wheel for four or five laps, learning the racing line and getting a feel for the 458's braking and acceleration prowess. The car's many stats are impressive, but the few facts that really matter: its 450-horsepower, 4.5-liter, V8 engine can slingshot the car to 62 mph in a neck-snapping 3.4 seconds and hit a top speed of 202 mph; its seven-speed, Formula One-derived transmission offers lightning fast gear changes with the slightest flick of two steering wheel-mounted paddles; and its massive disc brakes are capable of bringing the car to a halt so quickly that you risk whiplash. In a 458 Italia, you are quite literally flying on the ground.

My own chance to soar came late in the day, and in quite an unexpected way. The rain had not let up, though the day's session was not cancelled. In fact, rain is an instant skill sieve; there are those who instinctively and perhaps wisely slow down when the road or track gets damp, and those who see it as a chance to push the limits of the car and their own concentration. Surprisingly, I fell in the latter camp, thanks to instructor Nick Kunewalder.

After riding along with Nick on a recon lap, I hopped in the 458 behind him to begin my final lead-follow session. Neither he nor I had a passenger because the rest of the group had finished. He looked at me before we settled into our cars and smiled. I knew what he meant.

The first lap was slow as he once again showed me the wider, wet-weather racing line. But with each successive lap, his pace quickened. My mission was simple: keep up. My eyes focused laser-like on the tracks his rear tires etched in the rain, with my goal being to set my front tires in their wake. If I got too far back, I knew Kunewalder would slow down, and that would be that. But he never slowed.

How to describe that final, flying lap? In sense, it's easy. For all the noise created by the Ferrari's engine and the 20-inch Michelin tires slicing through the rain, I heard nothing. In that rocket of a car, as I tried to push its and my own limits, everything faded away. All that was left was an eerie calm inside my helmet. With my hands never leaving the leather-clad wheel, my eyes essentially drove the car as they looked not at the turn at hand but the turn ahead, willing the car into the correct, smooth path where the interplay between acceleration, braking and physics becomes a sublime dance.

At speed, I quickly learned something about this latest Ferrari marvel. It may parade down the poshest boulevards in the world, well-heeled success

Phil Hill driving a Ferrari 156 F1 in 1962 at the Nürburgring, Hatzenbach

Lothar Spurzem, 05.08.1962 Nürburgring, Hatzenbach

stories at the helm, but in simple truth the 458 should reside at a track, much like a winning thoroughbred has no business giving kids rides at a birthday party. This is a purpose-built race car that happens to have Department of Transportation certification. Here's just one example of a feature that in town means little, but on a track means everything. Embedded inside the top of the 458's steering wheel are a series of red LED lights which grow in number as the engine reaches the red line, at which point you need to upshift. I always felt it was a bit gimmicky. Wrong. Guiding the 458 around a racetrack in any conditions requires so much focus that you wouldn't dream of looking at the tachometer or speedometer or anywhere other than the road ahead. Those lights in the steering wheel were my guide to proper shifting, allowing me to push the envelope of my own meager driving skills.

Cover of Michael Cannell's book ***The Limit: Life and Death on the 1961 Grand Prix Circuit.***

As my final lap behind Kunewalder came to a close, he thrust his hand out his window and gave me a thumbs up. I reveled in the compliment but my mind suddenly flashed on something else. Hammering the 458 took me a step closer to understanding the Ferrari mystique, which is fundamentally rooted in the racing and not the posing experience. That Prancing Horse on the steering wheel hub—an image given to Enzo Ferrari from the mother of a downed Italian fighter pilot—shouldn't stand for a legacy of fashion and ostentation, but instead be focus on the man who created the cars.

Enzo Ferrari wasn't the easiest of men. Any Ferrari owner or fan would do well to read Michael Cannell's recent book "The Limit: Life and Death on the 1961 Grand Prix Circuit," a story about American Phil Hill's Formula One triumph in a Ferrari that will soon be a movie starring "Spiderman" star Tobey Maguire. In the book, Cannell describes an era that made the Ferrari name "before sponsors and TV coverage, when men drove not for money but for the love of driving and in fact for patriotism."

Ferrari's role in that passion play was one of stern, patrician leader who often cared more about how his cars fared in an accident than his drivers. It was an age when seat belt-less drivers died in almost every race; when cars were little more than an engine bolted to a frame with hand-hammered skin; when spectators were so passionate about the sport that they lined roads like the Targa Florio in Sicily and often met death when cars lost grip.

As I got out of the 458 Italia and gently closed the door, I was convinced I had ever so briefly experienced a bit of that old epoch here at Infineon Raceway. The Ferrari in front of me wasn't a $225,000 toy. It was a time machine back to a time when red giants ruled the road.

Marco R. della Cava lives in San Francisco and writes about popular culture for USA Today. ▲

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Speaking of Italian

Italy is a Multi-Lingual Nation, but What Language Do Italians Really Speak?

By Roberto Severino

Linguists today find little agreement when trying to define what the "standard Italian language" was in 1861, or even how a citizen of the newly unified Italy might be judged proficient in it. But most linguists do agree that only less than 10 percent of Italy's population was able to master a form of Italian that would later become the new nation's shared language.

At the time, the great majority in Italy, nearly 98 percent, spoke a local or regional "dialect," or, at best, a hybrid language. Many could not read or write it. Because of the strong linguistic diversity, the inability to use a recognizable form of Italian was even more widespread in Italy's southern regions, and especially among Italian women who, until then, had been almost totally excluded from formal schooling. By 1861, less than 1 percent of Italy's general population had attended post-elementary schools.

With the exception of the inhabitants of Tuscany and other central regions (Umbria, Marche and Lazio) whose dialects were more proximate to standard Italian, those who were more proficient in the new language of the unified Italy generally belonged to the affluent upper and middle classes or to the clergy.

But, clearly, the first rulers of Italy were fully aware of the great political significance of forging a single common national language in fostering sociopolitical unity in the new nation that hitherto had been divided in several independent states. Concerted efforts were made to bring about just such a result. By 1911, when the country celebrated its 50th anniversary, the number of analphabets, or illiterates, in Italy had been reduced to only 40 percent of the population.

Now, the situation is dramatically different. Because of the many important historical and sociopolitical factors, including the exponential influence of television and other mass media, and a greater openness to looking beyond the great literary language models to the enriching input of Italian regional dialects and foreign languages, especially American English, the Italian language has become the common medium of communication of all Italian citizens. And, as a whole, Italians have achieved a high level of literacy and education.

However, regional variants of Italian and local dialects that are nearly mutually unintelligible in their spoken form especially, continue to this day to coexist alongside the standard language. Recent surveys have shown that when speaking with friends and relatives, nearly 50 percent of Italians ➤

In Prato, Tuscany, in the early '50s, speaking Pratese

Courtesy of Alice Bernardi

>>

still prefer to revert to their native dialects that have all but lost the old stigma of being indicators of social and financial backwardness.

Consider how different and, indeed, mutually incomprehensible, the dialects of Southern Italy (the land of "Terronia" and of the "terùn," as the northerners sometimes derogatively call it referring to inhabitants who worked the land or "terra") from the dialects of Northern Italy (the "Polentoni," equally derogatively referred to as "Polentonia," or land of the eaters of polenta, the mushy corn meal dish considered by inhabitants of the southern region to be unfit for human consumption).

Allowing for small local regional variations, a standard Italian sentence such as "Guarda com'è carina questa bambina!" (Look how cute this little girl is!), for instance, in the eastern Sicilian dialect of Catania would be rendered as "Talìa comu è finicchia 'sta picciridda." In a northern Italian dialect such as Piedmontese or Venetian, that sentence would become, respectively, "Varda cuma l'è bela sta cita" and "Varda che bea questa toseta."

Or, a popular proverb such as "Cane che abbaia non morde" (A barking dog doesn't bite) in Sicilian would be rendered as "Cani c'abbaja non muzzica." In Piedmontese, it's "Can ch'abaula a mord nen," and in Venetian, "Can che sbaia no morsega."

As another comparison, in the central Italian dialect of Abruzzo, those two sentences become "Vide com'è belluccia 'sta cìtele" and "lu cane c'abbaie non moccica."

From these examples, the lexical components and the all-important regional pronunciation aside, the divergences between standard language and dialects don't seem that marked after all. This is because Florentine Tuscan itself, from which standard Italian has derived, was one of many dialects spoken in the Italian peninsula. Also, all of these dialects have a common root in Latin.

In reality, like Tuscan, most of these dialects can be considered full-fledged romance languages, the only difference being the extension of the geographical areas in which they are now spoken and understood.

Conversation on the Amalfi Coast

Dick Jensen

This map approximates some of the many languages and dialects spoken in Italy.

As it is widely known, many of post-World War II Italian films have freely incorporated the use of dialect. Memorable among them is Mario Monicelli's film "I Compagni" ("The Comrades,"1963), with Marcello Mastroianni who played a union organizer). And some of them, like Luchino Visconti's "La Terra Trema" ("The Earth is Shaking," 1948), based on Verga's 1881 novel "I Malavoglia," and Matteo Garrone's 2008 film "Gomorrah," even when shown in Italy, appeared with Italian subtitles.

This said, however, recent surveys show that even when speaking among themselves Italian young people increasingly seem to prefer using standard Italian. That's probably due to the effect of Italian schools where dialects are almost invariably banned, and where Italian classics of authors such as Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Tasso and Manzoni are a prominent part of the curriculum. Or, perhaps it's also due to a subtle sociopolitical, elitist perception of the standard language. Whatever the reason, the fact doesn't bode well for the preservation of Italy's rich variety of its many other languages.

In the late Middle Ages, Dante Alighieri was well aware of the enormous sociopolitical importance of the variety of languages spoken during his times in the Italian peninsula. In his "De Vulgari Eloquentia" ("On the Vernacular Speeches," ca. 1305), he wrote convincingly about the Italian vernaculars as mature mediums for the creation of literary works. Identifying 14 major Italian vernaculars, he praised, first of all, the Sicilian and Bolognese poetic vernaculars for being the product of most refined cultures, and then the Tuscan (Florentine) language for inheriting and developing its literary and linguistic canons.

Luchino Visconti's 1948 film "La Terra Trema" ("The Earth is Shaking") contained so much dialect that its release in Italy had Italian subtitles.

The release in Italy of Mario Monicelli's 1963 film "I Compagni" ("The Comrades") required Italian subtitles due to dialect.

Perhaps showing some political prejudice, Dante ranked Romanesco, the language spoken by contemporaneous Romans, dead last because theirs is a "tristiloquium" and "turpissimum"—a squalid and very vile manner of speaking: " . . . dicimus igitur Romanorum non vulgare, sed potius tristiloquium, italorum vulgarium omnium esse turpissimum," i.e., ". . . we say, therefore, that what the Romans speak is not so much a vernacular as it is a squalid speech, the most vile of all the vernaculars in Italy."

Although Dante recognizes other regional Italian vernaculars that were used by important authors and in numerous literary works—all of them being at the very core of what he called "Italianitas" (Italianness) whose components he identified in language, manners and customs—because of the wealth of Tuscan writers and the great literary masterpieces they produced, their vernacular soon became accepted as the chosen medium for literary expression. By the 16th century it was canonized as the standard written, literary language of Italy.

During the 19th century that ushered in Italy's unification, three great writers especially epitomize the geographical contribution of all of Italy to the solution of the "questione della lingua," the debate on what language to adopt.

Milanese aristocrat Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1883), the modern master of Italian prose who, in his youth, was more at ease with his native Milanese dialect or with French, painstaking reworked the lexicon and style of his narrative masterpiece "I Promessi Sposi" ("The Betrothed," 1827-42), trying to achieve a more contemporary form of standard Italian language that could be adopted nationally. He based the reworking, in part, on modern, current, middle-class Tuscan, especially Florentine.

Manzoni's contemporary, the great poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837), a native of Recanati, Marche, almost single-handedly renovated the forms and language of Italian poetry, purging from his best lyrics too rhetorical and antiquated forms of the old classical models.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, later in the 19th century, the Sicilian writer Giovanni Verga (1840-1920) created the "Verismo" movement, a stylistic form of Realism. Applying it in his masterpiece "I Malavoglia" (1881), Verga modernized 19th century Italian narrative genre by rendering the language of his humble protagonists through a form of Italian he created anew by grafting it on the syntax, communicative modes and proverbial expressions of the local dialect.

Fascism notwithstanding—which for sociopolitical reasons during its rule opposed vehemently the use of dialects—Verga's influence has had a lasting influence both in literature and cinematography. Many post-WWII and contemporary Italian writers have since adopted a sort of hybrid literary Italian, strengthened and spiced by words and constructs borrowed from various dialects. Among them, film director, novelist and intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini, who was influenced both by Friulian (the Rhaeto-Romance native language of the town of Belluno) and later, like the Milanese writer and poet Carlo Emilio Gadda, also by the Romanesco jargon of their adopted Rome; Alberto Arbasino, whose novels borrowed creatively from the Lombard dialect; author, playwright, screenwriter and poet Eduardo De Filippo, who made extensive use of his native Neapolitan; and author Andrea Camilleri, of the Montalbano series fame, who has found inspiration in his native Sicilian language and culture.

The fact is that Italian dialects are far from being dead, despite facing the increasing threat of being homogenized. Many remain fully functional, developed, robust languages with their own vocabulary, grammar, syntax and, in most cases, literature. The main regional languages of Italy are Piedmontese, Ligurian, Lombard, Friulian, Venetian, Emiliano-Romagnolo, Abruzzese-Molisano, Neapolitan-Calabrese, Sicilian and Sardinian, the latter subdivided into four distinct variants.

In addition, there are the languages and dialects spoken in long established geographically peripheral communities, such as German, Franco-Provencal, Croatian, Slovene, Albanian, Graecanico, Catalan, Ladin and Corsican, as well as many foreign languages and dialects recent immigrants, who constitute more than 6 percent of Italy's population, speak among themselves. ➤

Keeping alive a native language, regardless of how many speak it, is of paramount importance because it fulfills for the speakers the utmost cultural and social needs by expressing holistically the culture, memories, traditions and macro and micro histories that formed and nurtured them. A language is the very soul of a people and is fundamental to man's sense of identity and understanding of the world.

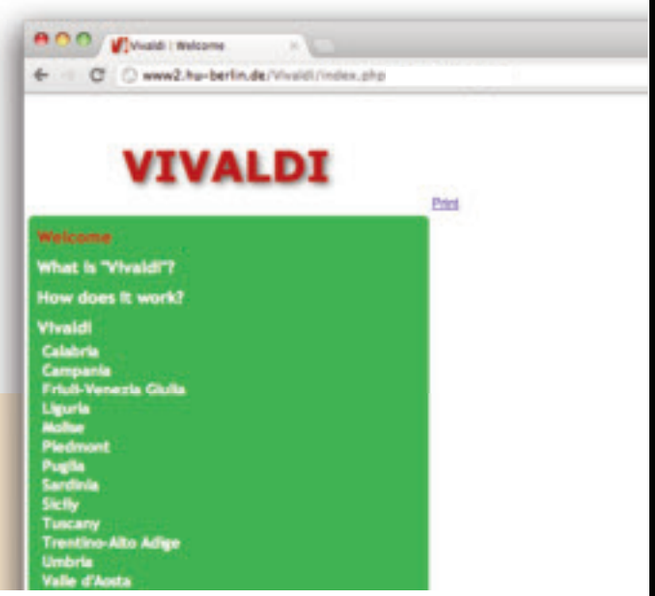
The poet Ignazio Buttitta (1899-1997) expresses these feelings most eloquently in the verses of a poem he wrote in Sicilian dialect entitled "Lingua e dialettu" ("Language and Dialect"). In it, he exhorts countrymen to defend and preserve this most precious inheritance that is at the very inner core
of their individual and collective cultural, social and historical identity:

"…Un populu / diventa poviru e servu / quannu ci arrubbanu a lingua / addutata di patri: / è persu pi sempri." ("… A people becomes poor and servile and it is lost forever when the language inherited from their forefathers is taken away from them.")

Roberto Severino, a native of Catania, Italy, is a well-known educator. He has written extensively on many literary and historical subjects and is a Professor Emeritus of Italian, Georgetown University. ▲

Medusa Film

Giuseppe Tornatore filmed his 2009 award-winning "Baaria," in two versions—the original in local Baariotu dialect of Sicily with Italian and English subtitles, and the other dubbed in Italian.



Interested in hearing samples of various Italian dialects and regional languages? Visit the website VIVALDI at **www2.hu-berlin.de/Vivaldi/index.php** where native speakers from 14 different dialects in Italy recount the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

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The Springtime Italian American Reading List

By Don Oldenburg

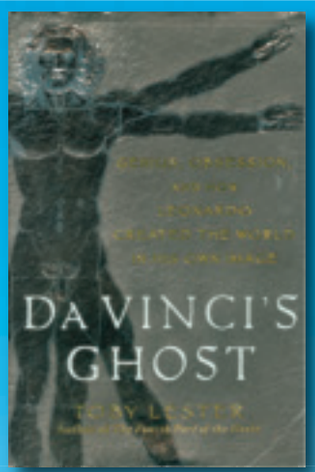
Turning to that first page of a new book is a little like spring. You find the promise of a new beginning …or at least a good story.

Italian-American artist Edward Giobbi gets it. He not only knows his way around the art world and his springtime garden, he also knows books, having authored several, including his classic "Italian Family Cooking," "Eat Right, Eat Well, The Italian Way," and "Pleasures of the Good Earth."

Giobbi's oft-quoted observation about spring: "I will always plant a large garden in the spring. Who can resist the feelings of hope and joy that one gets from participating in nature's rebirth?"

Here's our spring roundup of a few recently published books. As always, some are critically acclaimed and some fall short of the literary radar. But all of them are written by Italian American authors, or are of interest to Italian American readers, or both.

We provide the beginning sentences of each book because we believe new beginnings, just as our immigrant forefathers did. We've also added a brief summary or review of each book! Buona lettura!

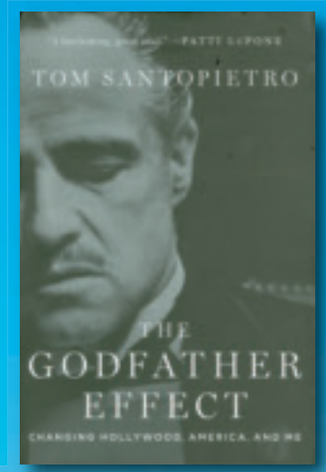


Da Vinci's Ghost: Genius, Obsession, and How Leonardo Created the World in His Own Image
By Toby Lester
Free Press; 304 pages; $26.99 hardcover

Beginning: This is the story of the world's most famous drawing: Leonardo da Vinci's man in a circle and a square. Art historians call it Vitruvian Man…

You undoubtedly have seen the image, Leonardo's "Vitruvian Man," on coffee mugs, t-shirts, Italy's 1-Euro coin. For a 520-year-old sketch, the drawing has legs (literally and figuratively). Author Toby Lester calls it the "the world's most famous drawing" and it is undoubtedly one of the world's most reproduced.

A contributing editor for The Atlantic, Lester tells a more intriguing story about "Vitruvian Man" than its modern commercial appeal. Starting more than 1,500 years ago with the ancient Greek and Romans, he investigates the anthropological evolution of relevant ideas, beliefs and events, even arguably the precursors that led to that moment of genius when Leonardo put ink to paper to create that universal icon. While the book is as much speculation as factual history, especially about Leonardo's faintly documented early life, Lester makes a convincing and fascinating case about the remarkable drawing's history.



The Godfather Effect: Changing Hollywood, America, and Me
By Tom Santopietro
Thomas Dunne Books; 326 pages
$25.99 hardcover

Beginning: When Francis Ford Coppola arrived at Marlon Brando's home in late 1970 to shoot a "makeup test" for the actor's role as aging Mafia chieftain Don Vito Corleone in "The Godfather," he had exactly one thing on his mind: how to conduct what amounted to a screen test without insulting the world famous Academy Award-winning actor.

While a good part of this book is about the making of Francis Ford Coppola's epic film "The Godfather" and its two sequels, the author does not glorify crime and violence, nor does he ignore the negative stereotyping generated from those films. Instead, the best of this book is Santopietro's personal story about how he never really connected to his Italian heritage as a youngster until seeing film's scenes of Italy and New York's Little Italy during the Depression.

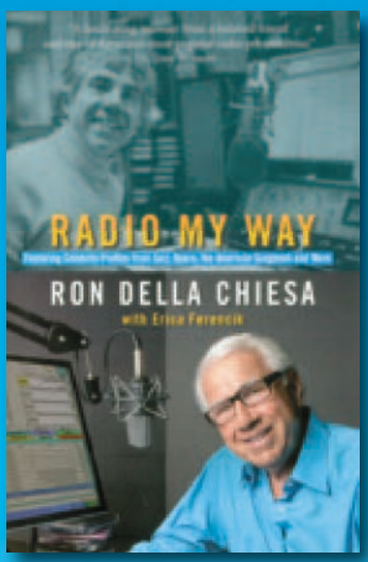
The author of books on Barbra Streisand, Doris Day and Frank Sinatra, Santopietro tries his hand at sociological analysis of the films' popularity, stirs up Hollywood gossip, and puts down reality programming, such as "Mob Wives" and "Jersey Shore," that promote negative and trivializing stereotyping. ➤

The Liberty of Servants: Berlusconi's Italy
By Maurizio Viroli
Princeton University Press
178 pages; $27.95

Beginning: English speaking readers already have a precise picture of Berlusconi's Italy. Scholars and journalists have accurately documented and explained that Berlusconi's system of power has no precedent and no equal in the history of liberal and democratic countries...

Published before the fall of the Berlusconi government last November, this controversial analysis by distinguished Machiavelli biographer political theory professor Maurizio Viroli argues that the media-mogul-turned-prime-minister gutted Italy's proud democracy into a shell of itself. The author applies the analogy of a modern-day imperial court in which Berlusconi, as if an emperor (see the book's cover), surrounded himself with an entourage of yes men, beautiful women and, most troubling, an adoring public.

Viroli catalogues Berlusconi's excesses and failures, factually and anecdotally, contending that he turned Italy into a servile nation. But while Viroli is unquestionably anti-Berlusconi, don't mistake that as being anti-Italy. As a contrasting backdrop to Berlusconi and his impact on the nation, the professor frequently interjects references to the principled and noble literature, philosophy and politics of Italy that helped to bring on the Risorgimento and create the republic in the first place.



Radio My Way
By Ron Della Chiesa
Pearson Inc.; 295 pages; $29.99

Beginning: There are times when I look back at my life to discover where this passion for radio began, only to realize there's no mystery at all. My beginnings were storybook-perfect to grow seeds of an obsession for broadcasting...

Boston broadcasting personality and NIAF friend Ron Della Chiesa recently celebrated his 50th anniversary in the broadcasting industry, a remarkable half century in which his smooth-as-silk voice introduced listening audiences to a wealth of music and music legends. This book is the inside story of those years of filling the airwaves with the best of jazz, American standards and opera.

Growing up in Quincy, Mass., Della Chiesa cut his musical teeth listening to the great Italian tenors, such as Caruso, Lanza and Gigli, not to mention the arias his father, Aldo, sang in the living room. But a boyhood fascination led him to the radio mic instead.

Called a "walking musical encyclopedia," Della Chiesa recounts interviews with some of the great ones of modern music—from Luciano Pavarotti and Dizzy Gillespie to Arturo Toscanini and Frank Sinatra. Tony Bennett calls the book "a fascinating memoir"? This behind-the-scenes look at Della Chiesa's radio career is so enjoyable you won't touch that dial.

Cookbook Spotlight

Fish: Recipes from the Sea
From the Silver Spoon Archives
Phaidon Press; 312 pages; $45 hardback

Every once in a while an Italian cookbook is published that requires the spotlight, and this latest addition to Phaidon Press' "Italian Cookbooks of the Silver Spoon Kitchen" series is exactly such a cookbook.

For those who don't know, one of the modern culinary classics in Italy for more than 60 years has been "Il cucchiato d'argento," something like "The Joy of Cooking" in the United States. Practically an encyclopedia of Italian gastronomy, it contains hundreds of traditional, authentic Italian recipes, including specialties from every region. As you'd expect, the original has been updated and revised in subsequent editions. But, until 2005, "Il cucchiato d'argento" had never been translated into English.

Phaidon Press published the first ever English translation of "The Silver Spoon" seven years ago and it was an immediate bestseller. Since then, Phaidon has been publishing themed cookbooks using its recipes—including "The Silver Spoon: Pasta," "Recipes from an Italian Summer" and "Tuscany." Now, Phaidon has culled and updated "The Silver Spoon" fish and seafood recipes into one excellent volume of more than 200 simple and authentic, step-by-step, Italian home-cooking recipes. The book is divided into sections that include White, Oily, Flat, Freshwater Fish, and Seafood, and instructs on identifying kinds of fish, choosing fresh fish, and cooking local fish—from Sea Bass to Skate.

We tested several recipes. Substituting fresh Yellow Tail, we tried the "Fried Skate with Butter and Capers" recipe and can enthusiastically vouch for this book's simplicity and value. ▲

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America's Best Pizzas

Reader Response to Our Survey Will Whet Your Appetite

By Don Oldenburg

Just last night we devoured a delectable thin-and-crispy-crust pizza with nice dark "charred" spots on the edge and bottom, topped with Prosciutto di Parma, Kalamata olives, caramelized onions, basil and extra virgin olive oil. That was at Pete's New Haven Style Apizza in Arlington, Va., an establishment dedicated to bringing the "ah-beets" style originated at legendary Pepe's and Sally's in New Haven to the rest of the nation.

Last week, it was a traditional Neapolitan "Margherita" pie with thin bubbled crusts, buffalo mozzarella and fresh basil, tossed before our very eyes and served piping hot from a wood-burning oven at Pizzeria Orso in Falls Church, Va.

So many pizzas, so little time. But you know that...

Presuming that Italian Americans know better than most where to find the best pizza in this great nation of ours, we asked readers in our previous issue of Ambassador to tell us about their favorites. And they did—by mail, by e-mail, and on NIAF's Facebook wall. Many of them replied with lengthy descriptions of their favorite pizzerias, some simply listed them, some told slice-of-life stories, a few were concerned that their secret neighborhood joints would be suddenly crowded.

So, here's what our expert readers have to say about America's upper crust of pizza:

"I have a great authentic pizzeria "Napolitano" located on 1st Avenue between 12th and 13th streets in the East Village of New York City. It's called Luzzo's. I have been there numerous times since it opened (maybe six years ago). The owner, Michele, is from Napoli, Italy, and uses a coal-fired oven to bake the pies. The delectably prepared tomato sauce is what makes the pizza so delicious, along with the excellent quality mozzarella he uses. The menu has around 15 different types of pizzas, fantastic pasta dishes and appetizers. The decor shows Neapolitan representations exclusive to the region—vintage photos of Totó, Vesuvio, Pulcinella; copper kitchen utensils, the Italian horn (against the evil eye), an antique tambourine, and much more . . . . "

– Adriana Aloia, New York City

"Here are my top five pizza places:

1. Frank Pepe's — Wooster Street, New Haven, Conn.
2. Co. — 230 9th Ave., New York, N.Y.
3. Motorino Pizzeria Napoletana – 349 East 12th St., New York, N.Y.
4. Di Fara Pizza — 1424 Avenue J, Brooklyn, N.Y.
5. Campisi's — 5610 E. Mockingbird Lane, Dallas, Texas

When I was a little boy, I grew up in Bridgeport, Conn., where my dad was a grocer. He knew Mr. Pepe and we would drive the Post Road to New Haven on Friday night to get pies and bring them back to Bridgeport.

– Bill Roberti, New York City and St. Petersburg, Fla.

"I am over 70 years old and have tasted a great quantity and various qualities of pizza in my life. My many experiences have led me to conclude that a restaurant in Brooklyn, N.Y. (a city that practically has a pizza shop on every corner), has the very best pizzas . . . .

The restaurant is located at 221 Smith St., Brooklyn, N.Y. Smith Street is considered the Restaurant Row of Brooklyn. TJ's Wood Burning Oven Pizza & Restaurant is the name. Go taste it, your mouth will not accept another ordinary pizza again.

– Lina Cernigliaro, New York

"Best pizza is Totonno's in Brooklyn (1524 Neptune Ave.). Right behind that is Di Fara (1424 Avenue J) and Grimaldi's (1 Front St.) in Brooklyn.

– John Viola, NIAF COO Brooklyn, N.Y., and Washington, D.C.

"If you are looking for a superb thin-crust pizza, drop in at La Laconda Restaurant & Pizza, on South Main Road in Vineland, N.J. Joe La Salandra and his wife Chiara offer a variety of pizzas, but I frequently keep it simple with just cheese and sauce. It tastes even better than you remember it. You can watch Joe create your pizza from across the room. A short ride across town is Jim Main's Bakery on South Delsea Drive. The Maniaci brothers and their wives create fantastic pastries, pies, cakes, cookies and bread, but they leave room in their ovens to cook up delicious pizzas, calzones and stromboli."

– Susan D'Ottavio Vineland, N.J.

"Chris Bianco's Pizzeria Bianco, Phoenix, Ariz."

– Marylu Latagliata Zuk, via Facebook

"For me, the best is right here . . . in the city of Laurel, Md. Pasta Plus has been around for awhile and continually gets voted as people's choice and people's best for Italian food. I've been going there since my son was born—about 20 years ago—and find that its Italian flavors, authenticity, consistency and value are still things to brag about. So is its pizza Fontina."

– Karin Leper, Travel Writer & Photographer, Rockville, Md.

"My mouth is watering ... Beto's (in Pittsburgh)."

– Doug Cerminara, via Facebook

"I grew up in Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s before corporate pizza shops came into existence. In Chicago, thin crust was king at that time, not that stuff known as 'deep-dish pizza.

The person who could've told you about America's best pizza is Peter Reinhart, the author of 'America Pie, My Search for the Perfect Pizza.' It is a worthwhile read. Chef Reinhart devoted a few pages to Pizza Bianco in Arizona. There are sections devoted to major cities where there is a least one pizzeria making excellent pizza.

The person who makes the best pizza that I have ever tasted is my son-in-law, Raymond Malandra, who grew up in South Philadelphia ... Vivi, ama, ridi e mangia bene! (Live, love, laugh and eat well!)"

– Arturo Cantante (mio nome d'internet)

"I am a native Italian and I met my American husband in Italy, where we lived for six years before moving to the United States. We are very 'experienced' in very good pizza. We both consider Pazzaluna at 360 St. Peter St., St. Paul, Minn., and Iggies Pizza at 818 N. Calvert St., Baltimore, Md., the two best pizzerias in the United States by far. "

– Roberta and Michael Wentworth, Arnold, Md.

"Famous Joe's (on County Line Road in Madison, Ala.) is my favorite outside of Italy. Thin and crispy."

– Paula Laurita, Athens, Ala., via Facebook

"Ozone Park Pizza in Queens Borough, New York City."

– Anthony Darmiento, New York City, via Facebook

"New York style of course! That is what my husband and I serve at our pizzeria, Joey's on the Beach. We are located in Panama City Beach, Fla. My husband is 4th generation pizzeria/restaurateur from Ponza, Italy! We have been here in Florida for 10 years."

– AnnMarie Busacca-Dimeglio, Panama City Beach, Fla.

"I live in Washington, D.C., and have yet to find pizza that compares to the pizza of Northeast Pennsylvania, specifically the town of Old Forge, Pa. The pizza dough is always light as a feather, fresh . . . at places such as Cafe Rinaldi. Not to be missed! Many others in the vicinity of Scranton, Pa., including Anthony's, and Arcaro & Genell."

– John Giacomini, Washington, D.C.

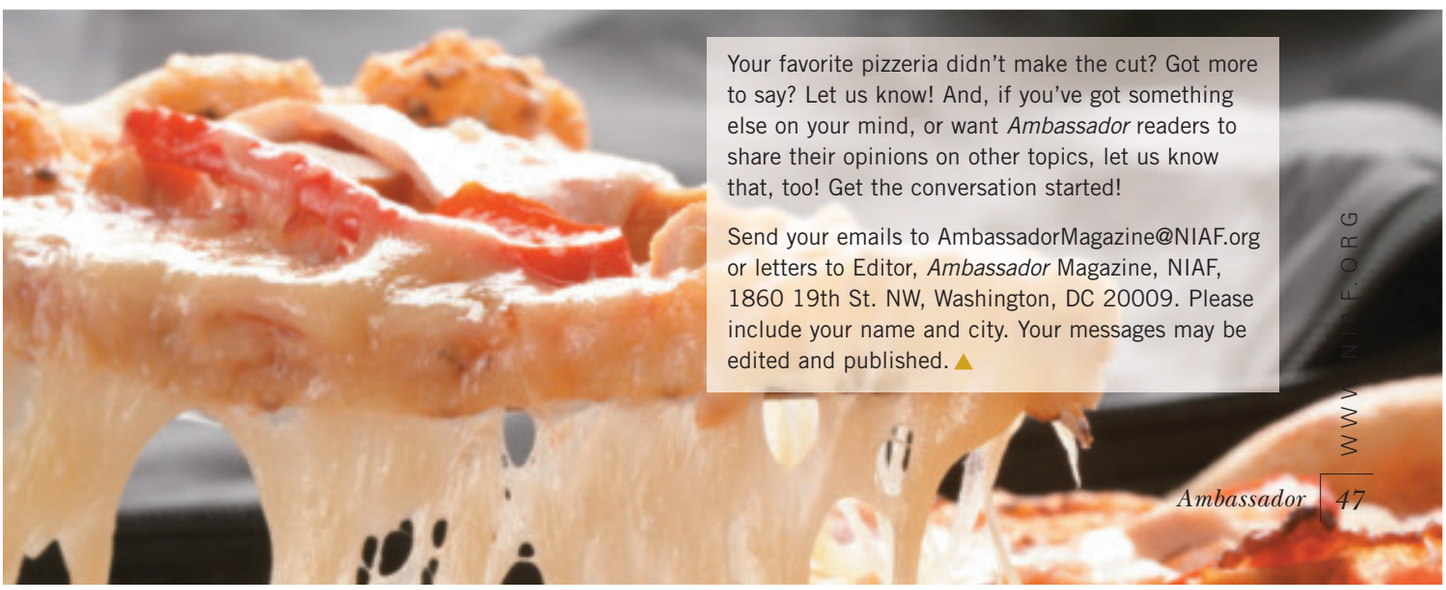
"My mom makes a pretty mean pizza!"

– Carmen Martucci, via Facebook

"I'm a second generation Italian-American. My family is originally from Benevento. Some of my cousins are still there and some have moved to Napoli or up north in the Lago di Como area. I have eaten pizza all over Italy—it's amazing and pretty different in each place. The best pizza I ever had was actually in Florence. It was Sicilian style topped with roasted red peppers!

As a New Yorker, and an Italian American, I am extremely particular about my pizza and New York's pizza is the only one that comes close to traditional pizza in my book. I love quite a few different pizzerias but my favorite pizza is in Brooklyn at L & B Spumoni Gardens. Try their Sicilian. It's fantastic, and you must eat it outside because that's part of the fun!"

– Robin Johnson, Staten Island, N.Y.



Your favorite pizzeria didn't make the cut? Got more to say? Let us know! And, if you've got something else on your mind, or want *Ambassador* readers to share their opinions on other topics, let us know that, too! Get the conversation started!

Send your emails to AmbassadorMagazine@NIAF.org or letters to Editor, *Ambassador* Magazine, NIAF, 1860 19th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Please include your name and city. Your messages may be edited and published. ▲

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Gianni Di Gregorio's "The Salt of Life"

A Comic Look at Men of a Certain Age

Antonio Carloni

Gianni Di Gregorio with Silvia Squizzato (left) and Laura Squizzato in "The Salt of Life."

By Maria Garcia

In Italy, the mammoni or mamas' boys, living at home well into their thirties, have lately been blamed for the country's low birth rate and failing economy. These men, and their mothers and wives, have long been a staple of Italian and Italian American screen comedy, but only on rare occasions do we see them portrayed in their senescence. That unusual perspective accounts, in part, for the popularity of Gianni Di Gregorio's movies, which are unabashedly aimed at adults.

In the sleeper hit, "Mid-August Lunch" (2008), Di Gregorio's character, Gianni, shares an apartment with his elderly mother in Trastevere, Rome. They are behind in their rent when the landlord offers to wipe the debt if Gianni will care for his mother over the Italian holiday. Events unfold at a gentle pace as Gianni prepares an unforgettable Ferragosto lunch for his wizened guests. The comedy, lauded by food and film critics alike, marked the "Gomorrah" co-screenwriter's acting and directorial debut.

Gianni and his strong-willed mother (Valeria di Franciscis Bendoni) are back this year in "The Salt of Life." This time, she is wealthy and he is a middle-class pensioner who lives with his wife and teenage daughter. Set in Trastevere, the 62-year-old writer-director's home, the movie is a droll, masculine view of aging. In her nineties, Mama fritters away her money on wine and poker, and Gianni does family errands, often interrupted by his mother's summonses. While Gianni's heart still flutters at the sight of beautiful women, they look back at him and see a nonno or zio — or they don't see him at all. Beneath his compliant, unruffled demeanor, Gianni, who no longer shares a bed with his wife, fears he will become a spectator to life like the old men planted outside his building.

"The Salt of Life" and "Mid-August Lunch" are distinguished by Di Gregorio's genuine love of ➤

Left to right: Gianni Di Gregorio plays a middle-aged son whose search for romance is hampered by dominant women in his life, his mother, Valeria Bendoni de Franciscis, her sexy caretaker, Kristina Cepraga, and mama's friend, Lilia Silvi.

women. His are not the fantasy versions, but women as complicated, flirtatious, manipulative and palpable as in real life. The mystique he attributes to his female characters springs from his male vantage point and, oddly enough, is what endears his films to men. For women who love men, Di Gregorio's poetic rumination on a man's loss of vitality is both hilarious and heart-rending.

In January, Di Gregorio took time to speak with Ambassador by telephone from Rome.

MG: Your actors all use their real given names. Please explain your reasons for this directorial decision.

GG: First, what really interests me is to shoot in a way that everything comes the closest to reality. With both the professional and non-professional actor, I like to use their personalities, their essential nature. Then, I borrow from that. In directing them, I tell them not to act the line of the script, but to use their own voice and personality. Improvisation frees them.

MG: In "Salt of Life," you seem to be saying that as men age, they lose a certain *gioia di vivere* because women no longer notice them. The only stable relationship, the one that never changes, is with their mother. Am I reading the film correctly?

GG: You can read it like that. At my age, it is the deepest relationship a man has, but of course, early in his life, a man must get away from his mother.

MG: The older ladies continually call Gianni a "*gentiluomo.*" He knows he is being manipulated by them, yet he derives pleasure from it.

GG: Yes, that's true. This is the way I was educated by my father, and it was the way my father was educated, in an old-fashioned way, to be very polite. At the same time, I have a spontaneous nature and I really like to please others. I get satisfaction from that. People do sometimes take advantage of me, so I need to defend myself. In the end, though, it is my nature. I can't change it.

MG: Gianni ignores the admiration of his sexy neighbor. Why?

GG: I know that she's attracted to me, but I think she likes to make a game out of it. She manipulates me, no?

MG: Your movie is very much about the loneliness of aging, and it appears to be aimed at men.

GG: There is a melancholic aspect to the movie, and I think it is quite strong. At a certain point, as I was making the film, I was worried it was too sad. I was thinking very much about the passage of time, especially when I looked at my female characters, young and old. I do think my film is a message to men. I love women very much, but as a man their mysterious world is not easy for me to understand or to express. I see them through my eyes, the eyes of a man, and generally I speak to men about them.

MG: In your filmmaking method, you are influenced by Italian Neo-Realism, but I would like to know what Italian screen comedies inspire you?

GG: I have not thought about this as much. It is a difficult question. I love Italian Neo-Realism, but at the same time, *la Commedia all Italiana* [Italian screen comedy of the 1960s-1970s] is also very important to me. I make comedies that are realistic. I want to work with what is natural and true. I like simple, universal stories.

MG: When I was watching the movie, I kept thinking about Alberto Lattuada's comedic characters, such as Alberto Sordi in "Mafioso."

GG: That is a great compliment. I love Lattuada's "Mafioso."

MG: What would you like people to feel while they are watching "The Salt of Life"?

GG: I am really happy when people laugh. I find a deep joy in that. Of course, if something in my movie makes them think or question something, that is a great compliment, too.

Antonio Carloni

Gianni Di Gregorio decides getting into shape will attract women as Michelangelo Ciminale looks on.

Maria Garcia is a New York City-based freelance writer and a frequent contributor to Ambassador. Her reviews and feature articles also appear regularly in Film Journal International and Cineaste. ▲

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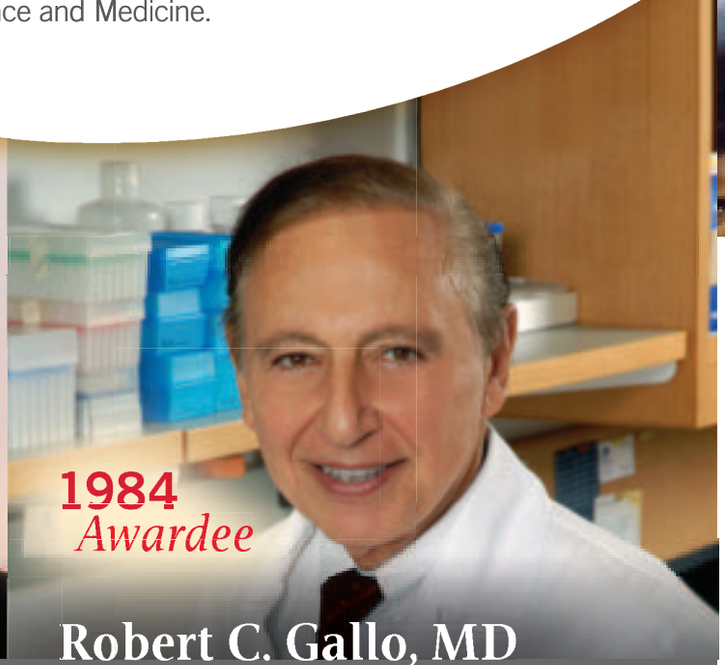

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University of Connecticut

The Geno Auriemma Slam Dunk

By Wayne Randazzo

Geno Auriemma's accomplishments at the University of Connecticut seem to transcend comprehension at the human level. Closing in on 800 career victories, Auriemma will soon add another notch to his belt of suspended reality in the 2011-12 season.

Born in Montella, Italy, the 57-year old Auriemma entered the United States with his family at age seven. They settled in Norristown, Pa. It wasn't until 1994, Auriemma's tenth season at UConn, that he became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

"When I left Philadelphia for the first time, [my mother] told me two things," Auriemma said during his Basketball Hall of Fame induction. "Work hard and make a lot of friends. All I ever wanted from anything—this game, from friends and acquaintances—was respect of how I do things and how I represent my family, my school, my program."

Auriemma's program will likely go down as the greatest in basketball history. Not women's basketball. Not college basketball. Just basketball. The sport has never seen a level of winning like it has in Storrs, Conn., with Auriemma and his Lady Huskies.

Dating back to the 1988-89 season, Auriemma's fourth year at the helm, UConn has advanced to the NCAA Tournament every year. Since the 1993-94 campaign, the Huskies have moved to the Sweet 16 every year, and the Elite Eight every season but two.

Coaching his squad to seven National Championships, Auriemma has been named the AP Coach of the Year seven times. Perhaps, above all of those titles and awards, however, is the winning streak. Auriemma's squad won 90 consecutive games from the start of the 2008-09 season until December 31, 2010. They surpassed the seemingly unbreakable record of 88 straight set by John Wooden's 1970s UCLA Bruins.

"This losing stuff is getting old, man; I hate it," Auriemma joked after the loss that ended the streak.

Humor might be the jewel of Auriemma's aura on the sidelines, in the locker room and off the court. In his book "In Pursuit of Perfection," Auriemma wrote of a talk he had with Diana Taurasi before the UConn legend's first game: "I asked Diana what number she wants to wear and she says 00. I tell her, you want to wear 00? Then you're an idiot. Nobody wears 00 in college. That's just a way of drawing attention to yourself. Pick a real number.

"Then she thinks about it and says, 'I'll wear No. 1.' Now I'm getting upset. 'Nobody is wearing No. 1 here. You haven't done enough to earn the right to wear No. 1.' Now she's ticked off. She's giving me some song and dance about why she's good enough for it and I'm not budging. I tell her, 'Look at No. 3.' She asks why and I say because if you do this right, if you do what I tell you to do, then you are going to be the Babe Ruth of women's basketball."

Just like he learned from his mother in Pennsylvania, working hard, making friends and earning respect. It turns out, even for one the greatest basketball coaches in history, mother knows best.

Wayne Randazzo is the editor of Red, White & Green, the official publication of the National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame. He's also the play-by-play voice of the AA Mobile BayBears Baseball Club and a freelance sports anchor for WGN Radio in Chicago. ▲

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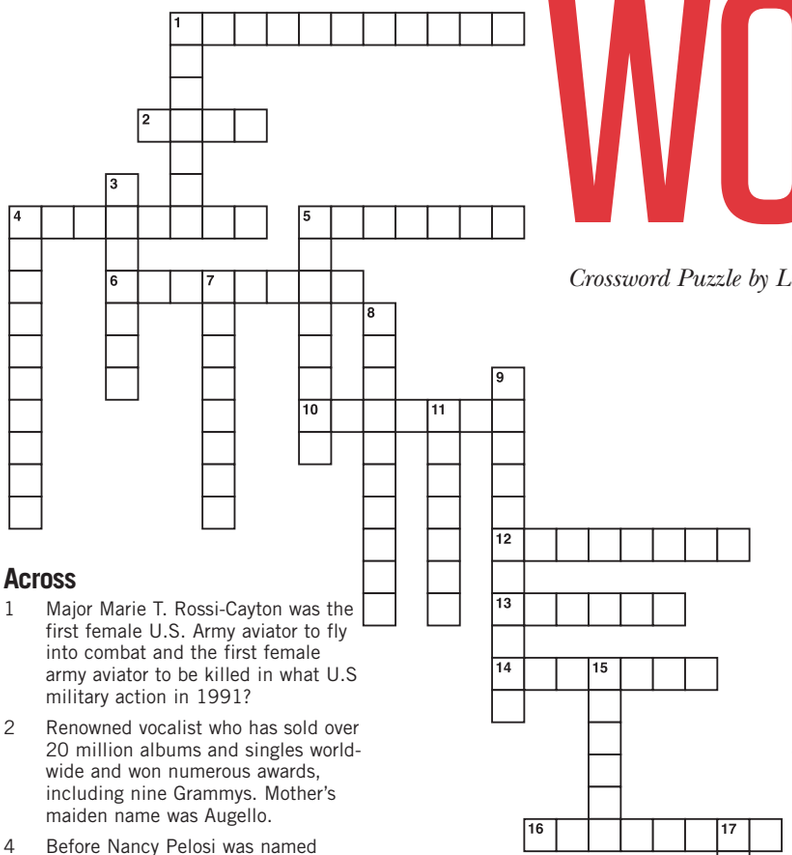
Italic WOMEN

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Crossword Puzzle by Leon J. Radomile

Across

1 Major Marie T. Rossi-Cayton was the first female U.S. Army aviator to fly into combat and the first female army aviator to be killed in what U.S military action in 1991?

2 Renowned vocalist who has sold over 20 million albums and singles worldwide and won numerous awards, including nine Grammys. Mother's maiden name was Augello.

4 Before Nancy Pelosi was named Democratic Party Whip in October of 2001 (later to serve as the 60th Speaker of the House of Representative), this former Italian-American congresswoman was once the highest ranking woman in Congress from New York.

5 Concetta Franconero had 56 Billboard Top-100 singles, 35 Top-40 hits, 16 Top-10 hits and three number-one hits. What is her stage name?

6 Won an Oscar in 1995 for "Dead Man Walking." Mother's maiden name was Criscione.

10 Sofonisba Anguissola was one of the first women to gain an international reputation as a painter. An innovative portraitist, she once said, "Life is full of surprises, I try to capture these precious moments with wide eyes." Her home and studio was located in what famous Italian city of violins?

12 She was the first woman to direct a film that grossed more than $100 million. That movie, "Big," earned Tom Hanks his first Best-Actor Academy Award nomination. Her 1992 hit, "A League of Their Own," also grossed more than $100 million. Name this director and actress who was born in Brooklyn in 1942 with the surname Masciarelli.

13 "That Girl"/St. Jude's Hospital. Her mother's maiden name was Cassaniti.

14 She was the first U.S. citizen to be canonized a saint in the Catholic Church. She was directly responsible for establishing 67 hospitals, schools, orphanages and sanatoriums in the United States.

16 Born Anna Maria Italiano, she won a Tony and an Oscar as Best Actress for her performance in "The Miracle Worker."

Down

1 Awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1926, she is best remembered for her novels about the life of Sardinian peasants.

3 Margherita Marchione is a Catholic nun, scholar, and the author of over 90 articles and 35 books. Her many academic honors include Fulbright Scholar, Columbia University Scholar and Star of Solidarity of the Republic of Italy recipient. She is the leading expert on the life of one pope. Her considerable historical and documentary evidence supports her conclusions that this pope has been made into a scapegoat for Europe's WWII Holocaust. Identify the pope.

4 She was the first woman to receive a medical degree in Italy. However, she is better known for her innovations in the field of education. Before the Euro, she replaced Marco Polo on the 1000 lire note.

5 Artemisia Gentileschi was the first female painter to become a member of the Accademia di Arte del Disegno, the first academy of drawing in Europe. Name the Italian city where it was founded and she studied.

7 Bonnie Tiburzi Caputo was the first woman to be hired as a pilot by a major U.S. Airline in 1973. Name the airline.

8 Italian born Leda Giovannetti Sanford was the first female publisher of a major national magazine with a circulation of more than one million (American Home, Bon Appétit). In 1979, she became the publisher and editor-in-chief for Jeno Paulucci's magazine for Italian Americans. Identify this award winning magazine that was the forerunner of NIAF's Ambassador magazine.

9 Child prodigy Maria Agnesi was born in Milan in 1718 and is considered to be the first woman in the western world to achieve a prominent reputation in what academic discipline?

11 Widely regarded as one of the greatest painters of the 20th century, she was named after her maternal Italian grandfather, Giorgio Totto.

15 Named the 1984 Female Athlete of the Year, she won an Olympic gold medal for women's all-around gymnastics.

17 The first U.S. vice presidential candidate to run on a major party ticket.

Solution

Across
1 Operation Desert Storm
2 Alicia Keys
3 Susan Molinari
5 Connie Francis
6 Susan Sarandon
10 Cremona
12 Penny Marshall
13 Mario Thomas
14 Mother Francis Cabrini
16 Anne Bancroft

Down
1 Grazia Deledda
3 Pope Pius XII
4 Maria Montessori
5 Florence
7 American Airlines
8 Attenzione magazine
9 Mathematics
11 Georgia O'Keeffe
15 Mary Lou Retton
17 Geraldine Ferraro (original surname: Rotunda)

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The National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the heritage of an estimated 25 million Americans of Italian descent, the nation's fifth largest ethnic group.

NIAF funds scholarships and grants; supports a variety of youth programs; researches Italian-American history and culture; promotes a positive image of Italian-Americans and works towards ending negative and stereotypical portrayals in the media; encourages the teaching of the Italian language in U.S. schools; and promotes closer economic, political and cultural ties with Italy.

The Foundation also works closely with the Italian American Delegation of the U.S. Congress in addition to the White House and federal agencies on issues important to Italian Americans and all Americans.

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