



July | August
2024



Italia

NEWSLETTER of the ITALIAN WORKMEN'S CLUB

914 Regent Street • Madison, Wisconsin 53715

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President's Message

We fooled Mother Nature. Festa 2024 is in the books. Saturday started out badly but turned out OK. We moved some activities inside the main tent. We awarded the scholarships, recognized the oldest club members and held the Pasta Eating Contest.



Joe Scalissi got the musical entertainment started. As usual, he filled the tent. The John Masino Band got things rockin' and Purple Veins brought the house down.

Sunday's weather was beautiful. Guests participating in the outdoor activities (bocce, soccer demonstration, Flags of Italy Parade, Magic Show etc.) enjoyed the sunshine. Gerri DiMaggio and VO5 provided the entertainment.

All in all, a good Festa. Volunteer help was a little short, and raffle sales struggled to hit 50% of members, which is something we'll address in the coming months.

On a personal note, I'm asking for your thoughts and prayers as I recover from surgery on my lower back.

As always, I'm proud to be the president of the best club ever.

Grazie,
John Caliva ■■

Festa Italia 2024

by David Rizzo

Festa Italia took on a slightly different look this year. We chose to go with a two - day versus three-day format. This decision was driven by our annual challenge to find enough volunteers to staff the various committees and duties, but more on that later.

Despite some rainy weather that began Saturday morning and continued into early Saturday afternoon, attendance was steady, and the mood was good. Sunday was beautiful, and the Festa



Continued on page 5

Italian Gestures

(Speaking With Your Hands)

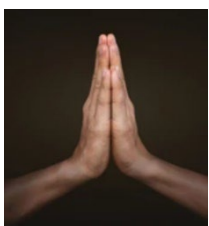
By Tom Smith

There are those who say that if you tied an Italian's hands behind his back he would be speechless. Though that may be a bit of an exaggeration, there is little doubt that hand gestures are an integral part of the Italian language. In fact, research by Professor Isabella Poggi of the Roma Tre University suggests that there are about 250 gestures used by Italians on a daily basis, and that the breadth and complexity of those gestures is comparable to that of the sign language used by the hearing-impaired. People of other nationalities also use hand gestures, but at least one study reinforces the idea that Italians in particular "talk with their hands." Maria Graziano from the Lund University in Sweden asked one group of people from Sweden and another group from Italy to describe a scene from a popular television show. The Italians made an average of 22 gestures per 100 words, compared to the Swedes' 11. But perhaps even more interesting, the Swedes used "representational gestures" to illustrate actions or events of the story (like mimicking a rolling pin while describing baking), while Italians often made more "pragmatic gestures" that commented on the story or provided new information.



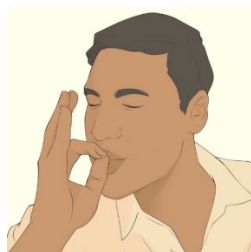
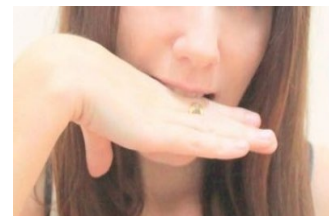
While there are certainly other countries where people include gestures in their conversations, people from different cultures use gestures differently due to varying rhetorical styles and different ways of constructing a story. Yet hand gestures seem to be part of the essence of Italian language, which makes one wonder why that might be the case. Some theories suggest that hand gestures are the result of a long history of Italy having the languages, cultures and mannerisms of invading nations imposed on its people. From colonization by the ancient Greeks to invasions by the Normans, Arabs, Germans and others, hand gestures developed as a means of communication for those who shared no common language.

Regardless of their origin, you don't really speak Italian if you don't use your hands. While it would be impossible to illustrate all 250 gestures here, anyone who wants to speak Italian like *un Italiano vero* should learn some of the most common gestures. For those curious what various sources include among some of the most essential and popular, here's a sampler.



The prayer clasp is used when you are hoping or praying for something to happen, or someone to stop doing something. It's a common gesture which may be accompanied by saying something like *ti prego!* ("Oh, please!"), *Ma dai!* ("Come on!"), *Ma fammi il piacere!* ("Be serious!"). Its origin is likely from literally "I pray."

When your Mama would bite her hand you knew you were in trouble, big trouble. It was done by biting your hand as if it were a sandwich, usually with the palm open, and meant “when I catch you, I’ll kill you” (or in the Sicilian dialect *si t’anacagliu*), used in a variety of ways but most often from fed up mothers to their children.



When someone bunches their fingers together and brings them to their lips for a symbolic kiss it is a sign they are satisfied or something is wonderful. Thought of as the best way to show appreciation when words just aren’t enough, the symbolic kiss says you have outdone yourself. It can be used in any context, but is often used in relation to food or expressing gratitude for a true masterpiece.

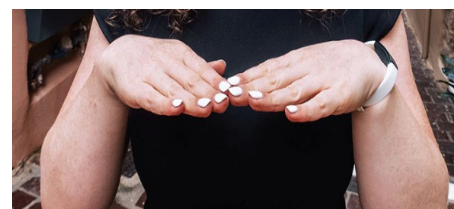
Almost everyone has seen someone make the famous “chin flick” hand gesture. Some give various interpretations, saying in Northern Italy it means “get lost,” but in Southern Italy it simply means “no.” Others suggest it is used to convey the message “*Non me ne frega*” which translates to “I don’t give a damn” or “I don’t care.” Whatever the meaning, to perform this gesture you must bend your arm at the elbow keeping your palm and fingers facing your body, then bringing your hand to your throat – with a flip of the wrist – running your fingers lightly upward from the neck past the tip of your chin!



Likewise, the “horn” gesture is familiar to many of us. It is the Italian gesture used to protect yourself from the Evil Eye, against anyone bad-mouthing you, or if someone is thought to be a jinx or when you believe something bad might happen. Several sources state that the horns are pointed toward bad luck the same way an animal would strike at something with its horns. It’s not unusual for people to carry a charm in the shape of the horns for protection but custom states you cannot buy one for yourself...it must be gifted to you, otherwise it will lose its protective properties.



When you’ve had enough of someone or something, this gesture will come in handy...the “*basta*” gesture (the “enough” gesture). This is the Italian gesture you can use when you want to say that you can’t do it anymore, you’ve reached your limit, you’ve had enough! To perform the gesture you draw an imaginary line level with your chest and move your hands back and forth crossing over each other. Your facial expression and the tone you take when you exclaim “***Basta***” will determine how exhausted you are with the conversation at hand.



Italian Gestures continued

Lastly, and perhaps one of the most well known and frequently used of all gestures, there is the “finger purse” or “pinecone hand” gesture. Gathering your fingertips into a single imaginary point and holding your hand upwards, some choose to move their hand up and



down for emphasis. It’s often employed when someone says something silly, or when you are feeling confused, annoyed, or exasperated and you want to ask: what are you doing?; what do you want?; where are you going?; but why?; or basically any other question. It is often accompanied by a confused or disagreeing look. The most common theory of its origin is that the hand is trying to grab something but fails to do so, symbolizing a person trying to grasp a meaning but can’t. It is often delivered with a measure of sarcasm.

Whether Italians began to “speak with their hands” during the foreign occupations that came after the fall of the Roman Empire, when people had to improvise to communicate with no common language available, or gestures simply evolved over the years leading up to when Italy became a unified state in 1861, gestures have become an integral part of how Italians express themselves. They are clearly visible in everyday life, in every conversation. Perhaps the most dramatic example can be found in the movie “Life Is Beautiful,” where the actor Roberto Benigni won the Oscar for Best Actor using only gestures and facial expressions, without saying a single word throughout the entire film. There is much that can be communicated through gestures alone! ■■



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Festa Italia 2024 continued

grounds and entertainment tent were full. Once again, our club delivered the food, music, culture, sports and fun that our guests have come to expect. Check out some of the great photos taken by **Ross DePaola** that appear throughout this article.

IWC Birthdays

July

- Scott Rossi (2)
- Paul Giansante (5)
- Robert J. Schiro (8)
- Mike Cerro (9)
- Henry Cuccia (9)
- Butch Pullara (10)
- Joseph Cabibbo (14)
- Anthony Bonanno (16)
- Daniel Dyer (16)
- John Scalissi (17)
- Philip Caravello (20)
- John Pascarella (20)
- Francesco Vitale (21)
- Michael Stassi (22)
- David Zanesco (22)
- Bill Czajkowski (26)
- Steve Loniello (27)
- Victor Lombardino (30)
- Leonard Novara (30)

August

- Alfred Falaschi (5)
- Vince Fumusa (5)
- Robert Battaglia (7)
- Phillip S. Clementi (9)
- Michael Heald (9)
- Tim Gatti (12)
- Richard Alexander (22)
- Charles Belz (23)
- Michael Kronz (24)
- Eugene Urso (27)

IAWC Birthdays

- Charmaine Pellitteri, 7/3*
- Cocoa Bustamante, 7/30*
- Katie Porwoll, 8/7*
- Karen Myers, 8/12P*

Everyone wants to know if our guests had a good time and if our club made a profit. The answer to the first question is YES. The answer to the second question is we won't know until we pay all our bills. Stay tuned.

Festa Italia is a large-scale outdoor festival. Here's a salute to the club members who led the various committees.



Planning — Jim DiUlio / Joe Tripalin / David Rizzo

Jim and Joe joined me as tri-chairs for this year's event. We divided the committee responsibilities and conducted bi-weekly conference calls and monthly zoom meetings to keep everything on track. In addition, countless phone calls, e-mails and text messages were necessary to ensure that every detail was checked and double checked to avoid any surprises.

Administration — Dan Dyer

Dan navigated the ever-changing bureaucratic landscape to obtain the licenses, permits and insurance coverage necessary to allow Festa to happen. His efforts take place behind the scenes, but no food is prepared, no music is performed, no culture is celebrated, no sports are played, and no children's activities are enjoyed without those efforts.

Admission / Information — Don Mash

Don Mash managed this area, which is our first point of contact with our guests as they arrive. We raised our admission price from \$6.00 to \$7.00 and heard few complaints. We also coordinated a special event (Biagio Scalissi's High School graduation party) handed out event schedules

Festa Italia 2024 continued



and checked in volunteers (provided name tags and FREE pasta dinner tickets).

Beverages — Frank Alfano / Tom Smith / Ralph Russo

Frank, Tom and Ralph coordinated the ordering of wine, beer, soda and water from Southern Italy Imports, Wisconsin Distributors and Coca Cola respectively. They also made sure plenty of ice from Alaskan Ice was on hand and negotiated for the rental of multiple arctic coolers and refrigerated caddies to store our food and beverages.

Bocce — Gary Berger / Ron Gatti

Gary and Ron did their usual excellent job of preparing the courts for play, and they adjusted the timing for the various matches due to the early wet weather. Lots of spirited competition and a fun time was had by all.

Children's Activities — Mark Salerno

Mark made sure our younger guests had fun games to enjoy and prizes to win. Mark was assisted by Silas Hunter and Miss Teen Festa on Sunday.



Wayne The Wizard and Karen Wendt — Face Painting were secured to provide more family friendly entertainment and plenty of smiles.

A big thank you to the players and coaches (especially IWC member John Pascarella) from FMFC for their soccer skills demonstration on Sunday.

Culture Tent — Jim LeTourneau / Ron Gatti

Jim and Ron took our offerings to the next level. Our Culture Tent had become somewhat of an afterthought, but they turned it into a destination for many guests. The combination of enhanced display racks for the Greenbush Neighborhood photos, cooking demonstrations by Salvatore Di Scala — Naples 15 and Sam Brown — Fabiola's Spaghetti House & Deli, a presentation by Jim on *Origins Of Madison's Italian Colony*, a display stand to showcase the flags of the twenty-one regions of Italy throughout the weekend,





which were eventually featured in a parade around the Festa grounds, and a Catholic Mass on Sunday provided something for everyone.

Entertainment — Mike Cammilleri

Most people list food as the #1 reason they attend Festa Italia. However, we’ve earned a reputation for having the best musical entertainment for a festival of our size. That’s due to Mike’s efforts to contact and negotiate with local and regional talent. This year’s lineup featured; Joe Scalissi, John Masino Band, Purple Veins, Gerri DiMaggio and VO5. Also, accordion maestro Jim Giacalone strolled the Festa grounds and even did a TV appearance for us. In addition, B&B Stage and Sound provided flawless execution of sound checks and performance quality. Finally, this year marked a return to our main stage by The Italian Folk Dancers of Madison after a five-year absence. They were warmly welcomed back.



Finance — John Benjamin / Dan Malone / Anthony Gatti

Operating out of the Finance Trailer (provided by Jerry’s Camping Center), this trio tracked revenue, kept the cash flow process running smoothly and ensured that our entertainers were paid promptly. Keeping the admission tent, ticket booth and IWC Food Areas supplied with the small denominations they need to provide change is critical to keeping our guests happy. This experienced group makes a challenging job look easy.



Festa Italia 2024 continued

Food Vendors — Mike Alioto

Mike managed the process of finalizing contracts with Salvatore's Tomato Pies, Ben's Soft Pretzels, Sugar River Kettle Corn and Atwood Scoop. These partners together with the IWC and IAWC food areas provided our guests with a delicious variety of options.

Grounds — Butch Pullara / Mike Stassi / Jack Parrino

Butch, Mike and Jack led a dedicated team that handled tents and security fence set up, porta potty and golf cart rentals (provided free of charge by North Country Carts), arranged for trash & recycling dumpsters and bins, packed and transported materials to and from the clubhouse and warehouse, electrical hook ups, remote parking arrangements and many other elements.

IWC Food Area — Travis Hunter / Sandy Hunter / IAWC

Once again, the food area was divided into three sections: pasta dinner & sandwiches, fry area and desert area. Travis, Sandy and a group from the IAWC worked cooperatively to provide great food and great service to our guests. From Saturday afternoon through Sunday evening, the lines were constant, and no one had to wait very long to get their food.



Marketing — David Rizzo / Al Falaschi

A two station tv buy, iHeart Media radio ads, print ads and a highly efficient social media

Campaign generated awareness. Additionally, in studio, over the air and on-site media interviews helped



publicize our two-day format and create excitement around the bands scheduled to perform and our overall schedule of events. Finally, there was a live remote by WIBA-AM of the pasta eating contest.

Raffle — John Caliva / Phil Clementi

John and Phil begin their work long before the first guest arrives at McKee Farms Park. They get the tickets printed, allocated and mailed to members in addition to staffing the booth to generate on-site sales. Despite their efforts, roughly half of our members purchase tickets, and many have gone multiple years without purchasing any.



Security — Joe Tripalin

Joe arranged for Fitchburg Police to have a presence at Festa and contracted with Reliable Events to provide an additional presence and overnight security. Although Festa Italia has a well-deserved, sterling reputation as a family friendly event, the importance of overnight security was reinforced by two minor incidents. One resulted in a citation for illegal dumping, and the other could have resulted in a burglary.

Sponsorships — David Rizzo

David (with a productive assist from Butch) arranged for sponsorship support from:

Wisconsin Distributors, A1 Furniture, Associated Bank, Country Inn & Suites, Dr. Robert Bradley,

Dental Implant & Periodontal Specialists, Inventure Capital, Vivian Deegan-Schmelzer — Restaino Realtors, MGE Foundation, Pellitteri Waste Systems, Sky's Edge Wealth, Salvatore's Tomato Pies, Southern Italy Imports, Woodman's Food Markets, Wolf-Sub Zero-Cove and Brunsell Lumber & Millwork

Stage Management — John Caliva / Mike Cammilleri

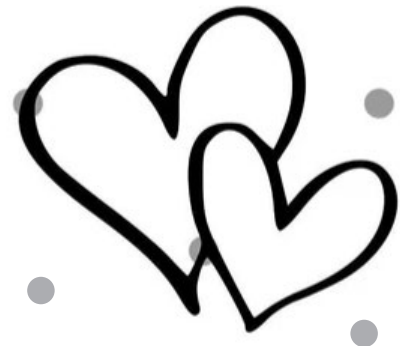
John handled most of the ceremonial presentations (with an assist from Mike Lumina) and Mike was on hand to introduce the bands. The IWC awarded \$11,000 worth of scholarships to deserving High School graduates.

Staffing — Jim DiUlio / Ross DePaola / Bob Lavigna

Ross managed the SignUp Genius site; Jim trans-

ferred the clubhouse sign ups to the site and Bob provided weekly reports on volunteer status. Festa Italia can't happen without a large contingent of dedicated people donating their time.

Finally, we have approximately thirty able-bodied members who neither signed up or showed up. Life does intrude on occasion, but these behaviors need to change when planning begins in earnest for Festa Italia 2025, or the Council will take appropriate action regarding the membership status of these individuals.



Festa Volunteers, Thank You!

Here's a list of the members who registered to volunteer on the SignUp Genius, or at the clubhouse. Many were accompanied by spouses, significant others, children, relatives, neighbors and friends. A huge thank you. Your commitment of time and talent makes Festa possible.

Carmelo Alfano, David Valenza, Joseph Tripalin, Bob Brill, Ron Gatti, Tim Gatti, Anthony Gatti, Tom Crapisi, Jim Capacio, Mike Stassi, Fred Underhill, Rick Alexander, David Zanesco, Charlie Belz, Doug Lucchesi, Vince Fumusa, Steve Carrola, Al Falaschi, Robert Murray, Joseph Shubat, Jim Trameri, Butch Pullara, Jack Parrino, Bob Chiesa, John Hunter, Travis Hunter, Paul Giansante, Day Dyer, Jack Theel, Tom Smith, Ralph Russo, Dennis DiCarlantonio, Davide Spadoni, Mike Alioto, Daniel Rendler, Dominic DeSano, Bob Lavigna, Jim DiUlio, David Rizzo, Mike Kronz, John Cusimano, Mike Cammilleri, Joseph Gmeinder, Russell Theel, Dan Blasiole, John Pascarella, John Capra, Frank Ranallo, Tiny Urso, Bill Battista, Rudy Senarighi, Jim LeTourneau, Brother Chuck Hannan, Joe Musillami, Mike Lumina, Richard Trameri, Phil Caravello, Tony Bonanno, Jr., Jason Mascitti, Richard Baker, David Zanesco, Joe Cristoforo, John Valenza, Steve Tortorici, John Tobin, Mike Bender, Jack Zarovy, John Caliva, Phil Clementi, Gary Berger, Garrett Gundersen, Mark Salerno, John Benjamin, Dan Malone, Luigi Vitiritti, Christian Swomley, Steve Loniello, Jay Moretti, Tim Lehman, Ross DePaola, Marco Galletti.

Yes, other members attended Festa without signing up and upon arrival, some asked if there was anything they could do to help. Their help was certainly appreciated, but if all members chose this approach, it would be impossible to plan a complex event like Festa. Instead of a smooth-running machine, chaos would ensue.

Things I didn't Know:

Chapter 2-B; "Colonies within a Colony, Churches and Social Clubs"

by Prof. Jim LeTourneau

We continue with chapter summaries of UW-Madison student John Arthur Valentine's 1964 thesis, "A Study of Institutional Americanization: The Assimilative History of the Italian-American Community of Madison, Wisconsin". At this point, Valentine begins referencing a lot of his information to an earlier thesis written in 1916 by another UW-Madison graduate student, Henry Barnbrock, Jr., "Housing Conditions of the Italian Community of Madison, WI". Because we have access to both theses, I intend to continue to focus on summaries mainly from the Valentine paper but will integrate, at times, more detailed information from the Barnbrock paper for any needed clarification of the past history of Madison's Italian "Greenbush" area, revealing more information about my old neighborhood with things I didn't know.

Henry Barnbrock Jr's 1916 detailed study, according to John Valentine, revealed that in 1910, Madison had a population of 25,000 people. By 1915, this increased to 30,000, a population hike of about 20%. In 1900, there were 15 Italians living

in Dane County. Ten years later, this ethnic population was 425. By 1915 Madison's Italian population had increased to 1100 people. This indicated a 158% increase in the Italian population. Ninety-nine percent of the local Italians were Sicilian. They came from five Sicilian provinces — Caltanissetta, Agrigento, Messina, Trapani and Palermo. The rest, about a half-dozen families, came from northern Italian regions Lombardy and Emilia (changed to Emilia-Romagna in 1948.)

Most of Madison's Italians came from two specific provinces of Sicily; Palermo and Trapani. A further breakdown to these numbers showed that while the city of Palermo was the largest in the province, twice as many people came to Madison from three small villages about 20 miles south of Palermo; San Cipirello, San Giuseppe Jato and Piana Dei Greci (later renamed Piana degli Albanese by Mussolini in 1941.) This was the stronghold of Albanian-Sicilians who came to this area of Sicily from Albania in the late-1400's to escape the advancing Turks. While Trapani was by far the largest city in Trapani Province, about

four times as many immigrants than those from Trapani city came to Madison from the small village of Salaparuta, in the southeast corner of Trapani Province, about an hour southwest of Palermo.

John Valentine wrote that over 90% of the Sicilians had been agricultural workers. If they owned land, it was a small parcel. If it was a bad crop year, there was much suffering, hardship and poverty. An inequitable tax system adversely affected the "contadini"(peasants). Most Sicilians believed America was a land of wealth and economic opportunity, a belief enhanced by returning emigrees who had been to the U.S. These were usually single men or those who left their families in Italy. Many of Madison's transient workers traveled between the city and Sicily year after year. These men also sent home considerable sums of money which also impressed Sicilians. For example, between October, 1914 and September, 1915, the Madison Italian community sent almost \$ 43,000 to Italy. That averaged out to about \$ 40.00 sent back for every man, woman and child in the Madison colony. As more men began bringing their families to the U.S., this monetary number began to decrease.

As the Madison Italian population grew, the “clan” traits became more evident. The first was the previously mentioned “campanilismo” (in the shadow of the hometown belltower). Over one-third of the Italians were of Albanian descent from the aforementioned Sicilian town of Piana dei Greci and some adjacent small villages. They maintained their original language and customs and, in effect, created a colony within a colony living chiefly on Murray and Regent Streets. They maintained their own social activities and organizations which usually excluded other Italians.

Another group, Sicilians predominately from Trapani Province and Palermo city, was centered along Milton and Lake Streets and Gwinnet Court. A third group was a conglomerate of the remaining Italian elements located on Spring Street and around the intersection of Regent St. and W. Washington Ave. These three groups competed against one another and rivalry often extended to the second generation. But, the friction was especially evident between the Italian and Albanian communities. Finally, out on the fringe of the neighborhood on the 800 blocks of Chandler and Mound Sts. and 200 S. Park St. was a beginning, in-bound trickle of Eastern European Jews.

Much of the difficulty between Albanians and Sicilians was attributed to a language differ-

ence. Although the Albanians could and did converse in Italian, they also spoke in a branch of the Albanian Tosk dialect, Arberisht, which the Sicilians didn’t understand. For this reason, as well as cultural differences, a mutual suspicion arose between the two factions. As a consequence, the two not only formed separate neighborhoods, they established their own social clubs, mutual aid societies and even churches. Usually, the club’s social activities were limited to billiards or card games held in one building or even a single room of a member’s house. Most often the membership included only older Italians: women were always excluded. During the winter months of unemployment, participation increased.

According to John Valentine, the mutual aid societies were far more institutionalized. Their chief purpose was to provide mutual insurance, health and death benefits to members or their families for a monthly membership fee. In 1912, the Sicilians organized the Societa Bersaglieri Alessandro La Marmora club. It was named after Sardinian army officer Alessandro La Marmora who, born in Turin, created a corps of sharpshooters for the Italian army of what could today be considered mountain troops or snipers. Organized in the Spring of 1912, the Bersaglieri club was incorporated in 1913 and only those of Italian descent, which excluded Albanians, could apply. The club was quite active in planning Columbus Day celebrations in Madison.

It started with 60 members and met in area houses before moving to the basement of St. Joseph’s Church before getting its own clubhouse in 1936 at the corner of Mound St. and W. Washington Ave. in a former clothing store. It reached its greatest membership in the 1930’s with 200 members.

Also formed in 1912 was Club Lavoratori Siciliani di Mutero Soccorso e Beneficenza with 42 charter members. All were Albanian-Sicilians who met in a back room of Angelo Maisano’s grocery at 821 Regent St. It later evolved into today’s Italian Workmen’s Club. Of these two clubs, the Italian Workmen’s Club would emerge the strongest. Borrowing equipment from local contractor John Icke to build a steel framework, the IWC erected its own clubhouse in 1922 at its current location at 914 Regent St. using volunteer membership labor. With its own facilities, the Italian Workmen’s Club was able to carry on a more social program than the Club Bersaglieri. During this time, three other Italian social clubs formed in Madison. They were the Club Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian-American Political and Education Club near the UW-Madison campus and the last was UNICO National. *NOTE: Not much information was found about these last two clubs, but we’ll get back to what we do know about them at the end of this chapter.*

Continued next page

Valentine wrote that although the societies were important to the immigrants, it was the Church which occupied the central social position in the community. St. Joseph's Catholic Church was organized in January, 1916 with a cornerstone laid at the corner of Park St. and Desmond Ct. (later Bowen Court) with the church built almost exclusively with volunteer immigrant labor. Two adjoining lots donated by Catholic Women's Club provided the land and it was dedicated on June 25, 1916 by Milwaukee Archbishop Sebastian Messmer. The original building was a frame construction with no foundation. In September, 1923, the building was raised and a foundation dug which put a basement beneath it and a brick facing was placed over the original church frame.

During the early years, many Italians belonged to the Church but only a meager number attended services with some regularity. This was in perfect keeping with their practice in Italy as the "contadini" had little respect or reverence for the Church and its clergy. Valentine wrote that this situation was a carry-over from the custom in Southern Italy where the Church was traditionally allied with the landowning aristocrats, displaying little concern for the spiritual or material welfare of the peasants. As a consequence of this attitude, the peasants, especially the men, seldom set foot in the parish church except on feast days, holidays or an

occasional funeral.

In Madison, Italian men generally looked upon attending church as effeminate and believed the institution to be designed for women and children. Some men were so embarrassed to be seen in church that they would attend a 5:30am Mass in order to be as inconspicuous as possible. Others didn't attend church because they didn't have "Sunday clothes". *NOTE: I asked my mother, Catherine Caravello LeTourneau many years ago before she passed away, why we didn't go to church when I was very young. She told me it was an old habit she went through herself as a child. She said "your grandfather didn't want us to go to church because he was embarrassed that he couldn't afford to get us nice clothes to wear". I had nice clothes, but for whatever reason, we still just didn't go to church until I was in seventh grade. Mom then had a religious epiphany which sent me to St. Joe's and Edgewood while serving as an altar boy at a lot of Sunday Masses at St. Joe's.*

In Italy, feast days usually followed a harvest or planting and provided a break from labor. Celebrated with great fanfare, these Feste provided a rare opportunity for recreation. This traditional celebration was also observed in the U.S., although the American Catholic clergy frowned upon it. Because of this practice, among others, according to writer Rudolph John Vecoli, "Italians were turned away from Irish and German churches. Even when the

Italians were admitted, they found these church sanctuaries alien and austere."

Before St. Joseph's was built, the local Italians attended Mass at either nearby St. James, originally a German national parish, or uptown at either Holy Redeemer, another German parish or St. Raphaels, an Irish National parish. *NOTE: St. Raphael's Church was the oldest Catholic church in Madison, established in 1839. It became the cathedral church of the new Madison Diocese in 1946 before it was destroyed by an arson fire on March 14, 2005.*

John Valentine wrote there was much evidence to suggest that in St. James and St. Raphael's Churches, Italian immigrants were not made to feel welcome. In interviews, Valentine was told that a ladies organization connected to St. Raphael's tried to encourage the Italians to build their own church and even promised financial aid. It was intended as an effort to remove Italians from their parish. For this reason, as well as their desire to have services conducted in Italian and to maintain their old-world religious customs, the Italian community decided to build its own church. Although Italian men did not regularly attend Mass, they wanted the Church for two reasons: it would provide an institution for their women and children as well as a location for traditional social activities.

There is also some evidence that the Bishop of the Diocese (Madison was part of the Milwaukee diocese at this time) encouraged them to build the Italian church because Protestant missionary work was being conducted within the colony by the Methodist-Episcopal Church. There was little evidence the Madison Catholic community provided any substantial funds for the Italian church but, with volunteer labor from the Italian community, St. Joseph's went up in 1916.

Father Angelo Simeoni, an immigrant priest, was the first pastor of St. Joseph's. It seems he was received with mixed emotions by the parishioners, according to some in the Italian neighborhood later interviewed by John Valentine. Some spoke very kindly of him and especially remembered he was a fine musician. But many complained he would not speak out on behalf of the immigrants, as his position in the outside of the community would have permitted. Others felt he was too dictatorial with the young men in the colony. It was alleged that on one occasion Father Simeoni was struck by one young immigrant boy because the priest was too insistent and demanding.

However, the most pervasive complaint was that he insisted the immigrants contribute to the Church, a practice which these people had never known in Italy. In Southern Italy, the "contadini" expected the Church to help them financially, not the reverse.

Oftentimes, according to Valentine interviewees, Father Simeoni would stop Mass and collect donations from the congregation himself, a chore usually relegated to ushers. Perhaps his demands were not unjustified as St. Joseph's was heavily in debt. In fact, by the early 1920's it was on the verge of bankruptcy. For this reason, the Bishop asked the Norbertine Fathers, a moderately well-to-do American Order, which had one of its abbey's near Green Bay in De Pere, Wisconsin, to assume leadership.

The first Norbertine pastor of St. Joseph's was Father Leo Rummel who, when called up, had been stationed at St. Paul's Student Chapel, built in 1909 and located at 723 State St. on the University of Wisconsin Campus. Unable to speak Italian, his tenure only lasted six months. To remedy this situation, Father Peter Perardi, who was an Italian immigrant, was recruited from a parish in Chicago. This transition was very unusual since Father Perardi did not belong to the Norbertine Order. A well-educated aristocrat from Milan, Father Perardi was not highly considered by the local Sicilian "contadini". According to one person interviewed by John Valentine, "He was an aristocrat who didn't understand the peasants and shouldn't have been working with poor people".

Part of Father Perardi's ineffectiveness was undoubtedly due to his poor health. In early 1926, he returned to his home in northern

Italy to recuperate. However, when he returned to Madison in October of 1926, Father Perardi was still in ill health. Father Rummel and a priest who spoke Italian, a Father Salvage, served St. Joseph's during this interim period. Father Perardi's health further declined and in 1927, he was forced to leave the parish and passed away a short time after.

He was replaced by Father Julius Neault, another Norbertine priest. At the time of his appointment, he was a professor at St. Norbert's College in De Pere, WI. Born in 1898 of French-Canadian parents in Ishpeming, Michigan, Father Neault had worked in the mines of Michigan's Upper Peninsula before entering the priesthood. Father Neault served as pastor of St. Joseph's Church until his death in January of 1956. He would be replaced by two Norbertine priests; Father Gabriel Hinkes, who would be the last pastor of St. Joseph's before it was torn down in the 1960's as part of the Urban Renewal Project and Father Martin Frigo, who also spoke Italian.

According to John Valentine, during 28 years of service, Father Neault gained the loyalty and support of his parishioners. Unlike his predecessors, Father Neault made an effort to understand the Sicilians and to work within the confines of their culture even though he inherited a parish which was about \$ 20,000 in debt. He learned to

Continued next page

speak the Sicilian dialect of Italian and adopt many of their old-world religious customs. For example, he allowed the crucifix to be laid in the center aisle of the church on Good Friday and visited Italian families after Easter to bless their homes. Both were old traditions which immigrants had known in Sicily, although they were foreign to American-born Catholics. Father Neault also worked closely with men of the parish, continually asking for their advice and guidance. He persuaded many men to begin regularly attending Mass and urged the immigrants to use the Church's facilities for various club meetings or activities. Coupled with the Church's festa, this placed St. Joseph's as the center of social life for the Italians.

There is no evidence to suggest that Father Neault ever pushed "Americanization" upon the immigrants. He viewed his job as only the Italian's spiritual caretaker. However, after his arrival, the church maintained a better relationship with Neighborhood House, a local social settlement project designed to Americanize the immigrants.

NOTE: More detail about Neighborhood House and its influence on the "Bush" will be explored in future chapters.

Before Father Neault's arrival, the Church had opposed Neighborhood House, according to John Valentine. The nun's, who knew

very little about the House's activities, had suspicions about it because the House was not a Catholic institution. The Sister's belonged to the Order of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence and were almost exclusively of Italian descent. Because they could speak Italian, they were asked by the Bishop to come from Chicago to work with the immigrants. He felt they could be effective in stemming Protestant proselytizing in the area. The nuns might have been aware of Protestant interests in the Italian colony, but, according to a Sister Salvatore, who was interviewed by Valentine in April, 1967, they were also suspect of Neighborhood House as a dangerous influence on the Italian's religious beliefs.

This Order's primary religious service was to maintain schools for handicapped girls. Since there was no need for this type of institution locally, the Bishop asked them to open an orphanage which would service Madison and adjacent areas. They built an orphanage house in 1920, but the project was quickly abandoned when it became apparent that a school could better serve the Italian community. They began teaching kindergarten and first grade in the convent, gradually expanding this operation. By the mid-1920's, the orphanage house was converted into a school.

According to John Valentine, before this time, most of the Italian children who attended a parochial

school had gone to St. James. The founding of St. Joseph's school was appreciated by both the Italian community and St. James. It seems both parties did not have a harmonious working relationship. In interviews Valentine conducted in the mid-1960's with former Greenbush Italians, he was told St. James was quite relieved to "get rid of the Italian school children." Valentine was somewhat certain this didn't affect many Italian children as most were attending public schools. This low parochial school attendance was a result of Italians not having a parochial school tradition in Italy.

Because the Italian parish was very poor, the nuns had to endure great poverty. Their classrooms lacked adequate lighting and heat. Sister Salvatore was quoted, "... her second grade moved from choir loft to sacristy and sacristy to basement due to the lack of heat and space." The nuns did not often receive their salaries and when they did, they spent much of it on school supplies. When the nuns originally arrived in Madison, they were shocked to discover the low regard which the Madison community had for local Italians. As a consequence, according to Sister Salvatore, they endeavored "to teach the Italian children American mannerisms".

However, there was a problem. It was doubtful, according to Valentine, that this parochial school was a strong Americanization agency.

Things I Didn't Know

Rather, it was an institution which isolated these children from the larger Madison community. These Italians were not exposed to other American children. Although English was the primary language, the children were allowed to use Italian, as the nuns were sympathetic to the Italian culture. Severely handicapped by the lack of funds, these nuns could barely keep their school in operation. They could not afford to promote activities such as excursions, concerts or movies which would have exposed the children to American culture.

In 1930, a new Order, the Franciscan nuns, took over the administration of St. Joseph's school. Primarily a teaching order, the Franciscans were probably better equipped for the job. They were not primarily dominated by Sisters of Italian descent which might have encouraged the children to learn English more rapidly. However, by 1920, this second generation of Italians was already speaking, for the most part, fluent English. Despite its poverty, the school remained in existence for over four decades, eventually becoming financially solvent before being demolished in the 1964 Urban Renewal Project of Madison.

In our next chapter of "Things I Didn't Now", 2-C, we'll look at Valentine's thesis topics of wage survival, increased discrimination and the beginning efforts to get the City of Madison to do more to

improve city services to the Italian community.

Jim LeTourneau writes: As previously noted in a prior edition of "Things I didn't Know", in the mid 1950's officers of the IWC and Bersaglieri clubs met to discuss merging the two organizations. According to late IWC President Nick Stassi, the officers agreed to put the proposal to a vote of their respective memberships. Both memberships resoundingly voted down the proposal.

However, in a 1993 article published in the Wisconsin State Journal, The Italian-American Women's Club and the Women's Bersaglieri club, both organized in 1934, seemed to have a better relationship. On Ash Wednesday, February 24, 1993, both clubs officially merged, maintaining the Italian-American Women's Club name, its 100 members meeting at the IWC clubhouse. Taking note of the above publication date, this writer wanted to know, if there was a women's club in 1993, whatever happened to the men's Bersaglieri club? Here's what I discovered.

At least until 1951, there were five Italian social clubs in Madison: The Italian Workmen's Club, the Bersaglieri Club, the Amerigo Vespucci Club, the Italian-American Political and Education Club of



St. Joseph's Church at 22 S. Park St., Rectory and 1-8 grade school.

Madison and UNICO National. Four were mentioned in a December, 1951 Wisconsin State Journal article as combining efforts to help flood victims in Northern Italy, Sardinia and Sicily. The Italian-American Political and Education Club was not. Club officers' names were listed for both men's and women's clubs with donations to be sent to Lombardino's, the restaurant then located at 651 State. St.

The search for information about four Italian clubs, excluding the IWC, first led me to the Wisconsin Historical Society. Starting with the Bersaglieri, I found a December, 1957 copy of the clubhouse sale at the corner of West Washington Ave. and Mound St., to the City of Madison as part of the Greenbush Urban Development Project.

Continued next page

Things I Didn't Know

Signing off on the sale were club President Nick Bongiovani, Secretary Sam Di Salvo and club witness, Tom Di Salvo. The building sold for \$ 28,250.00 and was later demolished. But that didn't end the men's club.

The Bersaglieri Club, founded in early 1912, was the Sicilian answer to the Sicilian-Albanian establishment of its own club, later to become the Italian Workmen's Club. The Bersaglieri club started as a military veteran's club, but eventually evolved into a general Italian social club, its first president was Antonino Fiore. It's assumed the club met in homes or rented halls or St. Joseph's basement until the Fall of 1937, when the club purchased Perlman's clothing store, later a theater, at the corner of W. Washington Ave. and Mound St.

Because social clubs like the IWC and Bersaglieri clubs used to have to register yearly with the Secretary of State's office, a visit to that office in the state capital building sent me to another location, the Wisconsin Department of Financial Services, located in the new Hill Farms Office building behind Hilldale Mall. Financial Services took over these registration duties from the Secretary of State's office on July 1, 1996. A nice lady clerk, who happened to also be from Italy, found both the records of the IWC and the Bersaglieri Club. According to the records, the activation fee of \$25 for the Bersaglieri Club had been paid yearly, as recently as 2023, by Tom Di Salvo. I know him as "Tommy" Di Salvo,

his father was the aforementioned Tom Di Salvo.

According to "Tommy", after the early 1960's Urban Renewal demolitions, including the Bersaglieri clubhouse, its members moved to Sam Loniello's Bob White Candy Company warehouse on Olin Ave. for their meetings. Then, when Loniello sold his business, the club moved its meetings to the basement of Fedele's (now Wayne's) Barber Shop at 420 S. Park St. "Tommy" Di Salvo says the club still meets, with its handful of members, usually to provide a holiday dinner for the widows of past Bersaglieri members. He is the Secretary-Treasurer. The Vice-President is Charlie Aiello, who I went to school with at St. Joe's, while the President is Nick Baldarotta. Looking in the file cabinet at the IWC clubhouse, I ran across an old, outdoor picture taken in the 1920's of a uniformed band. That's the Bersaglieri band. Its banner is in the background, and I recognize my grandfather, Philip Caravello, standing among the members.

One more note. In looking at the pictures we display at Festa of the structures that were in the "Bush", and in seven, small photo albums from the IWC cabinets, I found another oddity. Of all the pictures from both collections, there is not one of the Bersaglieri Clubhouse. There are pictures of all the structures that surrounded the corner location of the Bersaglieri clubhouse: Neighborhood House; the Neighborhood House kindergarten cottage next door to my house and, on the other side of it, the Bersa-

glieri Club; Licari's Tavern across W. Washington and Caruso's Grocery across from the clubhouse on Mound St. But no Bersaglieri Club photo!

John Valentine mentions in his thesis the evident rivalry between the IWC and Bersaglieri Men's Club, I can draw no other conclusion than realize the rivalry was a bit more acute. The late Rossario "Nick" Stassi took the pictures. He was a past president of IWC. It seems the Bersaglieri club was purposefully left out of the photo collection. So, if anyone has a picture of the Bersaglieri Clubhouse, it would be great to have it in our archives.

The Amerigo Vespucci Club was a bit of another mystery. In the IWC clubhouse, there is a Vespucci club banner hanging on the wall next to the encased Italian flag. I often wondered why another club banner was in the IWC clubhouse. I looked in the IWC file cabinet and found some membership acceptance certificates for individuals joining the Amerigo Vespucci Club. One I found was the acceptance certificate of Giovanni Caliva, grandfather of IWC president John Caliva.

My visit to the Wisconsin State Historical Society resulted in finding some past news articles from the Wisconsin State Journal and Capital Times mentioning events involving one or more of Madison's Italian social clubs, including the Vespucci club. Being an Italian explorer, Amerigo Vespucci gave his first name to the two newly discovered western continents in the

Things I Didn't Know

late 1400's-early 1500's, making him quite a hero to Italians.

According to John Valentine, it was St. Joseph's Church which started the Amerigo Vespucci Lodge. It was an effort by Father Julius Neault to get the Italian men to attend church as well as have a meeting place for non-religious activities. The club was officially organized on May 18, 1926, its first president was Salvatore Zaccone. A later Vespucci President, Anton Urso, is IWC member Eugene "Tiny" Urso's grandfather. It is assumed the club met in the basement of St. Joseph's church, but where they had some of their social gatherings was interesting.

A short article in the Wisconsin State Journal on Sept. 9, 1936 read... "The Society of Amerigo Vespucci held a dance at the lodge rooms, 914 Regent St. Annie De Lorenzo won a refrigerator". This address is the IWC clubhouse address. It seems the IWC and Vespucci club had a working arrangement for the IWC to provide social meeting space for the Vespucci club. There is no information what happened to the club after St. Joseph's Church was torn down in November, 1963. The Vespucci banner still hangs in the IWC clubhouse.

Another Italian-American service club branch in Madison was UNICO National, based in Waterbury, Connecticut since 1922. UNICO was founded by Italians who were denied membership in the local Rotary Club because they were Italian. It was also to show that



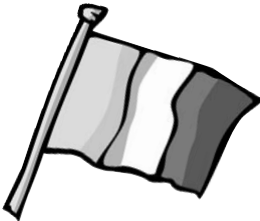
Italian-Americans were loyal to America first and held no allegiance to Italy except through cultural traditions. It claims to be the largest Italian-American service organization in the US. UNICO was instrumental in a campaign against the MTV reality show Jersey Shore and other negative portrayals of Italian Americans on TV. As a result of the organizations efforts, officials of MTV's parent company Viacom said that Jersey Shore's second season would have fewer references to Italians, fewer shots of the Italian flag, and fewer uses of offensive terms, such as "gui-do".

The National Italian Civic League, a similar organization, was established in Omaha, Nebraska in 1931. In 1946 efforts began to affect a merger with UNICO, ultimately creating one national organization. On July 4, 1947, at a convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, UNICO National was born. In an October 1939 article honoring Columbus Day and a December 1951 newspaper item, there evidently was a chapter in Madison which participated in the

previously mentioned Italy flood relief drive. Madison members were Tony Matranga and John Magnasco. That was the only Madison reference of UNICO National activity in Madison I could find. However, the organization still exists with chapters throughout the US with memberships available even if there is no local chapter. Information about UNICO National can be found online, including membership requirements.

Another Italian social club mentioned in news articles about Madison Italian social clubs was the Italian Political and Education Club. It reportedly started a short time after the IWC and Bersaglieri clubs formed and was tasked with promoting education and citizenship. To join, a man had to declare his intention to become a citizen. In order to promote religious unity, a St. Joseph priest and the Reverend of the Italian Methodist Church were invited to join, but there was no information I could find to show that effort was successful.

The only other mention of another Italian social club was in the November, 21, 1937 Wisconsin State Journal about a young men's organization called the Columbian Club holding a dance. "The Columbian Club to Hold Annual Dance, Thanksgiving Eve, at the new Bersaglieri clubhouse. The Columbian Jamboree will feature an orchestra made up of UW coeds and is open to the public". Evidently, being in an Italian social club back then was popular. ■



Meeting Dates

- IWC Council Meetings — 2nd Tuesday of Each Month 7:00 pm
- IWC Membership Meetings — 3rd Tuesday of Each Month 6:30 pm

Please clip and post this calendar.




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