



September | October
2025



Italia

NEWSLETTER of the ITALIAN WORKMEN'S CLUB

914 Regent Street • Madison, Wisconsin 53715

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President's Message

by Joe Tripalin



Ciao amici. We've had a memorable Summer with some important events for the club taking place. On July

15th we held a dedication ceremony commemorating our building's inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. What a wonderful event. We had about 100 people that came to the event with many members, spouses, and friends of the IWC in attendance.

I started out the celebration with a short speech outside the front door of the building. I shared details of the amazing members of 1922 that built our building and the process we went through to achieve this national recognition status.

Getting the Lane we Needed

I need to share a humorous aside. We tried to get the city to block



The Italian Workmen's Club was founded by unskilled Sicilian immigrant workers like this circa 1922 building crew, many of whom were club members. Back row: Oliva, unknown, Nania. Front row: Tony Bruno, Tony Palermo, Angelo Caravello, unknown, unknown, Frank Prestigiacomio, Rosario Parisi, Giovanni Daleo, Vito Matarana.

off a lane of traffic so we would have some extra room in front of the building for this ceremony. The city wouldn't do it. So, we

decided to try a few things ourselves to close this lane. At about

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Spaghetti Sauce...or Red Gravy



By Tom Smith

I have fond memories of visits to my grandparents' home on 16th Avenue in Brooklyn, New York. One recurring memory is of Sunday afternoon meals, where the moment you walked into the finished basement of their rowhouse you would smell the “red gravy” simmering on the stove. Growing up in Wisconsin, I only knew this rich concoction as spaghetti sauce, but in this Italian-American household it was an entirely different experience. My Mother always made her sauce from scratch, but it was in the home she grew up in where I learned what making “red gravy” was all about.

What are the origins of pasta sauce, of “Marinara Sauce?” While pasta has a history dating back at least 3,500 years, these sauces came centuries later. Before the advent of Marinara sauce, pasta was likely eaten with a sauce consisting of olive oil and garlic. Though many people associate tomatoes with Italy, they actually were not native to Italy but came from the Americas around 1500, brought from Peru or Ecuador by Columbus and Cortes. Tomato sauce is first mentioned in 1692 in an Italian cookbook (Lo Scalco alla Moderna – The Modern Steward) written by an Italian Chef named Antonio Latini. While at first Italians were suspicious of tomatoes, thinking they might be poisonous, by the late 1700s those suspicions were gone. It is thought that Marinara sauce originated in southern Italy, with both Naples and Sicily cited as the possible birthplace. Italians began to use tomatoes in their recipes, as illustrated in the cookbook L'Apico Moderno by Roman chef Francesco Leonardi in 1790 where he detailed the first recipe for Marinara sauce.



San Marzano Tomatoes

As for the name “Marinara,” it comes from a connection to the sea. Marinara translates to “seafaring, sailor style, or mariner style.” This was not because it began as a seafood-style sauce, but rather because it was the preferred meal of Italian merchants during long expeditions at sea. The primary ingredients for a traditional marinara sauce are simple. It begins with San Marzano Tomatoes. To that, add garlic, extra virgin olive oil, salt, and basil. Some recipes also call for onions, other fresh herbs, black pepper, and red pepper flakes. Adding tomato paste will produce a thicker sauce, a little red wine a little thinner, and of course cooking time will affect the consistency of the sauce.



As I delved into the history of our favorite sauce one question kept coming up...is there a difference between tomato sauce and marinara sauce? According to many, the answer is yes, they have distinct differences that make each unique. Tomato sauce consists primarily of tomatoes, fresh herbs, onions, and garlic. It has a longer simmering time which gives it a richer taste. As noted previously, the main ingredients of marinara are tomatoes, garlic, oregano, and olive oil. The simplicity of ingredients, preparation, and shorter cooking time result in a fresh tomato flavor and a sauce that is lighter and thinner in consistency. Tomato sauce is used in a variety of pasta dishes and pizza and can be used as a base for other sauces like Bolognese or vodka sauce. Marinara is the choice for spaghetti and some seafood dishes (a tribute to its maritime origins), and frequently used as a dipping sauce for breadsticks, mozzarella sticks, and calamari.



In addition to these two simple sauces, there are other more complex and savory sauces for pasta. Ragu alla Bolognese is considered one of the most famous sauces from Italy. With its origins in Bologna, Italy, Bolognese sauce is a meat-based sauce cooked slowly and employing several different cooking techniques including sweating (the gentle heating of vegetables in oil



or butter), sautéing and braising. Ingredients include a mixture of onion, celery, and carrot, along with different types of minced or finely chopped meat. Red wine, milk, and tomato paste, or sauce are then added and the dish is gently simmered (usually in a large frying pan) at length to produce a thick sauce. It can be served over many different forms of pasta.

Another famous sauce popular for meats is Marsala, made of Marsala wine which is a fortified dry or sweet wine produced in the region surrounding the Italian city of Marsala in Sicily. In traditional Italian cooking a thin slice of meat (often chicken) is breaded and sautéed, then covered with the wine-reduced sauce. Chicken marsala is said to have been invented in Sicily and may have been created by French chefs who moved to Sicily to serve queen Maria Carolina of Naples and Sicily.

One other savory sauce worth mentioning is Carbonara, which many sources say originated in the Lazio region of Italy. Historical predecessors included spaghetti alla gricia (bacon, cheese, and pepper), and cacio e uova (melted lard and eggs mixed with cheese). This rich sauce is made with cured pork, hard cheese (usually pecorino romano), eggs, salt, and black pepper. Commonly served with spaghetti, it is believed the heaviness of this sauce was created to keep coal miners (carbonaro) full during a long hard day of



Red Gravy continued

labor. Stories from the past claim spaghetti alla carbonara (loosely translated as “spaghetti in the style of the charcoal maker”) was cooked by coal miners using a shovel for a pan, though many say this rich, smooth, silky sauce could not be produced that way.

Though most Italians and Italian-Americans would balk at even discussing premade store-bought sauces, the story of sauces would not be complete without a little history on this topic. While jars of RAGU and Prego have had a place on grocery store shelves since the 1970s, the



history of store-bought sauces began long before that. Commercial canning of tomatoes began in the mid-1800s to preserve the fruit for longer periods. In the 1920s Italian-born Chef Ettore Bioardi (yes, that is the man we know as Chef Boyardee) started selling sauces he made in his Cleveland based restaurant Il Giardino D-Italia. As demand grew, he built a processing plant that produced cans of marinara sauce, and later received a commission from the government to provide spaghetti and sauce to WWII American soldiers. Assunta and Giovanni

Cantisano launched their RAGU brand in 1937, and soon after Campbell’s created Prego sauce. Today there are scores of brands and some gourmet offerings for those who long for a tasty dinner but may not have the time for an all-day cooking affair.

Movie fan that I am, when I think about sauce, I cannot help but remember the famous scene in *The Godfather* when Clemenza (well known for the scene where he says “Leave the gun. Take the cannoli”), is cooking for twenty men who have “gone to the mattresses” during a war between the five families. He calls to young Michael Corleone to come over and learn something, how to make the sauce. “You see, you start out with a little bit of oil. Then you fry some garlic. Then you throw in some tomatoes, tomato paste, you fry it; ya make sure it doesn’t stick. You get it to a boil; you shove in all your sausage and your meatballs; heh...? And a little bit o’ wine. An’ a little bit o’ sugar, and that’s my trick.” There are any number of sites on the internet that have tried to capture and reproduce that famous recipe. If you might be tempted to give it a try...



(Photo illustration by Salon/nito100/Paramount/Getty Images)

Ingredients

- 2 - 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 - 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can (28 oz) diced tomatoes
- 1 can (28 oz) tomato sauce
- 1 can (6 oz) tomato paste
- 1 pound (16 oz) Italian sausage cooked/crumbled
- 1 pound (16 oz) meatballs, cooked
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- splash of red wine

Continued next page

1. Heat a large soup pot or dutch oven over medium heat. Add the (the garlic and cook, stirring, until golden brown, about 30 seconds.
2. Add the diced tomatoes, tomato sauce and tomato paste. Stir to boil.
3. Add the meatballs, Italian sausage, splash of red wine and sugar. as desired, from 30 minutes to 8 hours.

This recipe will not feed twenty men, but it will make enough to take care of your familia, with even a few leftovers.

I cannot say that I ever make the kind of meal that was a part of the all-day affair at my grandparents' house. It would start with antipasto, followed by one or more pastas, then platters filled with the gravy meats, and finished off with cannoli for dessert. My favorite uncle would even have a few nuts – usually pistachios – after the meal (he said it was good for your digestion). Of course, this was also the uncle who would stand at the stove sautéing whole cloves of garlic in olive oil in a frying pan and – while cooking them – would take one out, cool it off, and pop it in his mouth. When I was a teenager, he would say..." it's good for you, puts some hair on your chest." I will never forget those days, or those meals, which would not have been complete without the amazing "red gravy" my aunt made on those Sunday afternoons. ■■



President's Message continued

5:20, John Caliva parked his car in front of Sweet Home Wisconsin to block the lane. Of course, the traffic police came and told John he would get a ticket and be towed if he didn't immediately move his car. While this was going on people were congregating outside on the sidewalk and in the street in front of the building. Pretty soon, a police cruiser came with its lights on and further blocked the lane. Butch Pullara went to the police officer and pleaded our case, and the officer told the traffic cop to move on and we had our blocked lane just as we had asked for. Now back to the ceremony.

We had a local television station there to film the ceremony and a film crew from PBS was there to get some film for their documentary on the Greenbush neighborhood that is going to air next spring. I did my little speech and then unveiled the plaque. It was special and fun, and it was good to acknowledge

Italia

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those members from 1922 that built the building by hand on nights and weekends; see the **photo of some of them included on the front page of this newsletter**. After the dedication, we went inside for food and camaraderie. Our clubhouse was packed with happy people celebrating our achievement. There was plenty of food and no one went home hungry. We had amazing appetizers from the Greenbush Bar, great pizzas from Salvatore's, and wonderful sandwiches from Fraboni's. I acknowledged special quests from the Wisconsin State Historical Society who worked with us to achieve the National Registration.

We also had a deputy mayor from Madison come and read a proclamation honoring the Italian Workmen's Club for its achievements. It was a fun and memorable night. I was relieved that everything went

President's Message continued

well, no one was run over in front of the building, and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves.

Annual Picnic

We held our annual picnic on Sunday, August 10th, at McKee Farms Park. For those of you who were there, you know the weather did not cooperate. We had showers for most of the event. In spite of that, we had a good time, people caught up with friends, and we had some very special sandwiches and salad from Salvatore's. Over 80 people signed up for the event and about 50 showed up to celebrate. It was a fun afternoon and once again, no one went home hungry! A big thanks to Fred Underhill, Butch Pullara, and Jack Parrino who worked hard to make the event special.

Jim LeTourneau has been working on updating our banners that we use and display at Festa. The ones we have now, while colorful, no longer accurately reflect the actual flags of the twenty-one Italian regions. Jim has found provincial flags that we can purchase and worked out a way to mount them on the standards we now use. They are very colorful, and the council has approved a modest sum of money to purchase these flags. Thank you, Jim, for your hard work on this.

Elections

We are asking members to consider running for at-large council seats (three openings) and the vice president position. You can nomi-

nate yourself or nominate another member (with their permission) for these positions. It is important to have members step up to serve on the council as it makes many decisions that support and enhance the club for all the members. There is a nominating committee made up of David Rizzo (608-852-3665, davidrizzo@me.com), Jasper Vaccaro (608-295-2977, jvaccaro0324@gmail.com), and John Caliva (608-225-2206, jcaliva58@gmail.com). You can contact anyone on the nominating committee with your nomination. Please step up to help the club.

Annual Banquet

The annual awards banquet is set to be held at the East Side Club on October 19th. This is going to be a great venue, wonderful views of the capitol across Lake Monona, a convenient bar, big parking lot, and plenty of seating where everyone can see the awards. The food is going to be catered by Salvatore's, and it is going to be special. Please watch for an announcement and signup form from Fred Underhill. To have an awards banquet we need to give out some awards. Each year we honor a member as Italian of the Year. We also provide an award to the top Italian athlete of the year, an award for Community Service and a posthumous award for Outstanding Service over a lifetime. If you would like to nominate an individual for one of these awards, please contact one of the individuals on the nominating committee. That committee is made up of John Caliva (608-

Cap Times

The Cap Times did an amazing article on the Greenbush neighborhood with many historic photos.

See the article here:

https://captimes.com/news/see-historic-greenbush-neighborhood-photos-in-the-cap-times-machine/article_18931ea6-d4ed-11ee-98d5-a3228f6996f0.html



Courtesy of Cap Times

225-2206, jcaliva58@gmail.com), Butch Pullara (608-274-9949, joeshark2@sbcglobal.net), and Jack Parrino (608-338-5292, clpjpp@yahoo.com).

Thank you Blassiole Family

I would like to thank Dan Blassiole and his family for a wonderful evening of music at the club. Dan, his wife Kristy, their daughters Surya and Paulina, and sons Soren and Axel played wonderful Italian folk tunes. They started with folk tunes from southern Italy and worked their way north. It was a fun night with not only the music but with explanations about the music and where it came from. I hope we can do this again and have more members join us to enjoy the music and the talented Blassiole family.

Please stay engaged, it is your club, make the most out of it. All the best....Joe ■■■

New Collaboration Benefits *Italia* Readers



The Italian Workmen’s Club is fortunate to have established a publishing agreement with the L’Italo-Americano newspaper of Pasadena, CA and La Gazzetta Italiana of Cleveland, OH allowing the IWC to circulate selected stories of interest from the newspaper to our members through its bi-monthly IWC newsletter. The following is an example.

For those interested, subscription information can be found online for these newspapers:

L’Italo Americano \$ 59 for one year (26 issues) or \$100 for two years.

La Gazzetta Italiana: \$ 25 for one year (12 issues) or \$ 40 for two years.

Both newspapers supply subscribers with both a paper and online editions.

More eyes and ears available to tell us their stories about Italy

By Prof. Jim LeTourneau, IWC

As a retired journalist, I still have a need for information, whether it be broadcast, print or internet. My first trip to Italy was in 1980 and I’ve made about twenty trips since then, either working as a professor on study-abroad trips with my journalism students or for my own desire to constantly learn more about my favorite country. Reading articles about people, places and things in Italy continually creates a desire for me to schedule “one more” trip.

I also subscribe to a pair of Italian-American newspapers, the bi-weekly L’Italo-Americano out of Pasadena, CA and the monthly La Gazzetta Italiana from Cleveland, OH. Both have reporters who find stories about Italy or Italian-Americans in the US while also having free-lance journalists throughout Italy who contribute mate-

rial. Though many articles pertain to their local audience, there are often interesting stories for the general reader of Italian information, whether it’s about culture, travel, food or lifestyle.

The IWC has been granted permission by both newspapers to re-publish articles of interest in our own IWC newsletter.

Italian Inventions from Italo-Americano June 12, 2025 edition

The worlds first cell phone? Made in Italy in 1935!

(Written by Italo-Americano staff with artist conception of Domenico Mastini created with DALL-E 2)

In the collective imagination, the invention of mobile phones is tied to the booming consumer culture of the 1980s. But long before the Motorola DynaTAC or the first brick-sized handsets made headlines, an Italian engineer had already envisioned – and built – the first portable phone. In the mid-1930s, Domenico Mastini developed what can rightly be considered the prototype of the modern mobile phone. His invention, produced by the Fimi-Phonola factory in Saronno, IT allowed users to place calls from a moving vehicle to any number on the urban telephone network, something

Continued next page

Italian Inventions continued

truly revolutionary for the era.

Mastini's system worked through a fixed radio transceiver and a vehicle-mounted phone unit. It relied on alternating frequencies – 46 MHz for transmission and 42 MHz for reception on the base unit, with the opposite configuration on the car phone. The range extended several dozen kilometers, allowing real-time communication while on the road, a groundbreaking feat that anticipated mobile connectivity by decades.

The real innovation, however, lay in Mastini's far-reaching vision for the future: he designed a national network of automatic radio repeaters, placed strategically on high ground to allow for seamless long-distance calls. It was, in essence, an early and remarkably intuitive blueprint for the infrastructure that would later power cellular networks worldwide. In 1942, in the middle of World War II, Mastini went even further by proposing a radio-based switching center on Mount Penice to link major cities in northern Italy via airwaves. However, only one connection – between Milan and Bergamo – was ever implemented, and only briefly, during the short-lived Republic of Salò.

After the war, Mastini's project was quietly shelved. Italy opted to rebuild its national telephone system using cable, and the success of Francesco Vecchiacchi's radio relay link between Milan and Rome diverted attention from Mastini's pioneering work. Yet, his legacy remains a remarkable one: decades

before smartphones became our daily companions, it was an Italian who dreamed up the idea of talking on the move. Was he visionary or simply ahead of his time? Who knows... But certainly, Domenico Mastini deserves recognition as the forgotten mind behind the world's first mobile phone. ■■



The beautiful chaos of Italian conversations

By [Chiara D'Alessio](#) | July 1, 2025
L'Italo-American Newspaper



Speaking like an Italian is part verbal, part theatrical, and – let's be honest – entirely contagious. On any street in Italy, conversation feels like a performance: arms wave, eyebrows arch, voices overlap: it starts with a simple “Ciao!” and turns into a friendly competition of expression that's as much about heart as it is about words. And yes, you'll find tiny but meaningful differences across regions, from Milan's measured tone to Naples's musical intonation. Let's begin with the basics. ■ Italians love to fill space in conversation. **Silence? Almost never.** Instead, there's a natural humility-free flood of words, questions, and opinions. Pause too long, and someone will jump in to

fill it, but it's not rude: it's interactive. In the north, speech stays polite and structured, but in the south, people will interrupt, overlap, and laugh so freely it sounds like chaos until you realize it's more akin to harmony. That overlapping, actually, signals interest, not disagreement, so if your friends in Puglia speak over you, it probably means they're invested in the topic.

Directness is appreciated, but there are limits: in other words, no need to bite around the bush but stay kind. Another thing Italians like is **honesty**, but avoid politics or religion unless someone starts it, because there is a clear line between open hearts and what may be considered private boundaries.

As we all know, **gestures** do the heavy lifting in any Italian conversation, so much so that around 250 of them have been identified: a silent vocabulary of their own. Some of them are famous, like the classic fingerpurse, where you tip your fingers together and wobble them up and down – “*Che vuoi?*” – “What do you want?” Mostly found in central and southern Italy, it expresses disbelief or impatience, while in the north, that same move means “Get lost.” The frontier runs roughly along the La Spezia–Rimini line: north of it means one thing, south another. But there are other gestures crossing regional boundaries, like the cheektwist – when you twist a finger across a cheek – which broadly translates to “Delicious” or “Cute.” Flicking the chin back (“chin flick”) can mean “no” in Naples or “go away” in Milan, so tread carefully.

Always keep in mind that **hands aren't extras**, they're essential punctuation, used to add emphasis as if your thoughts deserve exclamation points in mid-air. Don't forget: hands are part of the way Italians speak!



Voice and volume vary, too. In Rome and Naples, louder voices suggest excitement, not aggression; in Turin or Verona, conversations might sound like whispers: still warm, but more restrained. **Eye contact** is widely

Image created by DALL-E 2

expected: you look at the person you're addressing; careful though because too much gaze, though, can be seen as confrontational. Needless to say, **touch and proximity** matter: Italians are Mediterraneans, in the end, and that's why they tend to stand closer than Americans, at about an arm's length. Some of them may hug or pat your back when speaking; others may just shake your hand but remember, but always with warmth.

Regional words can add some extra flavor, too. In Tuscany, for example, people say "*boh*" for "I don't know" with a shrug; in Rome, you might hear "*daje!*" to mean "come on, let's go," and in Naples "*statte bbuono*" means "take it easy" or "be careful." If someone from Umbria says "*sci,*" they probably mean "yes."

Wherever you are in the country, always remember that conversation is **paced by cultural expectations**: in the north, punctuality at a dinner or appointment matters, and you should always arrive within five minutes. In the south, arriving 10–15 minutes late to social visits is polite; regardless of the location, once there, don't stand still,

move toward people, keep talking, because if you sit and stay quiet, people might think you're upset. When dinner time arrives, expect chatter about the food, wine, soccer, family news, with frequent overlapping sentences; if someone suggests you try the pasta, you say, "*Volentieri!*" If offered again, "*Grazie, molto gentile.*"

Under all circumstances, never forget about **humor**: Italians enjoy teasing, sarcasm, irony, and the occasional self-deprecating aside: "You? A chef?" might mean "you cook well," said with a grin. So, avoid taking teasing personally, because teasing in Italy is just a sign of affection: joke back or smile and continue. If you do laugh, however, do so fully: a little laugh can be viewed as a lack of engagement.

When it comes to **digital communication**, older Italians prefer calls, while younger people text and emoji away. But even there, expect energetic punctuation: exclamation marks, heart emojis, and animated GIFs to express warmth. Silence in messages is rarer: even a "*Grazie!*" shows you care.

Last, we shouldn't forget some extra, **region-specific rules**. In southern Italy, for instance, it's polite to compliment a woman's cooking or style even if it's just modest, while in the north, nodding in ap-

preciation may suffice. In Tuscany, calling someone "*zio*" (uncle) even if unrelated can be friendly and in Rome, close friends may call each other "*bello de mamma.*"

Ultimately, speaking like an Italian is about presence: touch, voice, gesture, facial tune; it's enthusiastic, sometimes loud, but never cold; it welcomes you in and pushes you to join. Learning to overlap, joke, and gesture isn't stealing cultural habits, it's more like participating in them: Italians won't say it outright, but if you speak with hands, heart, and eyes, they'll welcome you, and you might just end up with an invitation to dinner. So say "*Ciao,*" lean in, move your hands with flair, laugh loud, and expect someone else to jump in before you finish. Delight in the small gestures: "*che vuoi?*," cheek twist, arm hug, hearty "*Daje!*" *That's* the way Italians express themselves. ■



A PIECE OF HISTORY

The Italian Workers' Club building at 914 Regent St., pictured here, has received its formal plaque after being placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of the Interior, in recognition of its deep cultural and historical significance to Madison. The Italian Workers' Club has served as a hub for Italian-American culture, social gatherings and advocacy for workers' rights since the building's completion in 1922.





“Possa il tuo Halloween essere pieno di gioia e spaventi!”

IWC Birthdays

September

Michael Lumina	9/6
Carmelo Alfano	9/7
Jim Cerro	9/8
Jack Parrino	9/8
Doug Lucchesi	9/14
Tom Smith	9/14
John Capra	9/15
Joseph Scalissi	9/16
John Benjamin	9/19
Rosario N. DePaola	9/21
Joseph P. Tripalin	9/21
Frank Ranallo	9/26

October

John H. Hunter	10/4
Travis J. Hunter	10/7
John Porco	10/9
Luigi Vitiritti	10/10
Donald J. Mash	10/12
Michael Schmidt	10/15
Steve Carrola	10/16
Andrew Lager	10/16
Joseph T. Parisi	10/24
Domenic Scudera	10/28
Steve Tortorici	10/30
Mike Cammilleri	10/31

IAWC Birthdays

Victoria Szewczyk	10/4
Sandra Hunter	10/25



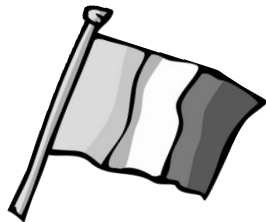
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Leave a Legacy

Members have expressed their desire to help the IWC. Not just being an active member or working a shift or two at Festa, but doing something that will leave a lasting legacy. If you count yourself in that group, consider a donation to the IWC as part of your estate when you pass on from our wonderful world. Your gift could be something as simple as a statement in your obituary that says “in lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Italian Workmen’s Club, 914 Regent Street, Madison, WI 53715”. You can specify the donations go to the club in general or directly to the scholarship fund. For larger gifts, language can be included in your will to specify a sum of money or other assets to be given to the IWC. This language should be coordinated with your will through your attorney.

Imagine what your gift can do to help the club and in turn help our efforts to provide scholarships and to keep our Italian heritage relevant in today’s world. Certainly, no one likes contemplating their passing, but this is a positive step you can take to make a difference and leave a legacy to your beloved club.





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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