



May | June  
2026



# Italia

NEWSLETTER of the ITALIAN WORKMEN'S CLUB

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## President's Message

by Joe Tripalin



### Festa Italia

Hello fellow members,  
Spring is nearly here as the temperatures rise.  
What is here is

the planning for Festa 2026. We are deep into getting the thousand details completed to allow Festa to happen. Contracts are being signed, signs made, sponsors contacted, security put in place, food ordered and the list goes on and on. A big part of the success of Festa depends on our members stepping up and volunteering for a shift or shifts. I recently received an email from Frank Alfano with information from the Italian Community Center in Milwaukee. They are also in the middle of their planning for their Festa. I wanted to share their message to their members.....



*Grape arbors at Olbrich Gardens.*

*See President's Message, Olbrich Gardens section on page 7*



Join the excitement - VOLUNTEER - help create unforgettable Italian experiences for everyone.

Volunteering at the Italian Community Center or at Festa Italiana is a chance to be part of something both fun and deeply connected to the Italian heritage. Help keep our traditions vibrant - whether you are welcoming guests at the ICC, sharing the excitement of Festa Italiana, or lending your talents behind the scenes. Every moment you give strengthens our community, brings people together, and creates the warm, lively spirit that makes our Italian culture shine. Step in, volunteer, and be part of la famiglia. Your new friends are here, waiting, and excited to meet you.

Continued on page 5

# Cani Italiani



By Tom Smith

Italians value family and friends, and for many of us those friends often include the 4-legged kind. Like so many things, the history of Italians and their dogs is a long one going back thousands of years. Scientific models suggest the presence of dogs in Europe 15,000 years ago, with evidence for Late Pleistocene dogs in two Upper Paleolithic sites in southern Italy – the Grotta Paglicci (*Apulia Foggia*) and Grotta Romanelli (*Apulia Lecce*) – as the oldest evidence of dogs in the Mediterranean.

As with many things in Italian history, origins are found in ancient Rome. “Beware of Dog” signs date back to the city of Pompeii, which was buried under volcanic ash from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. When archaeologists excavated the ruins of one house in the city of Pompeii, they discovered an intricate mosaic of a snarling black dog wearing a spiked collar and chain.



Getty Images

In between the dog’s paws read the Latin phrase “CAVE CANEM” ...Beware of Dog. The sign appeared at the entrance to what is now known as the House of the Tragic Poet, a house filled with elaborate decorations and mythological scenes that provides a look back into ancient Roman life. Several neighboring homes displayed similar mosaics.

Decades before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius the apostle Paul urged people in the Greek city of Philippi to discourage evildoers by using the phrase “beware of dogs” and his letters to the Philippians were included in the Bible’s New Testament. Legends have it that a she-wolf discovered Rome’s founder Romulus and his twin brother Remus at the shores of the Tiber River and nurtured them until a shepherd came along. Guard dogs were prevalent in ancient Rome, but dogs served in other roles including hunting, racing, and companionship. As civilization grew, the Romans adopted breeds from across Italy and imported others from Greece and Britain. But dogs could also be viewed in a negative light, as the Romans coined the phrase *dies caniculares* – “the dog days of summer” – because of the association with the intolerable heat that came during the time of year when Sirius (the “dog star”) was prominent.



Getty Images



## Cani Italiani *continued*

The role of dogs began to change with the Renaissance. Dogs were symbols of both high social status and loyalty, as only the wealthy could afford to keep an animal as a pet. The new class of merchants, bankers, landowners, and the influential elites embraced dogs in these roles as illustrated by much of the artwork of the time. Though there were many artists who featured dogs in their paintings, the works of Paolo Caliari are often cited as ones that depict dogs in ways that display “personality and character” adding a sense of humor to his paintings. One such painting is “The Wedding Feast at Cana,” a massive biblical themed painting. In center/foreground are two dogs that are the focus of attention.



Louvre Museum, Paris

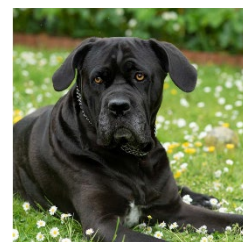
With this long history of dogs in Italy, what role do they play in Italian culture today? They are far more than pets. They are companions, they are family, they are a part of daily life. People traveling Italy will find they are socially integrated in daily life and welcomed in many places. You will find them on buses, trains, trams, even high-speed rail, and they often ride for free (though discounted tickets are sometimes required for larger dogs). The parks and piazzas in the cities provide large green spaces for people and their



companions on their evening *passeggiate* (evening strolls), some with dedicated areas where the dogs can run freely. In the coastal regions you may even find “bau beaches” where dogs can frolic in the Mediterranean.

Walking the streets you will find water bowls and see dogs happily joining their owners for a break during their stroll. Even the servers often greet their canine guests with a treat. Book stores, grocery stores, boutiques, and specialty shops display signs that read Cani Benvenuti (“Dogs Welcome”). Whether a small countryside inn or a luxury hotel, many offer pet-friendly accommodations and amenities...water bowls, treats, even beds. All of this is a fitting part of the Italian culture of “slow living” that brings these four-legged family members into daily life.

There are many dog breeds native to Italy, but here are a few of note. Any discussion should start with the Cane Corso, a large mastiff guard dog. When the Roman empire invaded the Greek islands, they took some of these dogs back to Italy and bred them with native Italian dog breeds. Cane Corso translates loosely as “Guardian,” and they accompanied soldiers into battle charging the enemy with buckets of flaming oil attached to their backs. Today they are family companions and guard dogs that bond with families and are



## Cani Italiani *continued*



especially good with children (despite their intimidating size they are incredibly gentle). My daughter's family adopted a dog that was a mixed breed but primarily of the Mastiff, who immediately bonded with my grandson and was a real-life example of the gentle nature of the Mastiff breed.

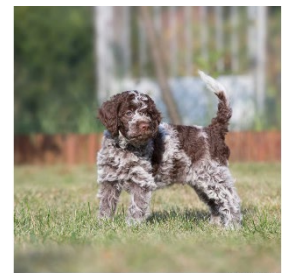
The Spinone Italiano (Italian Pointer) is a large Italian hunting dog, muscular and built for speed but known for its gentle, patient, and sociable temperament. It has a distinctive thick, wiry coat and comes in colors from white to an orange and brown roan. With a large, bulbous nose and thick beard and mustache, it has a very distinctive look. Good with families and other dogs, they are smart but can be stubborn. Yet some have been trained and used as therapy dogs working with children, visiting hospitals, and in assisted living facilities.



The Bracco Italiano dog breed, an Italian hunting dog and one of the oldest pointing breeds, is believed to date back 500 years to the Egyptian hound. It was developed in northern Italy, and by the medieval period was well established with Italian aristocracy. By the end of the 1800s the breed faced extinction, but diligent work by breeders in the 1920s rescued the breed from extinction. It is known for its intelligence and affectionate temperament, and was the 200<sup>th</sup> breed recognized by the American Kennel Club.



The Lagotto Romagnolo is a powerful rugged dog that originated in the extensive marshlands and lagoons of the Delta del Po in the eastern part of the Romagna sub-region of Italy. The painting "The Meeting" by Italian artist Andrea Mantegna in 1474, includes an image of the modern Lagotto. Though originally bred during the Renaissance as a water retriever, it is known as the "truffle dog" for its exceptional scenting ability to root out truffles. It is the only modern dog explicitly bred for sniffing out truffles.



The Italian Greyhound (*Piccolo Levriero Italiano*) is a small breed that was popular with European royalty and nobility. Some sources note they were kept by members of the Medici and Visconti families, as well as French kings including Louis XI and Charles VIII. They are an affectionate breed that can be playful and mischievous, but owners need be mindful of their



## Cani Italiani *continued*

prey drive lest they confuse other smaller furry housemates and friends as food or small game.

The Saint Bernard is usually thought of as a breed associated with Switzerland, but it was also bred in the Western Alps in Italy for rescue work by the hospice of the Great St Bernard Pass on the Italian-Swiss border. The hospice, built by and named after the Alpine monk Saint Bernard of Menthon, acquired the first dogs around 1660-70. One famous member of the breed was Rutor, a faithful companion of the Italian priest Pierre Chanoux, who was named after the peak Tete du Rutor above the Little St. Bernard Pass. Though famous for their rescues, there is no historical truth that St. Bernards carried casks of whiskey or brandy (though it is believed some carried food and water rather than the alcohol that would actually have contributed to hypothermia). It is a myth that grew from 19<sup>th</sup>-century art picturing the dogs used by monks to locate lost travelers in the alps, though an accompanying monk may well have given a rescued person brandy.



Dogs have a storied history in Italy and are a part of everyday life for many Italians. Whether in their homes, roaming the streets of cities and towns, or traveling across the country, they don't just accompany their owners but are faithful companions, experiencing life together. For dog lovers, they are very much a part of "*la famiglia!*"

## President's Message continued

When I read the message they sent out, it hit me that they are emphasizing the same message we have been sharing. Volunteering for a shift at Festa connects you to other members, shares our Italian heritage with the community, creates a sense of pride, and helps our club stay relevant. **We have shifts yet to be filled.** We need your support and commitment. Please take a minute and sign up to help.

Invite your spouse or other family members or friends to join you. It will be a rewarding experience!

The SignUp Genius link is included here.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0C44A4AE22A31-2019#/>

We understand there are situations where it is not possible for a member to volunteer for a shift. The individual might be traveling that weekend, there might be a graduation, or any number of other legitimate reasons why the member can't work. If that is the case, we ask only two things, **one you call or email us to let us know that you will not be able to work at Festa.** You can call Joe Tripalin

608-445-0984 email [jptripalin@gmail.com](mailto:jptripalin@gmail.com) or Jim DiUlio at 414-651-6993 email [jdiulio@hotmail.com](mailto:jdiulio@hotmail.com). Please give us the courtesy to let us know that you are not available. **Two, if you can't work, then please either sell a book of raffle tickets or buy them yourself as your effort/contribution to make Festa a success.**

Continued on page 7

# Playing for more than a score: Italian Americans and baseball

*Just about every kid who grew up in the “Bush” was a part of some sort of baseball or softball team. I was a batboy for my late uncle George Caravello’s softball team, sponsored Dane County Chemical Co., owned by reported Madison mafia mobster Sam Cerro, who was also the manager. It was made up of Italian guys from the “Bush” who didn’t play for the Madison Police or Dane County Sheriff’s teams. There were lots of Italian guys on those teams, too. I recall lots of verbal pleasantries being exchanged when we played either of those two teams.*

*In grade school, Neighborhood House was able to get Midget League sponsorships from the Optimists Club and Comstock-Johnson Auto Supply store for us kids. We played at Vilas Park.*

*In High School, Babe Ruth League had me playing first base for the Madison West team at Olin Park for home games. The Goodman pool is now where our left field used to be. The late Jim “Deacon” Davis, Jerry Licari, Tom Miller and Dick Arndt were teammates. The Madison East team was our main rival. A road trip was going to Middleton, Oregon or Sun Prairie. A long road trip got us all the way to Pardeeville. That was fun because we met girls we’d never met before!*

*Baseball then, as it is now, was a big deal. Records show 375 men with an Italian ancestry were/are associated with Major League baseball; players, managers and even some owners. (Marc Attanasio of the Milwaukee Brewers is one example).*

*Francesca Bezzone of L’Italo Americano Newspaper has a great March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2026*



*The most famous Italian American in baseball, Joe DiMaggio (By Sporting News - Library of Congress. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>. Public Domain*

*article about the Italian influence of “America’s pastime”. Play ball!*

*Prof. Jim LeTourneau IWC*

In many American cities, a century ago, the first place where **the children of Italian immigrants** felt entirely comfortable was not school and not even home, but a patch of open ground between buildings. Empty lots, half-paved streets, and small neighborhood parks became gathering spots in the afternoons, where boys improvised bases with pieces of wood or flattened tin cans and argued over rules learned from older kids. Their parents spoke dialects from Sicily, Campania, or Liguria, yet the language in those fields was different, fast, and practical, made of gestures, shouts, and shared understanding. In truth, what they were learning was not only a game: without quite realizing it, they were learning how to belong.

At the turn of the twentieth century, millions of newcomers were

arriving in the United States, and Italian families often settled in tightly knit neighborhoods where daily life revolved around relatives, parish, and work. Outside those blocks, however, expectations were unfamiliar and sometimes unwelcoming, and children crossed that boundary more easily than adults ever could. **Baseball**, which was already spreading rapidly through American cities, offered a kind of shortcut into the wider world because participation required almost no introduction: a boy who could catch a fly ball or run the bases quickly found himself included, even if his English was hesitant. In a pattern so typical of childhood, skill and “being good at playing” spoke more clearly than accent, and the game created a space where differences mattered a little less.

Parents, however, did not always see it that way. In families where

Continued on page 8

# President's Message *continued*

## Olbrich Gardens

In a recent update, I mentioned the council was asked to donate toward the rebuilding of the grape arbor at Olbrich Botanical Gardens and the council decided to provide \$1,000 toward that effort. This grape arbor is special because the grapes growing on it are from vines originally grown by Josephine Braschi who grew grapes in the old Greenbush neighborhood and shared them with neighbors and many people around the city including the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Ed Hasselkus from the UW offered these grapes to Olbrich over 30 years ago to grow on the new arbor they had just built. The grapes Josephine grew were brought to Madison from Sicily and adapted quite well to a climate here that is a little colder than Sicily.

The grape arbor is quite intricate, please see the pictures included, to get a feel for the unique design of the arbor. As you can see, construction is moving along well, and very shortly Josephine's grape vines will again be growing on the arbor. Olbrich Botanical Gardens is a beautiful place and well worth a visit, and it is free!

## Scholarships

Member Jason Mascitti who handles the scholarships for high school students, has provided information to area Dane County high schools to make available to students regarding our scholarships. The requirements are listed on our website but among them,

require the student to be of Italian descent and if the student isn't in Dane County then the child or grandchild of an IWC or IAWC member. This important work benefits from the money we earn at Festa. While our scholarships don't cover all the costs of tuition and room and board for a semester, they do help make life a little easier for the student receiving an award.

## International Fest

As I mentioned in a previous update, we had a very successful event at the Overture Center. We were one of six food vendors, and our Italian offerings were very well received. We sold out our food by early afternoon. Travis Hunter planned the food offerings and managed the food booth throughout the day. This year, Travis and Pat DePula made 800 meatballs and other food that we sold at the event. We earned almost \$2,000 from the event. Hats off to Travis.

## Final Thought

I think our club is special! I feel it is a warm welcoming place where friends come together to celebrate our heritage, share experiences, and just to have some fun. We do good things for our community and annually share our culture with 5,000 of our neighbors at Festa. We provide scholarships for high school students and UW students going off to Italy to study for a semester. These are good things. We provide special events where people can celebrate a season of

**Italia**

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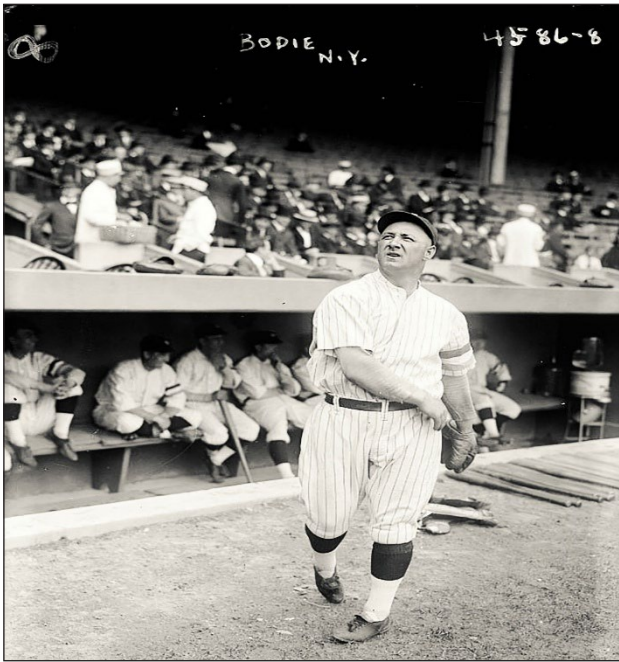
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(608) 516-7637

the year or individuals in our club receiving recognition awards, that is special. The club is what you make it. The more you put in, the more you get out. Enjoy Spring! ■■■



*Francesco Pezzolo, better known as Ping Bodie (By Bain-Library of Congress Public Domain); <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>*

money was scarce, many fathers expected their sons to help with jobs or errands after school, and spending hours chasing a ball could look like wasted time, especially in families where every extra coin mattered. Yet the attraction persisted precisely because the field stood outside the routines of immigrant life: on those makeshift diamonds, children negotiated friendships, reputations, and confidence in a society their parents were still trying to understand. A good player was recognized at school and in the neighborhood, and that recognition carried weight in a world where Italian names could still invite suspicion or mockery.

Not everything was easy, on the other hand, in the early world of

professional baseball, which remained, at least for a while, entangled in the same prejudices that characterized wider society, as demonstrated by the example of **Ping Bodie**, born **Francesco Pezzolo**, a name reporters quickly replaced with a nickname that sounded easier and, to them, more entertaining. But the change also reveals how public life worked at the time: acceptance often depended on appearing less foreign,

especially in a sport followed by national audiences. Italian players proved their ability, but they also learned how closely image and opportunity were connected.

By the late 1930s, a different kind of reception began to appear, and much of it centered on **Joe DiMaggio**. Raised in San Francisco within a family of Sicilian fishermen, DiMaggio entered professional baseball carrying both extraordinary talent and a background familiar to many immigrant households. Newspapers and magazines described him with admiration, presenting him as disciplined, modest, and reliable; this was pivotal because it associated Italians with an image that was trustworthy and

amicable. Now, the importance of this moment, for a minority that was still affected socially by the usual negative stereotypes associated with immigrants, needn't be explained.

Figures like DiMaggio managed, in other words, to transcend the realm of sport and enter that of **sociality** and **integration**: baseball became at once a moment of family gathering, with relatives listening to the game on the radio together, and of “belonging” to the new Motherland, thanks to the all-American appeal of the sport.

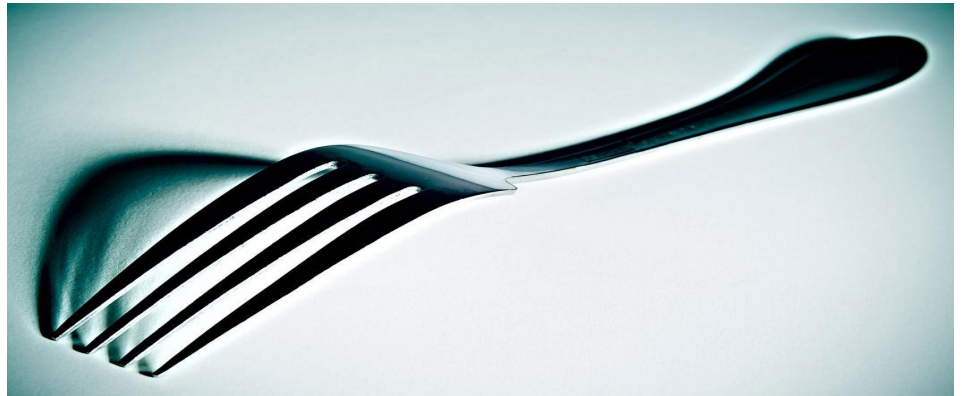
Gradually, the connection deepened, especially once Italian Americans began to appear not only as players but also as managers, coaches, and executives, a change that mirrored the community's broader social mobility; this is why historians of the sport say that baseball, in many ways, followed the larger Italian-American experience: early skepticism, then visibility through achievement, and eventually familiarity.

In the end, those modest neighborhood fields explain the change more clearly than any major stadium ever could. The children who gathered there were not thinking about assimilation, nor about how they might be perceived in a new country; they went because their friends were there, because the afternoon was long, and because the game was absorbing enough

# The Fork: A Small Italian Revolution at the Table

*Setting a dinner table for a common family of four or a royal banquet of 40 requires one common utensil; a fork. Dinner at your home usually requires one fork per person for everything. Dinner at a palace could mean up to 30 different types and sizes of forks, depending on its usage.*

*For example, common forks include: dinner, salad, dessert, fish and cocktail. A specialized fork would include oyster, cheese, snail (escargot), carving and, yes, a spaghetti fork. Tines, or prongs, range from two to five. A two-tined fork, which dates back to ancient times, would be used to hold a cooked duck while carving it; three tines is available as a fruit-eating fork, four tines is the common din-*



*ner fork while five tines is used for slicing bread.*

*Italy had an important role in Medieval times in revolutionizing the design and use of forks, as explained by the following article from L'Italo-American Newspaper. Prof. Jim LeTourneau, IWC*

By Staff | January 6, 2026

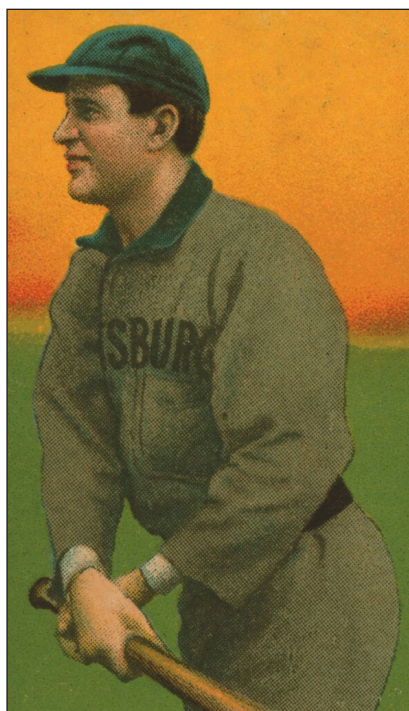
*A modern fork. This ubiquitous piece of cutlery originated in Italy's Medieval courts (Photo: Vclements/Dreamstime)*

For centuries, eating with the

Continued next page 10

to make them forget, at least for a while, the small hesitations that marked life outside the neighborhood. Yet it was precisely through those repeated afternoons that they began to move more easily within a society that at first felt distant and difficult to read. Baseball provided a set of shared expectations, a language of gestures and outcomes that did not depend on accent, and success depended on what a player could do in the moment rather than on where his family had come from.

From this angle, baseball did not dissolve differences, nor did it remove the barriers immigrants faced in other parts of life; however, it offered a setting in which a person could be known for a skill



that others admired, and that kind of recognition often traveled faster than social acceptance itself. A well-timed hit, a strong season, or even the reputation of a good local player could alter how neighbors, teachers, and employers responded, and over time, those small adjustments accumulated. Long before broader approval appeared in other spheres, the ballfield allowed Italian Americans to occupy a visible and respected place in public life, gradually expanding, almost without announcement, the sense of who belonged within the national story. ■

*A collector's card of Ed Abbaticchio, first Italian-American in the major leagues to play using his real name. Played for Phillies (1897) and Pirates (1909). (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/>). (Public Domain)*

## The Fork *continued*

hands was the norm across much of Europe: knives and spoons were common at the table, but the fork as we know it today arrived relatively late, and its story is closely tied to Italy.

Early forms of fork-like utensils existed in the ancient world, particularly in Byzantium and the Eastern Mediterranean, where small two-pronged tools were used for serving food, but their use at the table was rare and often viewed with suspicion. The turning point came in Medieval Italy, where the fork began to take on a new, practical role.

One of the earliest documented episodes dates to the late 10th century, when a Byzantine princess married into the Venetian elite and reportedly used a small gold fork at banquets. The gesture caused scandal among churchmen, who saw the utensil as unnecessary luxury and even moral excess. But in Italy, especially in wealthy urban centers like Venice, Florence, and later Naples, the fork slowly gained acceptance.

By the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, Italian food habits made the fork increasingly useful: the growing popularity of long, thin pasta shapes required a tool that could lift, twist, and manage strands cleanly, so Italian craftsmen responded by refining the design, moving from two to three



and eventually four prongs, which made the fork more stable and efficient.

The fork spread from Italy to the rest of Europe largely through **cultural exchange**: Italian nobles, merchants, and brides carried the utensil with them, particularly to France but, even there, its adoption was slow. In the 16th century, Catherine de' Medici is often credited with introducing the fork to the French court, though it took generations before it became widely accepted. For many Europeans, eating with a fork still

*The fork became common in Medieval Italy (Photo: Glo5/Dreamstime)*

seemed affected or unnecessary.

By the 17th and 18th centuries the fork was firmly established across Europe, and its Italian origins were largely forgotten. Yet, its modern form was shaped in Italy. And so, what began as a controversial novelty became a standard object of daily life, which changed the very way we eat and enjoy our food today.

“... a Byzantine princess married into the Venetian elite and reportedly used a small gold fork at banquets.”



**IWC Birthdays**  
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**May**

- |                  |      |                     |      |
|------------------|------|---------------------|------|
| Enzo Ciarletta   | (1)  | Joseph Shubat       | (5)  |
| Eric Holmes      | (5)  | Anthony Balistreri  | (6)  |
| Scott Theel      | (9)  | Gary Berger         | (8)  |
| Anthony Gatti    | (10) | Frederick Underhill | (11) |
| Frank Hill       | (12) | Dick Murray         | (12) |
| Ron Giordan      | (16) | Biagio Scalissi     | (20) |
| James Pullara    | (19) |                     |      |
| Jay Moretti      | (20) |                     |      |
| Jim LeTourneau   | (21) |                     |      |
| Ron Gatti        | (23) |                     |      |
| John J. Colletti | (27) |                     |      |
| George Colletti  | (28) |                     |      |

**June**

- |                       |     |                |         |
|-----------------------|-----|----------------|---------|
| John Baker            | (3) | Joanne Jenson  | May 18  |
| Todd Cambio           | (4) | Rigina Rendler | June 08 |
| Vincent Colletti Weis | (4) | Cindy Parisi   | June 13 |
|                       |     | Jean Musillami | June 21 |
|                       |     | Kim Rendler    | June 29 |

**IAWC Birthdays**  
.....



# 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.



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## Meeting Dates

IWC Council Meetings — 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of  
Each Month 7:00 pm

IWC Membership Meetings — 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday  
of Each Month 6:30 pm

*Please clip and post this calendar.*



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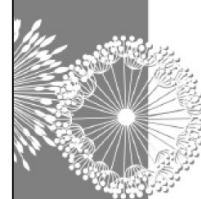
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