

VOCE DI GCICS

GULF COAST ITALIAN CULTURE SOCIETY, INC.

1811 Englewood Rd., #317, Englewood, FL 34223 WWW.GCICS.ORG May 2025

Mary Rinaldi, Editor



President's Message:

Happy Spring! This past month, our 2025 Scholarship Festa was a wonderful occasion when GCICS gathered at Stoneybrook Country Club to celebrate our most important event of the year. Yes, this day was set aside to meet and honor our six scholarship recipients and their families. It fills GCICS members with pride and joy as the recipients come to the podium to receive their award and share their plans. It is truly inspiring to realize that your generosity has made this day possible. These students will go on to colleges and universities, giving us hope that our community is in good hands and, more importantly, that we played a role in helping them along the way.

Let us not forget that each of these students epitomizes what it means to be of Italian heritage, which can be appreciated through their values and the examples they set for others to admire.

For those who could not attend and wish to experience the highlights of this wonderful day, I encourage you to read more in this newsletter. You will find the names of our honored recipients, photos, and many memorable moments of this day.

I applaud our Scholarship Chair, Sandra Russell, and her committee, who worked diligently to select our six scholarship recipients. Please look for Sandra's message and the names of her committee members. We appreciate all your work, especially selecting such worthy recipients. I also want to express my gratitude to George Quinn, Stoneybrook's Events Manager. He did a fabulous job, and I want to compliment the chef

as well. The food was well prepared and enjoyed by everyone.

I am mindful that we are moving forward and planning for next year's scholarship recipients. Again, it feels like a suitable time to say how much your generosity has meant to our Society. I would also like to applaud the Membership Chair Phil Miner and his wife Patty who secured over \$700 in raffle tickets sold for our scholarship fund.

This is an update on George Arfield, our Cultural Chair. George is recovering from surgery, gaining strength daily, and is on the road to better health. I am sure George would appreciate it if you kept him in your prayers. I encourage you to send well wishes to his home: 1921 Monte Carlo Drive #301A, Sarasota, FL 34231. We miss you, George.

One final note of appreciation to all those who helped with our Scholarship Festa, and those who worked quietly behind the scenes--Ellen Roderick, Josephine Fontana, Gordon Bloom, Phil and Patty Miner, and Sandra Russell. Sincere thanks go out to all our Board members not previously mentioned but very much appreciated--Mary Rinaldi, Tom Hurban, Jerry Hall, George Arfield, and Camille Kramer.

I wish you all well. Stay safe, as many of you travel during these summer months.

Julie Bondarenko
President

BOCCE NEWS



Vin DeNicolas, Jerry Hall, and Beth Rose
Teaching Bocce

Last month I wrote about the symbiotic relationship we have with the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, now the Big Waters Land Trust. In the past month major news articles have appeared about two new tracts of land that are now preserved forever. Wonderful! They held a Wild About Nature day on April 5th at their property to teach youngsters about many things pertaining to nature. GCICS has been present each year to teach bocce to anyone who is inquisitive. This year Vince DeNicolas and I took the earlier hours and Jerry Hall and Beth Rose the latter. Attendance was down this year from the usual well over one thousand attendees.

I hate to be repetitive, but again, we WELCOME new players with no experience to join us to play bocce. We have enjoyable games from 2-4 almost every Sunday at the court we maintain in Osprey. Any questions? Please contact me!

Tom Hurban. Bocce Chair
908 507 3048
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Opera Thank You Note



SARASOTA OPERA

VICTOR DeRENZI, Artistic Director
RICHARD RUSSELL, General Director

November 1, 2024

Gulf Coast Italian Culture Society, Inc.
811 Englewood Rd Unit 317
Englewood, FL 34223

Dear Sir/Madam,

Sarasota Opera's 2024-25 Season is just around the corner, and we can't wait to welcome you back to the Opera House! As a Patron level donor, you are invited to attend exclusive events that give you an inside look into your opera company.

The list of exclusive events we are offering for the upcoming season is included on the next page of this packet. **To RSVP** there is a tear-off form at the bottom of that page that you can detach and return to us in the envelope provided. We will also be sending out a link so you can RSVP online. **Please note that you only need to RSVP once, via mail or online.**

Our benefit events are designed to show you the impact of your philanthropy and to bring you closer to the work you support. We thank you for your generosity and hope to see you at each of these events. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at (941) 366-8450, ext. 250 or by e-mail at btamm@sarasotaopera.org.

All my best,

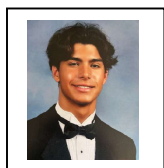
Brenda Tamm
Patron Giving Manager

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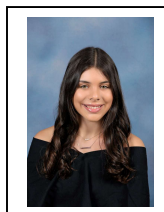
GCICS 2025 Scholarship Awardees

Article by Sandra Russell

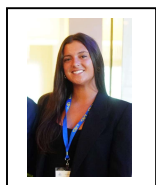
This year's Scholarship Committee selected 6 graduates from the Sarasota/Manatee area to be honored with a \$2,000.00 merit scholarship. These are 6 amazing students with outstanding high school achievements and biographies which deserve to be shared with our members.



Nicholas Joseph Barresi is graduating from Sarasota High School. He is an honor student and member of the National Honor Society and the National English Honor Society. Just recently he was awarded the scholar athlete award. In addition to being Captain of the school swimming team, he works with swimmers with disabilities of all ages to improve their skills and spends time with this team during regional swim meets. With all this he still has time to play sax and piano. Joseph has been admitted to University of South Florida, University of Central Florida, Florida State University, and the University of Florida. His plan is to study engineering and finance.



Isabella Sophia Cicala is a student and soon to be graduate of Sarasota High School. An Honor Student and member of the National Honor Society, and Science Honor Society, she also is treasurer of Students for Healthcare Opportunities and Education, and a member of Women in STEM. Isabella has been accepted at the University of Central Florida and University of South Florida where she plans to major in Forensic Science and minor in Biochemistry. She has worked as an intern for the Respiratory Care Department at Sarasota Memorial Hospital during the last 2 summers. As a member of the Sarasota community, she has worked with Embracing our Differences in Bayfront Park.



Kyla Marie Freddolino is graduating from Venice High School, where she is a member of the Science Honor Society, Math Honor Society, Principal's Cabinet and Future Business Leaders of America. Additionally, she is a member of the varsity volleyball, varsity soccer and varsity track and field teams. FSU, UCF, USF, and FAU have accepted Kyla. As of this publication, she is waiting to hear from University of Florida. Her plan is to major in Business. With all this she manages to find time to coach youth in the summer, and to work with the Sarasota National Cemetery Flag placement/collection and wreath placement /collection projects.



Kaitlyn Diane Meyer is soon to graduate from Venice High School. She is in the International Baccalaureate Program. She has been a member of the Varsity Cheer team. Her biography includes being a Student Government Representative for 3 years. And she is the founder and president of the Indian Pride Spirit Club. At school she is also a member of Future Business Leaders of America. Beyond school she works on Mission Venice and Service Saturdays.

The Chair of the English Department notes that everything she does she does perfectly. Kaitlyn has been accepted at Florida State University, University of South Florida, University of Central Florida, Florida Atlantic University, and Florida Gulf Coast University. She plans to study Finance and Legal Studies.



Anabel Joanne Tocco attends and will graduate from Venice High School this year. As a student at Venice High School, she participated in the National Honor Society as Vice President, and Rho Kappa Social Studies Honor Society as President. She is a member of the Science National Honor Society, Key Club, Thespian Society, Indian Pride, and VHS theater participating in several performances. In addition to these activities, she is a member of the YMCA swim

team, and works with the All-Faiths Food Bank, Society Toys for Tots, Service Saturdays, Land Hispanic and Italian Rebuild Fundraisers. Anabel has been accepted by Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida Atlantic University, University of South Florida, University of Central Florida, Florida State University and University of Florida.



Jack Gregory Wittmus is a student at Riverview High School, and a student in the International Baccalaureate program. At Riverview he has taken part in Mock Trial Club, Chess Club, Officer in National Honor Society, National English Honor Society, National Science Society, and National Math Honor Society. Recently, Jack has offered to schedule a few after school review sessions for the SAT. One of his teachers refers to him as a student with a strong work ethic and skills needed to

be successful in college and beyond. He has been accepted at several Florida universities and has chosen to attend the University of Miami as a Political Economics major with a minor in Global Business. Jack keeps terribly busy as a tutor.

GCICS 2025 SCHOLARSHIP FESTA

Article: Ellen Roderick

Photos: Gordon Bloom & Ellen Roderick

Our Scholarship Festa is the most popular and best attended event during our program year. While 79 people (62 members/17 guests) registered for the luncheon, illness prevented five members from attending. We held our celebration at Stoneybrook Golf & Country Club in Sarasota on a beautiful Saturday morning (4/12/24) with temperatures in the low 80s. We enjoyed a delicious buffet including baked cod, chicken piccata, mushroom ravioli pesto, two salads, multiple desserts (did you try the cheesecake?), and a mimosa or house wine to whet the appetite. Fourteen restaurant gifts cards were raffled off which raised \$740 for our scholarship fund. We witnessed the awarding of \$2,000 scholarships to six multi-talented high school seniors with Italian ancestry:

Nicolas J. Barresi, Sarasota High School

Isabella S. Cicala, Sarasota High School

Kyla M. Freddolino, Venice High School

Kaitlyn D. Meyer, Venice High School

Anabel J. Tocco, Venice High School

Jack G. Wittmus, Riverview High School

The following six photographs show each of the scholarship recipients receiving their Award Certificate. Sandra Russell, Scholarship Chair is at the left of the student and Julie Bondarenko, GCISC President is on the right.



Nicolas J. Barresi



Isabella S. Cicala



Kyla M. Freddolino



Kaitlyn D. Meyer



Anabel J. Tocco



Jack G. Wittmus

We are grateful to our Scholarship Committee for the dedicated work they put into publicizing the scholarships, reading and rating the applications and essays, interviewing the finalists, selecting the recipients, arranging the luncheon, publicizing the event, managing the reservations, creating the written program, and conducting the event. The committee members were Sandra Russell, Chair; Julie Bondarenko, Mike DiMicele, Mary Lou Ferrari, Carol Miranda, Ellen Roderick, and Sherman Shonk.



Sandra Russell, Ellen Roderick, Carol Miranda, Mary Lou Ferreri, Lucille Samartin, Julie Bondarenko
Not pictured: Mike DiMicele and Sherman Shonk

Our President, Julie Bondarenko, opened with a grand welcome. Mike DiMicele led the Pledge of Allegiance and Joe Barresi delivered the blessing.



President Julie Bondarenko presiding over meeting.

Following lunch, Scholarship Chair, Sandra Russell, led the introduction of the scholars and their families. Each student is required to compose an essay on a famous Italian American identified by the Scholarship Committee. Kyla Freddolino was asked to read her essay entitled "*Maria Montessori, Physician & Educator.*" The essay is reproduced in this newsletter. Sandra and Julie then awarded scholarships to each student who shared his or her plans for college. The scholars will be attending universities across the state: FSU in Tallahassee (2), UF in Gainesville (2), University of Miami in Coral Gables (1), and UCF in Orlando (1). Julie provided closing remarks, thanking everyone for their generosity in supporting the GCICS Scholarship & Grants Program.



Photo By: Darcie Freddolino
Sandra Russell, Jack Wittmus, Kaitlyn Meyer, Nicolas Barresi,
Kyla Freddolino, Anabel Tocco, Isabella Cicala, Julie Bondarenko



MARIA MONTESSORI ESSAY

Kyla M. Freddolino



Photo By: Darcie Freddolino
Kyla is reading her essay.

Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori revolutionized early childhood education with her innovative Montessori method. Born on August 31, 1870, in Chiaravalle, Italy, Montessori defied convention to become one of Italy's first female physicians. Her Italian heritage, which emphasized family, education, and individual development, heavily influenced her philosophy and teaching style. Through her work, Montessori not only transformed the field of education but also contributed to a more enlightened and inclusive society.

Early Life and Education

Montessori's upbringing in Italy played a crucial role in shaping her intellectual pursuits. Her father, Alessandro Montessori, was a civil servant, and her mother, Renilde Stoppani, was well-educated and progressive for her time. Encouraged by her mother to support women's education, Montessori was a

good student and would not be limited by gender roles when it came to furthering her studies. She graduated in 1896 from the University of Rome as a doctor, being among the first female doctors in Italy (Association Montessori Internationale, n.d.).

As a doctor, Montessori studied pediatrics and psychiatry and worked with developmentally disabled children. She observed that the conventional method of education was not effective for these children and became determined to improve education techniques. Her work as a physician formed the basis of her theory of education, which involved experiential, sensory-based learning tailored to the individual child's developmental needs (American Montessori Society, n.d.).

The Montessori Method

Montessori's work with children led her to develop an innovative educational approach that focused on independence, self-directed learning, and a carefully prepared environment. In 1907, she opened her first classroom, the "Casa dei Bambini" (Children's House), in a low-income district of Rome. She provided children with structured freedom, allowing them to explore their interests using specially designed materials. Montessori's observations demonstrated that children, when given the right environment, displayed remarkable concentration, curiosity, and a natural love for learning (Britannica, 2023).

Her method gained international recognition, and by the early 20th century, Montessori schools had been established in Europe, the United States, and beyond. Today, the Montessori method is used worldwide, influencing not only preschool education but also approaches to primary, secondary, and even special education. The core principles of Montessori's philosophy—respect for the child, self-motivation, and experiential learning—have significantly impacted modern educational practices (Association Montessori Internationale, n.d.).

The Influence of Italian Heritage

Montessori's Italian heritage played a pivotal role in shaping her contributions to education and society. Italy, with its rich history of intellectual pursuit and cultural appreciation for the arts,

influenced her holistic approach to education. Italian culture emphasizes family, community, and the development of the whole person, values that Montessori incorporated into her philosophy. Her focus on educating the child as a unique individual, as opposed to strict structures, reflected Italy's long history of emphasizing creativity and human potential (Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America, 2021).

Additionally, as an Italian woman during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Montessori had great societal obstacles. Women were dissuaded from seeking professional careers, particularly in medicine and academia. Her determination and success opened doors for Italian women and women around the world, leading to increased gender equality within education and the workplace. The accomplishments of Montessori proved the value of equal educational opportunities for women, a legacy that continues to motivate generations to come. (American Montessori Society, n.d.).

Impact on Society

Montessori's contributions extend beyond education. Her philosophy has influenced fields such as psychology, child development, and even business leadership. Many successful innovators, including Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, credit their Montessori education with fostering creativity and independent thinking. Her impact is evident in contemporary discussions about child-centered learning

and the importance of individualized instruction.

Additionally, Montessori's work promoted inclusivity and respect for diversity. She advocated for education that transcended national and cultural barriers, believing that fostering independence and critical thinking in children could lead to a more peaceful world. Her legacy is reflected in the continued expansion of Montessori schools, which emphasize respect for all cultures, backgrounds, and learning styles (Britannica, 2023).

Conclusion

Maria Montessori's life and work were deeply influenced by her Italian heritage, which valued education, individuality, and community. Through her innovative educational method, she transformed the way children learn, emphasizing independence, self-motivation, and respect for the child's natural development. Her perseverance as a female pioneer in medicine and education also contributed to greater gender equality in professional fields. Montessori's legacy continues to shape education worldwide, proving that her Italian roots and revolutionary ideas have made an enduring impact on society.

Works Cited

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3/24/2025 Cultural Event

Article By: Camille Kramer
Sarasota Opera House Tour

When I organized the Sarasota Opera House Tour for March 24, 2025, it was my hope that members might see a new side of opera and its workings and fall in love with it, if they had not already. I have a feeling that just might have happened!

Our group of 37 was shepherded through the opera house by Travis M. Rogers, Patron Services Manager, who clearly loved being a part of the Opera House and all its works. The fact that Victor DeRenzi, Artistic Director and Principal Conductor, at the helm for over 40 years, is a huge fan of Verdi is no secret and Travis mentioned the 28 years it took to complete the Verdi Cycle. The Verdi Cycle, completed in 2016, is a worldwide distinction held only by the Sarasota Opera House, which has performed every single piece of music written by Giuseppe Verdi! Next time you are at the opera, notice the plaque on the left outside wall as you enter the building.

Travis told us about the history of the building and that initially it was an “open plan” with an open roof and small shops in stalls. Times have changed and the building has had several iterations. He indulged us with a long Q&A session as the group had many interesting questions and points to make. On a more serious note, Travis shared the serious economic devastation of the pandemic and that the Opera House has still not bounced back totally to its pre-Covid days.

The Opera House has it all – gorgeous music, dramatic productions, intriguing costuming, and the theater set up so that from the most expensive seats to the cheapest, everyone has a clear view of the stage and the English translations. The Sarasota Opera House is truly one of Sarasota’s finest gems!



3/28/2025 Cultural Event

Article By: George Arfield

THE 1943 ALLIED LANDINGS IN SICILY

In July of 1943, an Allied invasion of Sicily became a turning point in WW II, an event that contributed to the collapse of Mussolini's regime and set the stage for the eventual Allied victory in Italy and across Europe. This campaign, codenamed Operation Husky, is often overshadowed by the Allied landings in Normandy (Operation Overlord) almost a year later.

This campaign, critical to defeat of Fascism and Nazism, was brought to vivid life to GCICS members and guests by Prof. Davide Tanasi's inclusion of family recollections and visuals in his March 28 illustrated talk at the Sarasota Selby Library's auditorium.

Prof. Tanasi described to 62 attendees how Operation Husky was planned with the goal of knocking Italy out of the war and opening a new front in Europe. It was primarily a British American operation, with other nations, including Canadian and Free French forces, participating. The operation aimed to gain control of Sicily, disrupt Axis operations in the

Mediterranean, and prepare for an eventual invasion of continental Europe. It also was the initial stage for the rivalry between the leader of American forces, Gen. George Patton and his British counterpart, Gen. (later Field Marshal) Bernard Montgomery.

The success of the landings, said Prof. Tanasi, allowed the Allies to control the island by mid-August, but it also had significant political and military consequences. Mussolini was deposed on July 25, 1943, because of the invasion's success and the growing discontent within Italy. The new Italian government, under General Badoglio, then began negotiations with the Allies.

The invasion of Sicily was a turning point in the war, contributing to the downfall of Mussolini's regime and setting the stage for the eventual Allied victory in Italy and across Europe. Prof. Tanasi's presentation was a reminder of Sicily's strategic importance since the dawn of recorded history.



Audience listening intently



Julie Bondarenko, Dr. Tanasi, George Arfield

4/9/2025 Cultural Event

Article By: Camille Kramer

Photos By: Ellen Roderick

Historic Asolo Theater & Kotler-Coville Glass Pavilion Tour

Wow! Who knew that a 15th century Venetian and exiled Queen of Cyprus, Caterina Cornaro, could have such a major cultural impact on our current day Sarasota? Well, the GCICS group (all 29 of us), who attended the Historic Asolo Theater & Kotler-Coville Glass Pavilion Tour on Wednesday April 9 were regaled by stories about the theater built in 1798 within Caterina's castle in Asolo, Italy as a tribute to her.

Mussolini ordered it taken down in 1931 and ultimately panels from the interior made their way back to the United States to the Ringling Museum of Art in 1949. Sadly, John and Mabel Ringling did not live to see it. Our three guides through the theater talked about the Italian connections and history, the art itself, and how the modern theater functions,

even inviting us up on the stage. They were Rebecca A.R. Baker, Box Office Manager, Dr. Sarah Cartwright, Curator of Collections and Gary Bower, Production Manager, each an expert in their area.

Then off to the adjoining glass pavilion to experience some significant Italian glass pieces. Marissa Hershon, Curator of Ca'd' Zan and Decorative Arts, told us that because Florida's Gulf Coast has become a hub for glass collections, it is often referred to as the "Glass Coast." Another big "Who knew?!" Each masterpiece, and yes, they all qualify, tells a unique story. It is a wonderful place to take friends who are visiting – it is different, the glasswork is beautiful, you can spend as much or as little time as you want, and it is always free of charge!



Marissa Hershon, Decorative Arts Curator/Tour Guide



"Suspicious Cleavage Jones" by Stephen Powell



Members on Historic Asolo Theater Stag



Program Manager, Historic Asolo/Tour Guide



Historic Asolo Theater (HAT)

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Marie Corsentino	2007
Mary Amabile Palmer	2008-2010
William Korp	2010-2014
Anthony Esposito	2015-2016
Sheryl Lazzarotti	2016-2020

Trivia Italiana:

by Camille A. Kramer

1. Italy is a little bigger than Arizona.
2. Nearly one fifth of Italy's population is over 65 years old.
3. Italy's borders include Austria, France, Vatican City, San Marino, Slovenia, and Switzerland.
4. Italy's longest border is with Switzerland.
5. The average Italian family has 1.27 children (The Italians are not replacing themselves.)

