

VOCE DI GCICS

GULF COAST ITALIAN CULTURE SOCIETY, INC.

1811 Englewood Rd., #317, Englewood, FL 34223 WWW.GCICS.ORG May 2026

Mary Rinaldi, Newsletter Editor



President's Message:

April has been a full and energetic month for our Society, with great participation and wonderful support from so many of you.

Our Happy Hours have been a highlight. We gathered at Lefty's on April 6, followed by Café Epicure on April 13, where we received a \$50 gift card. On April 20, we enjoyed Bruschetta and received two \$50 gift cards. Thank you to everyone who joined us and helped make these evenings so lively. Julie will be hosting our next Happy Hour on April 27. I appreciate her stepping in to lead.

On April 11, we held our Scholarship Luncheon at Plantation Golf & Country Club in Venice, welcoming approximately 60 attendees, including six scholars and their families. It was a meaningful event celebrating these outstanding students. Through our gift card raffles, we raised \$950, and we are grateful to everyone who participated and to the grand prize winner, who generously donated \$300 back to the

club from the "Dinner for Four" at Drift Kitchen & Bar at the Lido Beach Resort.

Our April 23 program required a last-minute adjustment due to an unfortunate accident involving our scheduled speaker for the presentation on the Holocaust and the Jews. In its place, we presented a YouTube feature, *Aiello: Secret Jews of Calabria*, along with a taped interview of Elizabeth Bettina discussing her book, *It Happened in Italy*, which tells the story of Italian Jews during World War II. We appreciate your understanding and flexibility.

Looking ahead, we are excited about our upcoming programs. On October 24, 2026, we will celebrate Italian Cultural Heritage Month with our Welcome Back Luncheon at Stoneybrook Country Club. At that event, we will present the Italian American of the Year Award to Rick Piccolo, retired President and CEO of SRQ Airport. We will also continue

our popular Happy Hours and La Cena gatherings throughout the summer.

On a personal note, Patty and I will be traveling next week to be with our son, his wife, and their children as they welcome a new baby. We are thrilled to be expecting a granddaughter and fully expect to return a bit

tired! We would appreciate your prayers for a safe and healthy delivery.

Thank you all for your continued support and enthusiasm. It is what makes this Society so special.

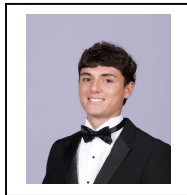
Warm regards,
Phil Miner, President



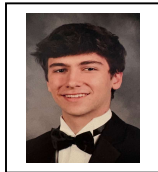
GCICS 2026 Scholarship Recipients

By: Sandra Russell, GCICS Scholarship Chair

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



Ryan Freddolino is graduating from Venice High School. He is an honor student and member of the Future Business Leaders of America, the Biochemistry Club, and National Science Honor Society's secretary. He plays soccer both for fun and competitively. He has volunteered with Boys and Girls Clubs and Wreaths Across America. Ryan will attend the University of Florida, majoring in Chemistry. Ryan read his essay "Vince Lombardi: The Italian American Who Changed the Game" at the Scholarship Luncheon.



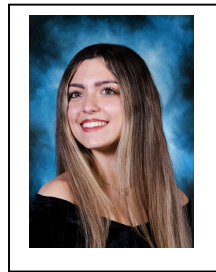
Remy Christopher Craddock is graduating from Booker High School. He is a member of the Booker High School Performing Arts Theater Department, having taken part in eight productions. He participated in the band for four years. He is proud to be a CFES Student Ambassador, Co-leader of STACKS Business Club, and participates in peer mentorships. Remy will attend the University of South Florida, majoring in Finance.



Audrey Rain DeLuca is graduating from Riverview High School, with an International Baccalaureate Diploma. She is a member of the National Honor Society, Art Honor Society, and Spanish Honor Society. Audrey also plays varsity golf and is a Highland dancer with the RHS Kiltie Band. Audrey will attend Florida Gulf Coast University, majoring in Journalism/Pre-Law.



Benjamin Peter Hertz is graduating from Lemon Bay High School. He is a member of the National Honor Society, National English Honor Society, LBHS Swim Team, and manager of the LBHS Soccer Team. Benjamin volunteers at Vineland Elementary School, Suncoast Humane Society, and Youth Soccer. He will attend the University of Florida, majoring in Microbiology and Genetics.



Sophia Marie Mazza is graduating from Lemon Bay High School. She is a member of the National Honor Society, Science Honor Society, 2025 Florida Girls State Delegate, and Student Government Senior Representative. She is also a member of the High School Volleyball team and Think Pink Club. She volunteers with Boys and Girls Clubs of Englewood, Solaris Healthcare, and Gallery at North Port. Sophia will attend the University of Tampa, majoring in Allied Health.



Gino Markus Tambe is graduating from Lakewood Ranch High School. He is Sergeant Major of JROTC, a member of the National Honor Society, Raiders co-captain, and mentor of State Champions. When not in school, he volunteers at churches including Woodland Church, Bedrock Church, and our Lady on the Angels Church. Gino will attend the University of Central Florida, majoring in Mechanical Engineering.

Congratulations to our scholars. This year's competition reflects an outstanding group of young people selected from an outstanding field of competitors. We are proud of these young scholars and future leaders who have shared their talents and their love of their Italian heritage with our Society.

GCICS 2026 SCHOLARSHIP FESTA

Article: Ellen Roderick, GCICS Secretary

Photos: Gordon Bloom, GCICS Technology Chair

Our Scholarship Festa is the most popular and best attended event during our program year. Phil Miner, GCICS President, welcomed 63 members and 14 scholars and parents to Plantation Golf and Country Club, a “first-time” venue for the Society. We enjoyed a delicious buffet including salmon, shrimp, chicken piccata, sides, salad, and tiramisu. Restaurant gifts cards were raffled off which raised \$950 for our scholarship fund. We witnessed the awarding of \$2,000 scholarships to six multi-talented high school seniors with Italian ancestry:

Remy Christopher Craddock, Booker High School
Audrey Rain DeLuca, Riverview High School
Ryan Anthony Freddolino, Venice High School
Benjamin Peter Hertz, Lemon Bay High School
Sophia Marie Mazza, Lemon Bay High School
Gino Markus Tambe, Lakewood Ranch High School

The six photographs below show the scholars receiving their Award Certificates from GCICS President Phil Miner (left) and GCICS Scholarship Chair Sandra Russell (right).



Remy Christopher Craddock



Audrey Rain DeLuca



Ryan Anthony Freddolino



Benjamin Peter Hertz



Sophia Marie Mazza



Gino Markus Tambe

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, Audrey Koertvelyessy, Carol Miranda, Ellen Roderick, Lucille Samartin, and Sherman Shonk.



Ellen Roderick, Lu Samartin, Mary Lou Ferrari, Audrey Kortvelyessy,
Sandra Russell, Julie Bondarenko, Carol Miranda, Sherman Shonk

Our President, Phil Miner, opened with a grand welcome. Sherman Shonk led the Pledge of Allegiance and Lucille Samartin delivered the blessing.



Phil Minor



Lucille Samartin

Following lunch, Scholarship Chair Sandra Russell led the introduction of the scholars and their families. The scholars then shared their college plans, with all of them attending in-state universities (FGCU-1, UCF-1, UF-2, USF-1, U of Tampa-1). Each student is required to compose an essay on a famous Italian American identified by the Scholarship Committee. Ryan Freddolino was invited to read his essay entitled “*Vince Lombardi: The Italian-American Who Changed the Game.*” The essay along with Ryan’s photo appears in a separate article below. Ellen Roderick, GCICS Giving Challenge Chair, spoke about the 24-hour Giving Challenge, April 15-16 during which anyone may donate to our Society. All donations ranging between \$25 and \$100 will be matched by The Patterson Foundation. This is the largest fundraiser for GCICS and provides about \$10,000 to our Scholarship Fund. Phil provided closing remarks, thanking everyone for their generosity in supporting the GCICS Scholarship & Grants Program. Sandra closed with the reading of a touching letter written by Nicolas Barresi, a 2025 scholarship recipient, updating us on his progress at the University of FL where he majors in Mechanical Engineering.



Sandra Russell



Ellen Roderick



Phil Miner, Remy Christopher Craddock, Sophia Marie Mazza, Ryan Anthony Freddolino, Audrey Rain DeLuca, Benjamin Peter Hertz, Gino Markus Tambe, Sandra Russell

Vince Lombardi: The Italian-American Who Changed the Game

By: Ryan Christopher Freddolino



Ryan Christopher Freddolino reading his essay.

"Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work" (Source 1). The words of Vince Lombardi resonate deeply with me, not only as an athlete, but as a person. Lombardi was more than a legendary coach; he is a name to remember. He was a leader who transformed sports into the unifying force it is today, demonstrating how values rooted in who we are as people despite where we come from could strengthen anything.

As an Italian American growing up in the early twentieth century, Vince Lombardi was shaped by a culture that emphasized hard work, loyalty, and pride. These values became the foundation of his coaching philosophy. When Lombardi took over the Green Bay Packers in 1959, he inherited a struggling team and turned them into a dynasty (Source 2). Through preparation, accountability, and the balance between self-ambition and collective effort, Vince was able to demonstrate that success is not about

individual glory but fighting for something bigger than oneself.

As a student athlete myself, I see his influence every day in the way that sports bring people together, such as the recent super bowl. Lombardi understood that a team thrives when members feel valued, but this was very difficult to implement at the time (Source 3). During his time coaching, the atmosphere in . America was not one to be messed with. The players, coaches, and any non "traditional" American, such as colored people, faced widespread discrimination and heavy prejudice. Lombardi, being the legendary coach, he is, refused to tolerate any of this in his locker room or at practice, demanding equal respect for each of his players. This mentality elevated team unity, highlighting that diversity is a source of strength, not division.

Lombardi's leadership also extended outside the field and stands. His dominating team was able to unite entire communities and fans

of various backgrounds around a shared passion: football. His influence directed sports to become a place where race, religion, or even gender differences didn't matter, and connections grew. The same sense of belonging is what I experience when I compete now. My soccer team is a place where teamwork, trust, and resilience matter more than anything else. Vince Lombardi's legacy reminds me that sports are not just games where people compete, they are opportunities for people to build a community.

Vince Lombardi's life and work on and off the field embody the truth of his own words: "Individual commitment to a group effort—that's what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, and a civilization work." Lombardi's career revolutionized sports into a unifying institution that could celebrate diversity through a shared purpose. His leadership shaped communities and future athletes, like me, to value teamwork over individual recognition. Because of Vince Lombardi, I strive to remind myself and my soccer teammates that you cannot be successful if your teacher fails.

Source 1: <https://www.socratic-method.com/quote-meanings/vince-lombardi-individual-commitment-to-a-group-effort-that-is-what-makcs-a-team-work-a-company-work-a-society-work-a-civilization-work>

Source 2: <https://www.profootballhof.com/players/vince-lombardi>

Source 3: <https://daily.jstor.org/the-uneasy-history-of-integrated-sports-in-america/>

Source 4: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vince-Lombardi>



Bocce News



We have been busy on Sunday afternoons with the old crew and many new faces coming to play. It has been enjoyable to have new members joining us! The renovations we have made to the court have worked out well.

On March 28 the Big Waters Trust held their annual Wild About Nature event to teach youngsters about the many things going on around them. This event draws many hundreds to their grounds. We partake in it by showing anyone interested, the game of bocce. Vin DeNicolas, George DiCostanzo and Doris and Tom Hurban participated.

The court at 400 Palmetto Ave. Osprey is reserved for our Club members from 2-4 Sunday afternoons. We welcome new members coming to play as it is fun, informal and very social.

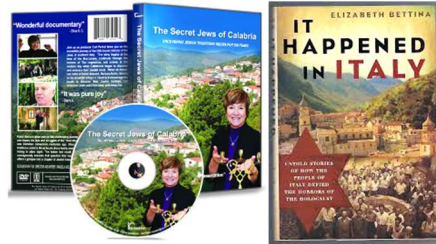
Questions?

Tom Hurban. 908 507 3048 dorisntom@gmail.com



Cultural Event *Holocaust and Italian Jews*

By: Camille Kramer, GCICS Program Chair



On April 23 at 2pm at the Jacaranda Library in Venice, 50 GCICS members and guests gathered to learn about Italian Jews and the Holocaust in Italy.

The original Holocaust and Italian Jews Lecture with Rabbi Barbara Aiello that had been in the works for about a year had to be postponed because of the Rabbi's fall and injuries that occurred within about a week of her Zoom rehearsal with us.

The Program Committee Event group consisting of Phillip Gordon, Gordon Bloom and Camille Kramer, had a backup plan in place just in case there were any technical difficulties with the internet connection in Calabria, Italy from where Rabbi Barbara would have joined via Zoom.

Fortunately, the backup plan turned out to be an excellent precursor to the future lecture.

The first video created by Rabbi Barbara Aiello herself, *The Secret Jews of Calabria*, explores how when given the choice to either leave Italy

or convert to Catholicism back in the 1500s, many Jews "converted" but clandestinely continued to keep their Jewish traditions alive for centuries.

The second video was a moving interview with Elizabeth Bettina about her book *It Happened in Italy: Untold Stories of How the People of Italy Defied the Horrors of the Holocaust*. The book (highly recommended) explains that, based on population percentages, more Jews in Italy were saved, roughly 80%, than in any other European country.

Elizabeth Bettina has worked with Rabbi Barbara and in fact mentions the Rabbi's work in her book.

The Holocaust and Italian Jews Lecture with Rabbi Barbara will be rescheduled for the near future when the rabbi is fully recovered. At that time, it will be with a well prepared and knowledgeable GCICS audience!



The Holocaust: A Reflection

By: Phil Miner, CGICS President

For those of you who are not aware, I am, to my knowledge, the first Jewish president of GCICS. My maternal grandparents and my paternal grandmother were Jewish. My paternal grandfather was Italian Catholic. My maternal grandfather immigrated to America from Lithuania at age 17. Had he not left his small town, Ariogola, hundreds of his descendants, including myself, would not have been born. Over 90% of the Lithuanian Jews did not survive the Holocaust, the highest percentage of murdered European Jewry for any country.

As you might imagine, discussing the Holocaust is very painful for me. Two of my great uncles did not survive. One of my second cousins, however, survived the camps. I sat in her apartment, and we talked until three in the morning. Our conversation, based on the questions I asked and the response I received, boiled down to the following:

Question: "What was it like in the camps?"

Response: "We lost our period."

As a physician and in this circumstance, the cessation of a woman's menstrual cycle is caused by severe stress and severe malnutrition. I suspect both.

The Holocaust was a terrible and tragic time for so many and yet among the suffering a few shining souls stood out. These have come to be known as "Righteous among the Nations". The late Sir Martin Gilbert, a Jewish British historian, author of over 80 books on Churchill and the Holocaust, wrote "The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust" in which many of these people are documented.

Lastly, Yom HaShoah 2026 (Holocaust Remembrance Day) was celebrated from April 13-14 (sundown to sundown). It commemorates the murder of 6 million Jews during the Holocaust.

I want to leave you with the following English translation from the Talmud: Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now, love mercy now, walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.

OFFICERS/DIRECTORS

President

Phil Miner
Retire66@gmail.com

Secretary

Ellen Roderick, PhD
itrain@erols.com

Treasurer

Josephine Fontana
Fontana.Josephine@gmail.com

Bocce Chair

Tom Hurban, DDS
dorisntom@gmail.com

Scholarship Chair

Sandra Russell
russellsandra062@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor

Mary Faith Rinaldi
maryfaithrinaldi@gmail.com

Technology Chair

Gordon Bloom
Gordon.bloom@att.net

Program Chair

Julie Bondarenko
juliebondy@yahoo.com

Courtesy Chair

Jolene Ruffo
ruffojd@yahoo.com

Director-at-Large

Phillip Gordon
pgordon7474@gmail.com

Small Group Activities Chair

Laura Heald
ljheald@comcast.com

Past Presidents

Joseph Raffaele, PhD	1988-1992
Gabriella Thurston	1993-2001
Patrick Corsentino	2001-2004
Arthur Castraberti	2004-2006
Marie Corsentino	2007
Mary Amabile Palmer	2008-2010
William Korp	2010-2014
Anthony Esposito	2015-2016
Sheryl Lazzarotti	2016-2020
Julie Bondarenko	2020-2025

Trivia: Did you know?

by Mary Rinaldi



Below are 8 amazing facts about rainbows.

- 1. You can never get to the end of a rainbow.**
- 2. You can see a circular rainbow from the sky.**
- 3. You are less likely to see a rainbow in the winter.**
- 4. A double rainbow appears when light is reflected twice in a raindrop.**
- 5. Earth is the only planet in the solar system with rainbows.**
- 6. The Greeks and the Romans believed rainbows to be a path from the gods.**
- 7. The longest-observed rainbow lasted for nearly 9 hours**
- 8. No two people see the exact same rainbow.**

Source: www.rainbowshymphony.com