

VOCE DI GCICS

GULF COAST ITALIAN CULTURE SOCIETY, INC.

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

Mary Rinaldi, Newsletter Editor



President's Message

Dear GCICS Members,

I hope that everyone is well. The prediction is that this year we will experience the worst flu season in 25 years. The culprit is a variant of the swine flu that is not covered by this year's flu vaccine. The vaccine may help lessen the severity and duration of the illness. Please consider testing yourself if you have been exposed to the flu.

I will get off my soapbox by discussing GCICS topics. Firstly, if you have not yet registered for Carnevale, please do so. The celebration is a fundraiser, with proceeds deposited in our Scholarship Fund. In addition, I will be raffling off about a dozen restaurant gift cards and gift certificates, so bring cash or a check.

Secondly, Ellen will soon be announcing the St. Joseph's Celebration Luncheon. This year, it will take place at Bevardi's Salute

Restaurant on Sunday, March 15th at 11:30 am. We hope to have a good turnout.

Lastly, I want to announce that the GCICS Board of Directors has elected our twelfth Board member, Laura Heald. Laura will direct the Small Group Activities (SGA) Program. Each committee manager will report to her. The activities include Italian cooking demonstrations, coffee klatches, Italian card games, Italian dancing, a GCICS Italian cookbook, and knitting classes. I encourage members to get involved in one or more of these activities.

Kind regards,

Phil Miner
GCICS President and Social Chair

GCICS ANNUAL MEETING

Peridia Golf & Country Club, Bradenton, FL, January 10, 2026
Article & Photos by: Ellen Roderick, GCICS Secretary



Phil Miner, GCICS President

LUNCHEON: Phil Miner, GCICS President, welcomed 67 attendees in Italian. Lunch was served. Thank you, Linda Ahern, for recommending the wait staff serve the entrees by table rather than by entrée type. Thank you, Ellen Roderick, for recommending the wait staff serve the rolls and salads immediately after the president's welcome. Both recommendations made the luncheon run smoothly, on schedule, and folks at each table received their meals at the same time.

ANNUAL MEETING: Phil asked Board members to introduce themselves. All were present except for Mary Rinaldi (hospital) & Gordon Bloom (cruise). Phil spoke about membership levels: 141 members at present; 7 passed and 45 new members joined since a year ago; and 19 did not renew this Fall. Tom Hurban, Bocce Chair, spoke about the Welcome Back Picnic & Bocce Invitational on 1/24/26. He worked on team formations and food assignments.

TOWN HALL: Ellen introduced 8 new members who joined since 1/11/25: Anita Caravello, Tony & Myrna Memoli, Steve Mulligan & Susan Ross, Philip & Elaine Quirin, and Joe Tenebria. All appear in photos below. (Note: Truth in photography: the Quirin photo was taken on 11/13/25 at the Dante lecture.) Ellen paid tribute to seven members who passed since 1/11/25: Cherrie Randall & Francie Hammond: DoD teachers & world travelers; Sheryl Lazzarotti, GCICS President, 2016-2020; Jerry Hall, GCICS Board member, 2020-2025 & Mr. Bocce; Bart Snider: an avid golfer and sailor; Ted Wilson: an avid golfer & lawn bowler; and Carl Schubert: an art teacher. A moment of silence and reflection was held in their memory.



Anita Caravello



Tony & Myrna Memoli



Susan Ross and Steve Mulligan



Elaine & Philip Quirin



Ellen Roderick welcoming
Joe Tenebria

PROGRAM: Ellen introduced the program ***“Meet the Artists: Learn How They Create Beautiful Pieces”*** and our three extremely talented artists who are GCICS members: Carolann Garafola, Joe Raia, and Phyllis Shonk. Each spoke about his/her “journey” into the world of art and described how they create their “beautiful pieces.” [Note: Prior to the luncheon, a “Meet and Greet the Artists” took place. The artists’ works were on display and members chatted informally with Carolann, Joe, and Phyllis about their incredible pieces.]



Carolann Garafola



Phyllis Shonk



Joe & Lucille Raia

CLOSING: Ellen updated the members on the health of two members and Phil made brief closing remarks. The meeting adjourned at 2:40 pm. [Note: Each of the three artists received gift bags as a token of appreciation and thanks.]

TOUR OF PATRIOT PLAZA AT THE SARASOTA NATIONAL CEMETERY RECAP

Tour Patriot Plaza At The Sarasota National Cemetery

Article By: Camille Kramer, Program Chair



MEETING POINT: “Home” (the two large eagle sculptures) East Entryway to Patriot Plaza, Sarasota National Cemetery, Ann Hirsch Sculpture

On January 15, 2026, which just happened to be the worst weather day with high winds and chilling temperatures, fourteen brave GCICS souls braved a private tour of Patriot Plaza at the Sarasota National Cemetery.

Mike Loparca and Tom Smith, both decorated veterans and enthusiastic volunteers, helped us experience the astounding artwork and tributes to U.S. veterans. The group was split between the two so each group got exceptional personal attention. Mike did research on Italian American contributions in WW2 and made numerous connections between Italians and

military service and commitment. Tom had his own inspiring stories to share.

The highlighted artwork included mosaics, sculptures, photographs, stories of service in various conflicts as well as experiences back in civilian life. The Sarasota National Cemetery, a hallowed burial site for men and women who served our nation, was opened in 2009. Following the opening, the Patterson Foundation, working with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration, created Patriot Plaza at the cemetery as a 2,800-seat ceremonial amphitheater.

Although the weather was challenging, the GCICS members and guests echoed a similar sentiment – that they must return and spend more time to fully absorb all that was there.

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

Membership Chair

Julie Bondarenko
juliebondy@yahoo.com

Program Chair

Camille Kramer
carmilleakramer@gmail.com

Courtesy Chair

Jolene Ruffo
ruffojd@yahoo.com

Director-at-Large

Phillip Gordon
pgordon7474@gmail.com

Small Group Activities Chair

Laura Heald
ljheald@comcast.net

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



Larry Samartin and Mary Rinaldi want to thank all the members who sent get well wishes their way. Both are looking forward to a good recovery.

