

LA VOCE DI GCICS

GULF COAST ITALIAN CULTURE SOCIETY, INC.

P.O. BOX 2591, SARASOTA, FL. 34230

WWW.GCICS.ORG

June 2021

Mary Rinaldi, Newsletter Editor



President's Message:

Good News! I am happy to say things are looking up. It appears when we commence this fall, we will indeed be meeting in person. How exciting! To say the least this has been a difficult time for all of us; we have persevered. It will be the right time to again venture out in public, embracing one another as we have in the past. I am looking forward to our Welcome Back Luncheon in October.

Our Board is busy identifying several events we are planning that you have become accustomed to enjoying over the past many years. Our Welcome Back Bocce Picnic is confirmed for November 7; and our newest Board Member, Gordon Bloom will give a lecture on Enrico Fermi, date and time to be announced. We have firmed up our Holiday/Christmas Party; Annual Town Hall Lunch and Lecture; Mardi Gras and St. Joseph's Feast Day Celebration, just to name a few. Please look for Ellen's "Save the Dates" and further information on these and many other events that are now in the planning stages.

GCICS is in need of members as I have previously asked all of you to keep in mind whom you would like to invite to one of our events. For us to continue our work we must replenish our membership rolls. It is not just to increase our rolls, but new members bring new ideas and talents.

Our next Social Hour is May 27 from 5-6 pm facilitated by Leita Kaldi. Ellen Roderick will welcome members and keep time. "Italian Immigrants Who Became Rich and Famous" will be the topic. Look for Ellen's update in an e-mail. Sounds exciting and there is still time to register.

This is our last newsletter for our program year. I would like to call attention to the many programs we initiated during COVID and our members who made them possible. We were successful Zooming and could not have accomplished this without the help of Jerry Hall. Thank you, Jerry!

What did we Zoom? Ask George Arfield or anyone who participated in the many transatlantic interviews that would have never taken place without his connections. His hard work cannot be overstated and George, although thank you seems insufficient to express our gratitude, it is nonetheless what we wish to say. George, thank you for bringing us the most interesting people.

Another that has kept us afloat during this time is Robert Gaglio who also brought us Zoom experiences through his wonderful presentations. Thank you so very much.

There are many others who have contributed their time, knowledge, and energy on behalf of GCICS. Leita Kaldi has brought her selection of book reviews in each newsletter called "The Italian Bookshelf". Her books are interesting and fun to read and all have an Italian theme.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Tom Hurban who has kept our bocce court at the Bay Preserve in Osprey in good order throughout the year. He and Jerry work on the court each Sunday to prepare before members arrive to play. Several months ago, it was necessary to resurface the court. It was back breaking work; Tom, Jerry and Vin DeNicolas did all the unloading, carrying, and spreading more than 2,000 pounds of stone and sand. Our members have this court solely because of the relationship Tom has forged with this foundation. Tom it is members such as you who have always stepped up to the plate when needed. Thank you for your dedication to GCICS.

Who kept us all in check and made sure we receive information in a timely manner? Who writes the agenda for every board meeting and produces the minutes that follow? The list could go on and on. Of course, it is Ellen. Again, thank you for all you have done on behalf of GCICS. It cannot be overstated.

I would like to say thank you to the entire board for doing all the necessary, sometimes grunt work that keeps our Society moving forward. Our Newsletter Editor, Mary Rinaldi, our Treasurer, Penny Thomas, Mary Lou Ferrari our Membership Chair, and Linda Mercurio, our VP, devote many hours to serving the Society. And although I do not say it often enough, I wish to thank our entire membership for your support during these past many months. Your continued support is why we are a Society enjoying camaraderie with one another while we promote and enjoy Italian culture and understanding our Italian heritage.

Many members will be traveling and leaving Sarasota to be with friends and family in other places. I wish all safe travels and hope to reunite in October at our first in-person event in more than eighteen months while celebrating our Italian culture and heritage and joyful to be together again. Thank you all for your support during this challenging time in our Earth's history.

Julie Bondarenko
President

ISTRIA, THE REMARKABLE CORNER OF THE ADRIATIC ON GCICS ZOOM



Professor Ivan Hrastovčak

Prof. Ivan Hrastovčak, who teaches history at senior High School in his native Croatia, described the fluid history, colorful character and landscape of Istria, the heart-shaped peninsula that south of Trieste juts into the Adriatic across from Venice, in a chatty, candid presentation.





Fortified hilltop village with distinct Italian style



Roman Colosseum in Pula

Prof. Hrastovćak began the April 27 transatlantic Zoom event with a description of the presence of ancient Romans, many of whose traces remain standing, defying the ebb and flow of military, political and ideological forces. He illustrated his words with maps, photos and videos that reflected Istria's kaleidoscopic history.

Since Roman times Istria has been part of, among others, the Holy Roman Empire and its Habsburg heirs, the short-lived Napoleonic Empire, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Yugoslavia. Today it is part of Croatia, which became independent after Yugoslavia crumbled as a unified republic in 1990/91.

Prof Hrastovćak spent extra time describing how from the 12th to the 18th centuries Venetian families dominated the region, which accounts for the Venetian-style architecture that remains well preserved, especially in coastal and hilltop cities and towns.

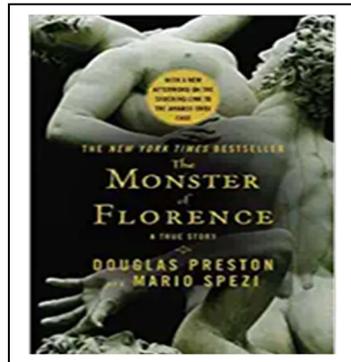
A close relationship with Venice and Trieste remained throughout long turbulent times. During the period when Croatia was a region integrated into Yugoslavia Istria became the center of thriving smuggling activities as Yugoslavs set their fashion sights on Italian and other Western fashion items.

During the years of the Cold War "non-aligned" Yugoslavia, unlike Soviet satellite countries behind the Iron Curtain, allowed its citizens to travel abroad. That led Prof. Hrastovćak to recount with amusement how an uncle of his used to return from frequent visits to Trieste, the nearest Italian city, wearing as many as seven pairs of "Rifle" brand jeans. These were resold at a tidy profit in Yugoslavia, whose authorities customarily looked the other way. At the time the little-known-elsewhere Italian-made "Rifle" brand was regarded as THE denim to wear in Yugoslavia.

Today Italian influence, including the language, remains alive in Istria and, as Prof. Hrastovćak explained with a chuckle, "in Istria there isn't a person that doesn't at least support one Italian football (soccer) team."

ITALIAN BOOK SHELF BY LEITA DAVIS

The Monster of Florence: A True Story
Mario Spezi and Douglas Preston
Grand Central Publishing, 2008, 321 pages



Many countries have legendary serial killers, like England's Jack the Ripper and the Boston Strangler. Italy has the Monster of Florence. Between 1974 and 1985, seven couples were murdered while making love in parked cars in the beautiful hills surrounding Florence. Young men were shot, their girlfriends were stabbed and their sexual organs mutilated. The case had become the longest and most expensive criminal investigation in Italian history. Close to 100,000 men were investigated and more than a thousand arrested, many of whom had to be released when the Monster struck again. Even renowned journalist, Mario Spezi, was arrested and jailed for several weeks. Preston ultimately helped to obtain his release. The case captured the international attention of *The Atlantic*, the *Guardian* and *Dateline NBC*. The generation of Florentines who came of age during the killings say that it changed the city and their lives. There have been suicides, exhumations, alleged poisonings, body parts sent by post, seances in graveyards, lawsuits, planting of false evidence and vicious

prosecutorial vendettas. Despite the longest manhunt in modern Italian history, the Monster of Florence has never been found. Many conspiracy theories developed or what the Italians call *dietrologia*, what lays behind the facts. This practice makes people feel powerful, writes the author, the feeling that at least "they are *in the know*."

Mario Spezi comments that deep inside, Florentines believe they are more civilized than other Italians. Their Tuscan dialect, the language of Dante, became the official language of Italy. The book contains an excellent history of Florence and of Sardinia. Perhaps most interesting is the almost forgotten bit of Italian history, the mass emigration in the 1960 from the island of Sardinia to the Italian mainland. Italian police traced several Sardinian suspects back along the "Sardinian Trail," into lawless mountain villages where bandits were esteemed, "...a country of shadows and witches."

In 2006 Spezi was awarded Writer of the Year for Freedom of the Pre

Welcome New Board Member

Gordon Bloom



Gordon grew up near Niagara Falls, NY and took his Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering at the University of Buffalo where he also met his future wife Joyce who was also from the same area. They were married after graduation and moved to Cleveland, OH where Joyce worked as a public health nurse and a psychiatric nurse while he took a masters in engineering at Case Western Reserve. From Ohio, they lived in a number of locations including Beloit, WI, Milford, MA near Boston and suburb of Chicago, IL before retiring in Venice, FL. He took an MBA at Boston University and worked in a variety of engineering and information technology positions throughout his career with industrial corporations, business consulting groups and a mid-west CPA Audit firm. During their years in Chicago, Joyce added a Doctor of Nursing to her Nursing Bachelor and Nursing Master degrees. They will be married for 55 years this year and have a son and three grandchildren who reside in North Carolina.

His Italian lineage comes from his maternal side with his grandparents immigrating to

New York City around 1912 - 1913 from a small town near Ivrea in the Piedmont region of northwest of Italy near the Swiss border in the Po River Valley. His mother was born in New York City.

He has travelled in Italy over the years for both business and pleasure. His business took him primarily to Milan but had delightful side trips to Venice and Padua. He took his mother on a trip for her seventieth birthday to see the village, Albiano d'Ivrea where her parents came from. Joyce and Gordon have visited Venice, Florence, Naples, Pompeii and Milan.

Both Gordon and Joyce are very interested in boating and after retiring, they lived on their sailboat for 6 months every year for about 10 years traveling from Florida to Maine every summer. They also enjoy cruise ship travel and usually spend 3 months every year adventuring somewhere.

They have been members of GCICS for at least 5 years and enjoy their affiliation with group very much.

FYI : Noni St. Amand

The Italian government has approved a plan to furnish Rome's ancient Colosseum with a new floor, giving visitors the chance to stand where gladiators once fought. Culture Minister Dario Franceschini announced the project to build the wooden, retractable floor. The floor is expected to be finished by 2023. At present, the 2,000-year-old monument has no floor. It was removed by archaeologists in the 19th Century, exposing the underground network of tunnels where gladiators and animals were held before the Roman blood sports began.



GCICS VIRTUAL SOCIAL HOUR - May 27, 2021

Article by Ellen Roderick, GCICS Secretary

I am pleased to write about our 9th and final virtual Social Hour of our 2020-2021 Program Year. We again learned a great deal about famous or infamous Italian immigrants. Eleven members participated. Thank you, Leita, for facilitating the session. She had selected the topic: **"Italian Immigrants (born in Italy/immigrated to USA) Who Became Rich & Famous...in any Field. . Art, Business, Entertainment, Crime, Government, Politics, Hospitality."**

This article focuses on Italian immigrants although we did learn about some famous persons of Italian ancestry who were born in the USA [Joe DiMaggio (Martinez, CA), Vito Acconci (The Bronx, NY), and Amedeo Giannini (San Jose, CA)].

Ellen Roderick opened the social hour, speaking about **Francisco (Frank) Rosario Capra** (1897-1991), who emigrated from Bisacquino, Sicily with his parents & six siblings in 1903 to Los Angeles. He acquired a degree in Chemical Engineering from the CA Institute of Technology but never practiced. He became a famous American film director, producer, and writer. He was the recipient of 3 Best Director Academy Awards for *"It Happened One Night"*, *"Mr. Deeds Goes to Town"*, and *"You Can't Take it with You."* However, his most famous film, shown every year on TV at Christmas time is *"It's a Wonderful Life"* (1946) starring Jimmy Stewart. Frank served in WWI and WWII, was naturalized in 1920, and was President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.

Gordon Bloom introduced us to **Stefano Maggadino**, "The Undertaker" (1891-1974), an Italian-born crime boss of the Buffalo crime family in upstate NY. He emigrated from Castellammare del Golfo, Sicily in 1902 and became a naturalized citizen in 1924. Gordon shared with us some photos including the front page of the Niagara Falls Gazette. He dealt in bootlegging during Prohibition and later loan sharking, illegal gambling, and racketeering. He was the longest tenured boss in the history of the American Mafia.

The Culture of the Mafia in America The Case of Stefano Magaddino



Noni St. Amand shared a fascinating story of two brothers-in-law, **Amedeo Obici** (1877-1947) & **Mario Peruzzi** (1875-1955) who founded a peanut business (1906) that grew into what all of us have enjoyed during our lifetimes – the Planters Peanut Company. Obici emigrated from Oderzo in the Veneto region to Wilkes-Barre, PA in 1889 while Peruzzi came from Trevino in 1894 to Hazelton, PA. Their story is a fascinating read on the web. After their deaths, the company was taken over by several companies, the last being Kraft Heinz. In February 2021, Kraft Heinz announced the sale to Hormel for \$3.35 billion.

Two other items: Leita modeled her red T-shirt sent from a friend in Italy that read: *"I Can't Keep Calm; I'm Italian."* She also announced that her newest book has been published: *"Dreams of Italy"*, available through Amazon for \$15 or through her for \$10. We thank everyone who participated in our successful Social Hours during the pandemic. The Board is looking forward to seeing many of you when GCICS resumes in-person events.

Save The Dates



Oct. 23, 2021: Italian Cultural Heritage Month Welcome Luncheon

Venue will be Mattison's Forty-One on Tamiami Trail



Nov. 7, 2021: Welcome Back Bocce Picnic

Venue at the Bay Preserve



Dec. 10, 2021: Holiday/Christmas Party and Scholarship Fundraiser

Venue TBA



Jan. 14, 2022: Annual Meeting/ Town Hall/Lunch/Lecture

Venue TBA; date dependent upon venue



March 1, 2022: Mardi Gras and Scholarship Fundraiser

Venue at Linda Ahern's Home



March 20, 2022: St. Joseph's Feast Day Celebration Luncheon

Venue TBA; hoping to contract with Café Baci



April 9 or 10, 2022: GCICS Scholarship Festa

Venue TBA; date dependent upon venue



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Past Presidents

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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

Penny Thomas writes:

Hi everyone

I cancelled my internet and cable with Frontier and they also cancelled my land line so I am letting it stand. My cell is 941-350-7006. Please use this number for all further phone contact.

Many thanks
Penny

Inda Ahern's new phone number is: 312 305 6400

Claudia Zeni's correct email address is:
claudiazeni@hotmail.it

