

VOCE DI GCICS

GULF COAST ITALIAN CULTURE SOCIETY, INC.

1811 Englewood Rd., #317, Englewood, FL 34223 WWW.GCICS.ORG October 2024

Mary Rinaldi, Editor

President's Message

Welcome all to Fall 2024! Many members have returned from the north and elsewhere after having enjoyed visiting family and friends. As we reacclimate to Florida weather and reacquaint with GCICS friends, we are hopeful that hurricanes prominent at this time of year will pass without any significant concerns to Sarasota.

I will let the weather go for now. I do want to talk about you! At times we have members who express concerns, and their wish that we address them. It is our goal to answer your concerns because we want members to know how much we appreciate and value them. The Board is hopeful that we can add to your enjoyment. GCICS allows us to experience the many facets of Italian culture. I believe many of us joined GCICS not only for the cultural opportunities but also the opportunity to support our scholarship program. The social events are also a draw for members. It is here that we integrate your energy, your experiences, with the Board's, working together so that GCICS fulfills your needs. When our members feel connected, we know we have succeeded as a Society and have met our goals.

The work the Board does at times is never ending. Just ask those who work to bring happy hours, picnics, luncheons, La Cena dinners, scholarship festas, fundraising events, cultural lectures, Holiday and

Carnevale parties, and a host of other important events throughout the year. This is why it is so important that you support us. Each, by the act of paying dues, in turn supports the other. I implore each of our members to please pay your dues if you have not done so already. I thank those who have answered with your renewal and possibly a donation. Your dues are what keeps our lights on. We are a volunteer organization and when our members renew, we then know how important this Society is to you. It pleases our Board, which works diligently on your behalf. We feel invigorated to continue and identify new ways to keep our members happy.

With that in mind, do you know how important it is to the Board when you sign up for an event. Please let me mention our ***Welcome Back Luncheon, Saturday October 26th and add, it is fast approaching.*** We will be honoring and celebrating one of our own, GCICS member and contributor to our Newsletter, Leita Kaldi Davis, as our GCICS 2024 Italian American of the Year. Leita has given several interesting and fascinating lectures to GCICS. She has authored several books, of which I am now reading one of them. She is quite knowledgeable about Italian history, the mafia and so much more. Look for the "Italian Bookshelf" in our Newsletter where

most months she is a contributor and reports on Italian novels. You will get to know so much more about this fascinating woman at our Welcome Back Luncheon. Please

register on our website or mail a check to Josephine Fontana soon. We have noticed and are genuinely concerned that many have not registered yet. This is our first and one of our momentous events at the beginning of the 2024-2025 GCICS Program Year. Look for Ellen's emails and please register.

Ellen and I are Co-Chairs for our Welcome Back Luncheon at Stoneybrook. We have interviewed the Board's selected Italian America of the Year. I am making sure that Stoneybrook prepares a delicious buffet for the event. Ellen is doing the write-ups for presenting our Italian American of the Year, Leita Kaldi Davis.

Please note that we are looking for a few good members who might be able to help us achieve some of our goals. It does not take a big commitment, only a bit of time to help a committee get some additional work done. Join our team, and/or make suggestions, your ideas are valued.

As we begin our new program year, I wish to acknowledge the Board. They should be recognized for all their work done on GCICS's behalf. In no particular order are Josephine Fontana, Treasurer; Sandra Russell, Scholarship Chair; Mary Ranaldi, Newsletter Editor; Jerry Hall, Language Instruction Chair; Tom Hurban, Bocce Chair; Gordon Bloom, Technology Chair; George Arfield, Social and Cultural Chair; Phil Miner, Happy Hour Chair; Ellen Roderick, Secretary; and yours truly, President. Let it be known that all of us who have found a significant place in GCICS not only do our respective jobs but also pitch in and work on other committees when needed.

Recap: Please pay your dues and sign up for our upcoming event "Welcome Back Luncheon." My final thought as we begin meeting in this new fiscal year -- I would like to say to all, show respect, acceptance, and understanding of all. I pray for all those hurting and especially those at war who have lost so much.

Julie Bondarenko
President



WELCOME BACK LUNCHEON

Dear GCICS Members

Your Board of Directors is excited to announce the GCICS Italian Cultural Heritage Month Welcome Back Luncheon on Sat, Oct 26, 2024, from 11:30-2:30 pm at Stoneybrook Golf & Country Club. Guests are welcome.

GCICS will honor a valued member of our Society, Leita Kaldi Davis. The Society will declare her "GCICS 2024 Italian American of the Year" during the luncheon. Leita will deliver the keynote address prior to the presentation of the honor. We hope that you will honor Leita with your presence and meet an author, teacher, staff member of the United Nations and UNESCO, a Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal, and a popular lecturer for our Society as well as for numerous other organizations. Attached is her photo taken on 8/30/24 when Julie and I "interviewed" her.



Here are the details:

EVENT: "GCICS Italian Cultural Heritage Month Welcome Back Luncheon"

Date/Time: Saturday, Oct. 26, 2024, 11:30 am-2:30 pm

Location: Stoneybrook Golf & Country Club, 8801 Stoneybrook Blvd, Sarasota, FL 34238

Cost: \$36 all inclusive

Registration: Please use GCICS website to register/pay (instructions appear at end of this email).

If Unable to Register Online: Mail check to Josephine Fontana, 8347 Canary Palm Ct., Sarasota, FL 34238; payable to GCICS; include each person's name.

Deadline: Online by Oct 16; or in Josephine's mailbox by Oct 16.

Point of Contact: Ellen Roderick, 301-775-1344 (<email to:itrain@erols.com>)

Program: "GCICS 2024 Italian American of the Year" Ceremony, with Leita Kaldi Davis providing the keynote.

Menu: Enhanced buffet including salads, flatbread, poultry, fish, and vegetarian options, vegetables, dessert, coffee & tea.

Cash Bar: \$6 White & Red Wine, Mimosas, Bloody Mary's

STEPS FOR PAYING ONLINE

*Go to this GCICS address: <<http://www.gcics.org/payment>>

*On 1st page, check "Member", enter first & last name, email address, phone #, and click on the blue block.

*On 2nd page, enter the total amount of your payment, then enter in the block directly below "10/26/24" and list the name(s) of the person(s) for whom you are paying. Please make sure you do this step.

*Click PayPal checkout and the next page will come up. Complete what is needed.

*Note: You do not need a PayPal account to pay for GCICS events. PayPal will accept your credit card directly. You will receive a confirmation email once you have completed the transaction.

Ellen Roderick

GCICS Secretary

Bocce Corner



SAVE THE DATE !
NOV. 10
Welcome Back Picnic

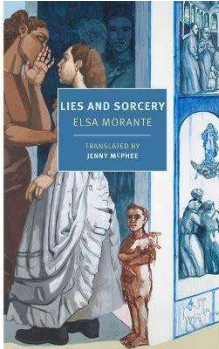
Because this event was formerly held adjacent to the bocce court at The Conservation Foundation grounds years ago, it remains one of my assignments. Please save the date of Sunday, Nov. 10. For those new to our Society, this is one of our most popular annual events. It is held at a picnic pavilion at the North Jetty Park in Nokomis from 12:30 till 4. There is no charge, but participants are asked to provide food for themselves and others. We will send a detailed email as this event date comes closer.

Because of inclement weather and many people traveling, there was not regular play of bocce this summer. Fall is here and we welcome everyone back and invite you to come join in the fun. We play bocce most every Sunday from 2-4 on a single court, which our Society maintains at The Conservation Foundation grounds at 400 Palmetto Ave. in Osprey. Play is not structured, and newcomers are welcome! No experience is necessary.

Any questions? Tom Hurban
 Bocce Chair
 908 507 3048
 dorisntom@gmail.com

Italian Bookshelf

By Leita Kaldi Davis



Elsa Morante is one of the most widely read authors in Italy, but virtually unknown in the U.S. *Lies and Sorcery* was first published in Italy in 1948. This book was brilliantly translated and published here in 2023.

Set in Sicily from the early to mid-twentieth century, the three primary characters are Elisa, her mother, Anna and her grandmother, Cesira. The narrator is Elisa's daughter, an orphan raised by her father's mistress. For years she has lived in an imaginary world of her own; now, however, her guardian has died, and she feels that she must confront the truth of her family's tortured and dramatic history. She is a spinner of stories, and the reader is drawn into tales of secrets, treachery and the art of manipulation, which also reveals a legacy of political and social injustice. Each generation has a fraught history. Descended from nobility they are living in penury. Elisa falls in love with a

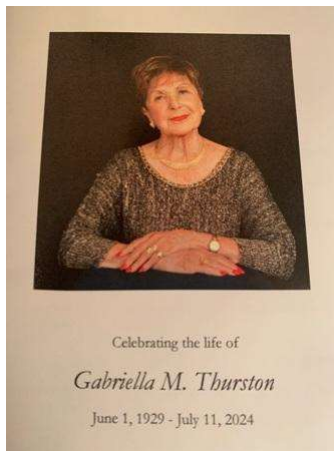
nobleman, Teodoro, who keeps her on his string but does not require her passion. Elisa must marry a commoner who adores her but whom she loathes.

This is not an easy read. Through 800 pages it examines the female condition and humanity. The narrator speaks directly to the reader, which brings a sense of intimacy. By the last third of the book, the weaving of many characters' lives and loves to become somewhat redundant. The narrator herself tell us "Let's return now after this rather meandering, inflated and inane digression in our story." Morante sought to reinvent the form of the novel itself as many European post-World War II existential writers did. She is the sorcerer who tells lies, who sees the mystical in human life, "... the sad pallor of insanity, and the shapeless boredom of death."



GABRIELLA MARIANI THURSTON

GCICS PRESIDENT, 1993-2001



On 8/31/24, the GCICS Board of Directors announced the passing of Gabriella Mariani Thurston, who died on July 11, 2024, at the age of 95. Gabriella was a long-standing member of GCICS who served as its first president from January 1993 until April 2001. She played a significant role in the founding of our Society, working closely with Dr. Joseph Raffaele from January 1988 through December 1992. Sometime after her presidency, Gabriella was named GCICS Italian American of the Year by the Board of Directors. Gabriella's Mass of Christian Burial took place at St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church, Siesta Key, on 9/7/24. Four GCICS members were in attendance: Kate Korp who knew Gabriella before GCICS was established and who took Italian lessons from her; Ellen Roderick who met Gabriella just once at the Memorial Service for Bill Korp in the fall of 2021; and Joe and Blanche Barresi who knew

Gabriella from the earliest years of GCICS. Below are members' thoughts, followed by Gabriella's obituary.

***Aida La Brutte:** *"She was a legend in the GCICS, known for her graciousness, great cooking, and generosity. I knew her only slightly but heard much good about her from her dear friends, Pat and Marie Corsentino and Mary Palmer, who are now deceased."*

***Joseph & Teresa Latona:** *"Thank you for thinking of us and forwarding the information regarding Gabriella's death. We first met her when we joined GCICS many years ago when she was the president. She was a very lovely lady."*

OBITUARY

Gabriella Mariani Thurston passed away peacefully on July 11, 2024, in Sarasota, FL, surrounded by her family and friends. Born in Savona, Italy, Gabriella traveled extensively throughout her life. She married the love of her life, US Ambassador Raymond L. Thurston, and together they settled on Siesta Key.

With impeccable style and grace, Gabriella gave of herself to the Sarasota Opera, the Red Cross, Mothers Helping Mothers, the Gulf Coast Italian Culture Society, her neighborhood association,

and students of Italian cooking and language. For her volunteer service, in 2022 Gabriella was awarded the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award. An avid cook, gardener, and artist, she touched the lives of many. Gabriella is survived by her daughter Francesca, son-in-law Ryan, granddaughter Chiara and, in Italy, by siblings Franca and Giorgio, nieces Cristiana and Michela, and nephew Fabio.

Written by: Ellen Roderick, GCICS Secretary





RUSSELL THOMAS HEIFNER (84)



Dear GCICS Members,

It is with great sadness that the Board of Directors announces the passing of one of our dear and faithful members, Russell Thomas Heifner. Russ died the morning of July 23, 2024, with his beloved wife Maria Nania by his side. Russ and Maria joined GCICS on 10/20/21 under the sponsorship of Mike and Patty DiMicele, close friends of Russ and Maria.

Today, Maria shared Russ's photo as well as the obituary below. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Mrs. Maria Heifner, 4049 Keats Drive, Sarasota, FL 34241.

Ellen Roderick
GCICS Secretary

RUSSELL THOMAS HEIFNER

Beloved husband, father, and brother, Russell Thomas Heifner, age 84, from Sarasota, Florida peacefully left us in the early morning hours of July 23, 2024, from liver cancer. We were able to get him home from the hospital so he could spend his last few days with his love, wife Maria Nania, and their two dogs, Jasper and Maci Mae. Russ will join his parents, Thomas and Argen Heifner, his brother Orlo, and his sister, Darlene.

He leaves behind his two children, Ginger Carter and Steven Heifner; his grandchildren, Holly Heminger, Lindsey Heifner, and Madison Heifner; his great grandchild and namesake, Oliver Russell Franks; and his brothers and sisters, Don, Carl, Paul, Lela, DeElda, June, and Susan.

Like his father before him, Russ was a learned religious scholar and followed the teachings of the Berean Bible Society. He lived a life of adventure and athleticism, traveling with his wife, Maria, to Europe, Asia, South America, Canada, and the US. He loved seeing the world and sampling the foods of foreign places.

He served 4 years in the Navy as a radar man on a destroyer, graduated from the University of Minnesota, and worked for the Ohio Casualty Insurance Group his whole career. He retired early and played competitive softball until a month before his passing. He lived a great life and touched many hearts with his gentle, kind, and helpful ways. We look forward to seeing him again one day. He will be sorely missed by many but his spirit lives on.





SAVE THE DATE

(As of: 9/26/24)

*10/26/24 (Saturday) Italian Cultural Heritage Month Welcome Back Luncheon: Stoneybrook Golf & Country Club, 11:30-2:30 pm; buffet - \$36 all inclusive; honoring Leita Kaldi Davis as GCICS 2024 Italian American of the Year; announced on 8/31/24.

*11/10/24 (Sunday) Welcome Back Picnic at the North Jetty Park Pavilion, Nokomis, 12:30-4:00 pm; bring your own main course and a dish to share; to be announced; brief article in Oct Newsletter.

*11/19/24 (Tuesday) Brainstorming New Member Recruitment Strategies: Open to all members; RSVP required; 1-3 pm at Josephine Fontana's Home; to be announced by Oct 19, 2024.

*12/5/24 (Thursday): Cultural Lecture: Topic TBA: Dr. Carrie Beneš, Professor of Medieval & Renaissance History, New College of Florida; evening (time TBA) at New College auditorium; free and open to members & guests. To be announced.

*12/15/24 (Sunday) Holiday/Christmas Party/Scholarship Fundraiser at Patty & Mike DiMichele's home, Misty Creek, Sarasota, 5:30 pm; Potluck; Scholarship donation (\$40 per person); BYOB; to be announced by Nov 1, 2024.

*1/11/25 (Saturday) Annual Meeting/Luncheon/Town Hall/Program at Peridia Golf & Country Club, Bradenton; N/C to members; program being planned; 11:30-2:30 pm; to be announced by Dec 1, 2024.

*3/4/25 (Shrove Tuesday): Carnevale/Scholarship Fundraiser at Carolann Garafola's home, off Honore north of University Pkwy, 5:30 pm; Potluck; Scholarship donation (\$40 per person); BYOB; to be announced by Jan 15, 2025.

*3/16/25 (Sunday): St. Joseph's Feast Day Celebration - Early Dinner: Chianti Ristorante Italiano (Clark Rd), 4:00-7:00 pm; \$50 all inclusive; to be announced by 2/1/25.

*4/12/25 (Saturday): Scholarship Festa Luncheon at Stoneybrook Golf & Country Club, 11:30-2:15 pm; cost and menu TBA.

NOTE: Cultural events (lectures, tours), La Cena's, and some additional "fun" events are being planned. Happy Hours (Mon) & Bocce (Sun) are ongoing.

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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



The following restaurants have recently donated gift certificates. Thank you, Julie Bondarenko, Ellen Roderick, and Phil Miner for all your hard work in obtaining all these gift cards. Remember, the monies obtained by raffling off these gift cards at our events helps to fund our scholarships.

Italian Grill (Central Sarasota Pkwy)

Mattison's Forty-One (S. Tamiami Trail)

Grillsmith (Sarasota)

Kona Grill (at UTC Mall)

Scarpino's (Bradenton)

Beckhams (Central Sarasota & S. Tamiami Tr.)

Madfish Grill (Cattlemen & Beeridge)

