



# Il Notiziario

[The Newsletter]  
of the

*Friends of Isola delle Femmine, Inc.*



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Volume 3, Issue 1

Editor: A.A. Grillo

Winter: Jan 1, 2022

## News from our Executive Board

by Frank "Ciccu" Bruno

**BUON ANNO A TUTTI! Hope you and your family have a great & better 2022.**

We have accomplished so very much in 2021. We increased our membership to 140, and had a very successful old fashion Sicilian-American picnic in Martinez where 180 Sicilian-Americans gathered and had a wonderful time. We gave out six college scholarships to our members' families' college bound students, and to support future scholarship awards, we completed a very successful raffle for a vacation for two to Puerto Vallarta thanks to the donation of Ken Molinaro. The lucky winner was Gabe Palomino. To enhance our organization's structure, we created chapters for Monterey, Martinez, and Pittsburg, each with their own director, to aid in managing some of our activities. Mary Pappas Coniglio has again organized the Panettone sales event with over 238 sold. Thank you, Erasmo Aiello of Palermo Bakery in Monterey, for sponsoring this fund raiser.

And now what do we have in store for 2022? Well, let me count the ways: even though we had to again postpone our "THAT'S ITALIAN" event, we are still planning to have our Dinner Show Extravaganza; we are also planning a FOI gathering in Monterey, possibly another picnic; and an elegant "High Tea" event. We are working on presenting the documentary "Potentially Dangerous" When It Was a Crime to Be Italian." The plan is for this to be at a theater in Pittsburg, Martinez, and Monterey with special guests Zach Baliva, the producer/director, and Lawrence DiStasi, author of *Branded: How Italian Immigrants Became "Enemies" During World War II*. At the writing of this article, we are waiting for the approval from the producers of the documentary to give us permission to show the documentary. In addition, we plan on having our Second Annual FOI Scholarship Awards.



As you can see, we have another full slate of activities to preserve our cultural heritage and keep us all connected to our roots.

To deliver our first-class events and planned activities we need VOLUNTEERS. These extraordinary events take a lot of time and planning to be successful. Please contact us by email at [friendsofisola@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofisola@gmail.com) and let us know you want to volunteer.

As the voice on the Disneyland Thunder Mountain ride states, "Hold on to your hats and glasses, it's going to be a rip roaring 2022!"

PLAN TO BE THERE.

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*To preserve, protect, and promote the Italian-Sicilian cultural heritage among the descendants, immigrants, citizens and friends of Isola delle Femmine, Sicily and around the world.*

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## News from Isola

by A.A. Grillo

### COVID Status, Visitors and Water Issues

We received news of Isola from Tonino Scala, who is the Vice-President of the Associazione Isola-Pittsburg Forever, the counterpart of our Friends of Isola delle Femmine in Isola itself. Tonino reports that the pandemic has been under reasonable control in Isola these past several months. The city is open for residents and visitors with similar restrictions to ours in California, namely the Italian Green Pass must be shown and masks worn for entry to most establishments, especially cafés and restaurants. The Green Pass certifies that the bearer has either been vaccinated, recovered from COVID-19, or been recently tested to be free of the virus within the previous 48 hours. With the region open, several friends from our west coast have visited Isola this year. These include Dusty Romeo Costello and son Jacob, Richard Seeno, Santo Enea, Marisa and Anthony Siino, and Joe Siino and family. One of the big attractions has been the Joe DiMaggio museum in Isola. Some of the visitors have contributed pictures which are added to the museum's collection.

We have concern about water here in California because of our chronic drought. Sicily also has water issues of a different nature. Pietro Puccio, mayor of Capaci, wrote that the municipal water system AMAP, which serves Palermo and nearby communities such as Isola delle Femmine, Capaci, and Carini, reported that excessive turbidity of the water behind their Poma dam has caused the Cicala di Partinico drinking water treatment plant to reduce the quantity of water being treated, reduce below that normally required by their service area. The short term remedy was to split the service area into different city groups with each group receiving water only on designated days. Mayor Puccio further wrote a final solution would require time and money to achieve such that opportunities for outside funding sources need to be explored. Further inquiries to Tonino Scala and Orazio Sansonini found that the problem has been resolved for the near term. At least Isola and we believe the other municipalities have cisterns to temporarily hold potable water such that Isola has a reserve of at least 10 days.

More interesting news, the Associazione Isola-Pittsburg Forever held a three-day celebration for the anniversary of Joe DiMaggio's birth, 25-Nov-1914. For two days, first and second grade and middle school children toured the museum. On Sunday, 28-Nov, a delegation from the regional Sicilian government visited Isola. The delegation was headed by the Honorable Mario Caputo, deputy of the Sicilian Regional Assembly. They visited the museum and were treated to cake and spumonte. Then they took a walking tour of Isola. The picture at right was taken at the celebration in the museum.



Front Row: Honorable Mario Caputo, Agata Sandrone  
Stefano Bologna former Isola Mayor, Marco Mogauero  
Back Row: Gianna Billeci and Tonino Scala

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## What's Happening

by Frank "Ciccu" Bruno

As of NOW, we will be having our long awaited "THAT'S ITALIAN" Dinner Show event on February 12. Join us for an evening of cultural heritage, music, singing, comradery, and mingling with cugini and friends, an evening of fun and laughter, an evening of pride of culture, an evening of fabulous cultural food, an evening of great entertainment, and an evening of AMORE.

To date we have 150 people signed up for this event. No one has asked for their entrance fees returned. We will have this event and we will have a grand time. You will not be disappointed and you will walk away with smiles and pride, having had a great time.

The Colombo Club, as well as the Alameda County & State of California will again dictate to us if we can hold our event. Cyril Bonanno, CEO of the Colombo Club and a FOI Board member has informed us that the club has had a few dinners of 300 plus attendees without incident. They held the clubs long awaited celebration of the 100 Year Anniversary of the Colombo Club's existence with attendance of 400 plus guests. All successful. As of the writing of this article, we are a GO for our "THAT'S ITALIAN" Dinner Show on Saturday, February 12. (Please see our Flyer below and watch our website [www.friendsofisola.org](http://www.friendsofisola.org), or on Facebook at "Friends of Isola delle Femmine" for late breaking news.)





## **I Ricordi d’Isola [Memories of Isola]**

by Sal Coniglio

### **The Holiday Season in Isola delle Femmine**

The ramifications of World War II were severe, especially in Sicily, and the difficulties, shortages of food and other essentials, lasted for many years after the war’s end in 1945, the same year I was born. As a result, holiday celebrations included, at most, very simple gifts. The spirit of celebrating with family was the real gift.

When I was young, living in Isola in the 1950’s and 60’s, we did not receive gifts at Christmas. Gifts were received each year on All Souls Day, November 2. As a small child, on the night before, November 1<sup>st</sup>, we would put our shoes behind the front door, inside the house. That night, the souls of our deceased family and loved ones would fill our shoes with goodies. Given the economy at that time, shoes were filled with a variety of specialty nuts, fruit and candy including chestnut. When my children were young in this country, we carried on this tradition. They would put their shoes behind the front door of our home and they would receive candy, trinkets and a little money. We continued this tradition until they were in Junior High.

There was another tradition followed in parts of Sicily in which similar presents were left in shoes on January 6, the feast of the Epiphany. This invoked a mythical character named La Befana [translated as the “old woman” or the “witch” in the sense of someone with magical powers to leave presents].

The Christmas Holidays in Isola were concentrated on religious celebrations, unlike today’s Christmas Holiday’s. We would go to Palermo to see the huge public Christmas tree and Babbo Natale [Father Christmas or Santa Claus]. Nativity scenes were displayed in the homes of Isolani, many were quite elaborate, and people would visit these homes to admire them. Christmas Eve was celebrated with extended family. Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles and cousins would get together for an early dinner of pasta, followed by baccalà fritto [fried codfish] and cavolfiore fritto [fried cauliflower] with sfingi [deep fried puff pastry] for dessert. After dinner we would play Tombola [Italian Bingo]. We would use kidney beans as markers on our cards. This gathering ended with everyone attending Midnight Mass at about 11:30 PM.

Christmas Day was celebrated with our immediate family members by enjoying a dinner together. The meal usually included pasta with meat sauce, which was rare, because on most days during the year we ate fish, meat was a specialty. The sauce contained meatballs, potatoes and hard-boiled eggs. Godparents would come over to visit their godchildren and bring sugar doll treats, similar to American Easter sugar treats. No real gifts were exchanged because Christmas was a religious holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus.

New Year’s Eve was celebrated with an early dinner. As a teenager I would go out into the streets with friends, playing accordion music, visiting relatives and neighbors, toasting and dancing. At Midnight the older people would discard old broken or undesirable household items into the streets from doorways and balconies. The day after New Year’s was a massive cleanup day for city workers.

New Year’s Day itself was a day of leisure.



Albero di Natale [Christmas Tree] in the Isola home of Rossa Bologna decorated by her daughter Maria.

## **A Bit of History that Is Ours**

by Vincent S. Ferrante

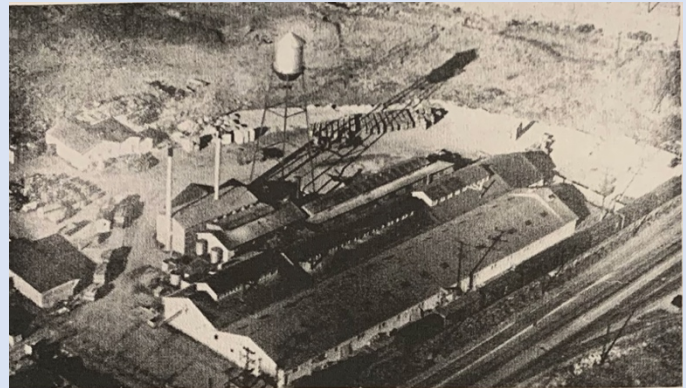
### **LOCAL FISH CANNING INDUSTRY BEGINNINGS – Part 3**

#### ***MARTINEZ CANNING, PACKING & FISH BUYERS***

Commercial fishing had become a major Martinez activity with the influx of Italian immigrants who had recently begun arriving in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Many had been fishermen in their native land. Pollution and years of overfishing the east coast rivers of the U.S. had greatly diminished the catch of salmon in the eastern states. Discovery of a new supply in the Pacific Coast waters brought the industry west. In 1870 only one cannery operated on the Pacific Coast. In 1882 there were a dozen, two of them in Martinez.

The salmon cannery of Joseph Black was established in 1882 in a building two hundred feet by eighty feet where 80-100 hands processed 80,000 cases per month. The cannery contained two retorts for the pressurized steam cooking of canned fish. The goods were shipped to Europe, the eastern United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Honolulu. The Martinez Packing Company also commenced in 1882. It employed 60 hands with a capacity of 350 cases per day. The President of that company was George Shiel.

Years later, the Costanza Brothers, Oratzio, Andrew, Leo, John and Rocco purchased the old Black's cannery that had been utilized as a plywood manufacturing plant for some time and converted it back to a cannery, known as Martinez Food Cannery. The Costanza's already had fish reduction plants in Port Chicago, the Red Rock area of Richmond and then in Port Costa. They canned shad and salmon which they bought from local fishermen. The cans were then sold to wholesalers. They utilized two large flat barges to pick up fish for the cannery and also to pick up sardines in San Francisco for the fertilizer plant in Port Costa. The motorized barges were like big floating tanks. They measured about 150' long, with a pilot cabin in front.



Martinez Cannery owned by the Costanza Brothers  
Known as the Martinez Food Cannery, Ltd.

Courtesy of Rocco H. Costanza

Upon the banning of commercial fishing by the state of California in 1957, the cannery continued processing fruits and vegetables into the early 1970's. Martinez Food Cannery was heavily employed by the local Sicilian/Italian-American populace living in Martinez's "Little Italy"



Operations Inside the Costanza Brothers Martinez Cannery

Courtesy of Rocco H. Costanza

Shoreline neighborhood. Women played a major role as well in the cannery, such as my great Aunt Francis DiMaggio-Davi, who served as a "Floor Lady" or boss. My Nannu Razzi Ferrante, who worked there seasonally in between fishing seasons, was offered a Foreman's position if he agreed to give up fishing in Alaska



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during the summers and “stay put”. He accepted. As you would expect it was truly a family affair. My father Vince began working there in high school and continued until its closure. It was a rite of passage to work there for many of the young men during summers and when home from college. Members of our FOI (Friends of Isola delle Femmine) in Martinez and participants in its events, with names such as Costanza, DiMaggio, Lucido and Pellegrini, could share with you the hard work and experiences from those bygone cannery days.

The following are excerpts by John Costanza, first Italian to become mayor of Martinez who wrote several columns of reminiscences for the Martinez News Gazette:

“My father Rocco Costanza Sr. was a fish buyer. Martinez had about six buyers in the early days, but from the 40 [Martinez] boats, some of which were ours. The boats we had were pick up boats. We would go around to various fishing grounds and pick up the catches to bring in. We had a scale on the boat; we would weigh the fish and give them [fishermen] a receipt so that at the end of the week they would come and get their money ... My family handled the business of go-between. We’d pick up the catch, bring it in and ship it to San Francisco to Paladini Company. We also shipped to Sacramento and to International Fish Company on the stern wheeler river boats ... They [fishermen] also came ashore on weekends to get their money. Our bookkeeper was Amy Morgan. It was our custom on those weekends, when the banks were open on Saturdays, to get \$500 to \$600 in cash, gold and silver, put it into a sack and bring it to our house where the fishermen would gather and we would pay them in cash.”

Fish Buyers, most of them agents for San Francisco fish brokers, acquired warehouse space on Granger’s Wharf in Martinez and later on the city wharf. Among them were Giuseppe Sparacino, Rocco Costanza, Vincenzo Lucido, Giovanni Flores, Pete Amato, and Peter B. Davi. Luigi Pellegrini established his own family business and delivered fish by horse and wagon in the early days. Later, he also supplied San Francisco firms. His place of business is still standing at the foot of Berrellesa Street. Fish



Label for Sardine Cans from the Costanza Martinez Cannery  
Courtesy of Rocco H. Costanza



Pete Amato fish buyer at far left at work with his crew cleaning fish  
Can you recognize anyone else?

Courtesy of the Amato Family

were used as barter for fruits and vegetables from the truck farmers on outer Alhambra Ave. in Martinez, while many old-time residents remember going to the wharf area to buy fish off the incoming boats. Many of the fish buyers’ grandchildren are members of FOI from the Martinez area and continue to work to support keeping the history alive.

Sources:

1. 1882 History of Contra Costa Co. by Slocum & Co.
2. Martinez News Gazette
3. Martinez, A California Town, Martinez Historical Society

## **Mangiate Bene Tutti [Eat Well Everyone]**

by Mary Pappas-Coniglio “Cooking with Mary’s Village Style”

Visit us “Cooking with Mary’s Village Style” and “Friends of Isola delle Femmine” on Facebook, Instagram & YouTube or on our Website: [https://friendsofisoladellefemmine.org/food\\_travel/](https://friendsofisoladellefemmine.org/food_travel/)

### *Cooking with Mary’s Village Style*

#### *Mary’s Pasta Bolognese*

This is the only sauce that I will tell you to cook all day! (2-3 hours)

The hardest part of this sauce is the prep!

Prep

Chop two onions as small as you can (then I give them a few pulses in the food processor)

1 head of garlic minced (or 2 heaping tablespoons pulsed in the food processor)

I use shredded Carrots (I chop them then I give them a few pulses in my small electric chopper)

I hand chop the celery and then give them a few pulses too.

#### Ingredients

Olive Oil

8 Oz. Pancetta (2 packages)

Red Pepper Flakes (To your taste)

2 large Onion (chopped small)

3 Pounds Ground Meat (1 lb beef, 1 lb veal and 1 pound pork)

1 cup Celery (chopped small)

1 cup Carrots (chopped small)

2 Heaping Tablespoons Garlic (1 head of garlic chopped small)

12 oz. Tomato Paste

1 can chicken or beef broth

Red Wine ½ bottle (good tasting RED WINE!)

3 cups of Milk

#### Method

Sauté until the pancetta is a little browned

Add onions to oil and cook until transparent and a little brown

Add meat & cook well until brown and crumble it up as you go (I use an old school potato masher)

Add vegetables & cook until soft, cooked well

Add tomato paste (Sauté it a little)

Do Not add any water.

Add Red Wine to taste (I used ½ bottle) cook a few minutes

Then add Milk

When it’s all combined bring to a boil and lower the heat to simmer

Simmer for 2-3 hours-The longer the better.



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**New Sustaining Members of Friends of Isola delle Femmine, Inc.**

We continue to add new members. Two here added to our already 138 active members.

George Leonard                      Desiree Lombardo-Valle

*more to be published in future issues*

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Jim Coniglio	Albert & Sandy Seeno	Bert & Bella Cutino
Michael Orlando	Nicky D (DePaola)	Leandra Ramm Coniglio
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