

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

● Italy's role  
in America's greatness



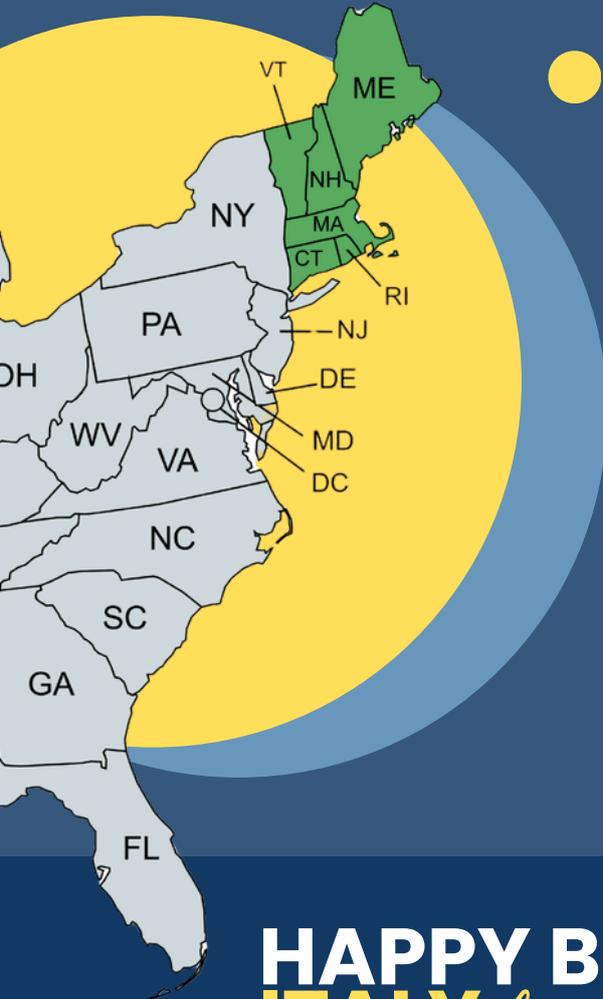
*Constantino Brumidi*



*Ettore Boiardi*



*Francesca Cabrini*



● Unsung Italian heroes (New England)



*Ella Grasso*



*Protasio Neri*



*George Scigliano*



*Rocky Marciano*



*Theodore DiMauro*



*John Volpe*



*Eileen Dondero Foley*



*John Pastore*



*Angelo Ambrosini*

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*



*Research and Medicine*



*Solidarity and Philanthropy*



*Democratic Stability*



**TWO ANNIVERSARIES ONE HEART**

**FEBRUARY 2026**

2026 is a very special year for the United States and for Italy. In both cases, an important milestone anniversary will be celebrated: 250 years since 1776, the birth of the United States; and 80 years since 1946, the birth of the Italian Republic.

At We the Italians, we want to celebrate both in our own way – by telling the beautiful stories in which Italy played a leading role throughout the 250 years of the United States, and likewise the beautiful stories in which the United States has played a leading role in Italy's 80 years.

Our project is called **Two Anniversaries, One Heart**, and as you may have guessed, it is divided into two parts.

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA

**Happy Birthday USA**, which includes stories about Italy's positive contribution to 250 years of the United States of America, is itself divided into two sub-projects.

The first is called **Italy's role in America's greatness**.

We have selected eighteen great Italians who played a fundamental role in the 250-year history of America. Eighteen prominent Italians of today will tell the stories of those eighteen very famous Italians of the past, also explaining the impact that these figures have had here in Italy within their respective fields of expertise.

The second is called **Unsung Italian Heroes**.

In addition to the eighteen most famous Italians, we want to tell the story of the impact that many other Italians have had in individual American states. These are more local Italian and Italian American heroes who are not as widely known. And who better than our Ambassadors to know at least one such story connected to their own area? They will tell us about the unsung hero who did something important in the place where they live and where they represent us.

At the end of February, we will share the stories of the Unsung Heroes of New England; at the end of April, those from the New York area; at the end of June, those from the East; at the end of August, those from the South; and at the end of December, those from the West.

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY

In this case, twelve stories written by prominent Italians of today will each be dedicated to America's positive contribution to Italy in a different thematic field.

We will tell twelve reasons why Italy has been, is, and will always be grateful to the United States – reasons that have generated positive effects in Italy and that have strengthened the solidity and the exceptional nature of the friendship and alliance between Italy and the United States.

All of this content will be distributed in several ways.

The articles will be published – all in Italian and English – on our website and across our social media channels.

The English versions will also be included in special bimonthly inserts of our magazine, to be released at the end of February, April, June, August, October, and December 2026.

At the end of the year, we will publish a book collecting all the content.

**Happy Birthday USA** and **Happy Birthday Italy** will also become two audio and video podcasts, likewise released every two months.

Finally, our Gala – which this year will take place on June 4 – will include a segment in which we will briefly present this project, along with a surprise that we are not yet ready to reveal.

**Two Flags, One Heart** – and this year as well,  
**Two Anniversaries, One Heart.**



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**  
**ITALY** *from the US*



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**  
**ITALY** *from the US*



*Research and Medicine*



Alessandro Astorino

## From reconstruction to innovation: the American impact on Italian healthcare and research

Since 1946, the contribution of the United States to Italy's medical and research sectors has been decisive, structural, and profoundly transformative. What began as support during a period of health emergency and national reconstruction gradually evolved into a high-level scientific, technological, and academic collaboration. American influence helped modernize the Italian healthcare system, promoting innovation, advanced research, more rigorous clinical standards, and full integration into the international medical and scientific community.

In the immediate postwar period, American assistance had an immediate and tangible impact. Through international aid programs largely supported by the United States and through the Marshall Plan, Italy received essential medical supplies, hospital equipment, and innovative medicines. The introduction and widespread distribution of penicillin and other antibiotics marked an epochal turning point in the fight against infections that only a few years earlier had often been fatal. At the same time, logistical and scientific support contributed to the fight against endemic diseases such as malaria, accelerating the process of healthcare modernization and dramatically improving public health indicators.

With economic growth and the consolidation of republican institutions, the relationship shifted from assistance to cooperation. American universities and research centers became preferred destinations for the advanced training of Italian doctors and researchers. Entire generations trained in the United States, learning rigorous research methodologies, standardized clinical protocols, and a systematic approach to evidence-based medicine. Upon returning to Italy, these professionals brought with them a scientific culture oriented toward controlled experimentation, outcome measurement, and international publication, significantly raising the

quality of research and clinical practice.

An essential role in this dialogue was played by Italian Americans, who served as a cultural and professional bridge between the two countries. Physicians, scientists, university professors, and philanthropists of Italian origin active in the United States promoted academic exchanges, targeted funding, and institutional collaborations. Through private foundations, donations, and mentoring programs, they supported young Italian researchers, helping them enter international research networks. In many cases, shared cultural roots facilitated the creation of relationships based on trust, accelerating scientific cooperation and the transfer of technology. The Italian American diaspora therefore contributed in a concrete way to the growth of Italian human and scientific capital.

Pharmaceutical innovation represents one of the areas in which the American contribution has been most evident. The United States has led the development of new molecules, oncology therapies, biological drugs, and innovative vaccines. The American model of collaboration among universities, biotech companies, and investors created a dynamic ecosystem capable of producing revolutionary therapies. Italy directly benefited from these innovations, both through rapid access to new drugs and through participation in international clinical trials. The experience of mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 demonstrated how American technological leadership can have global impact while simultaneously strengthening scientific cooperation with Italy.

The contribution has also been decisive in the field of medical technology. The United States has been a pioneer in the development and diffusion of advanced diagnostic tools such as CT scans, MRI, PET imaging, and, more recently, robotic technologies for surgery. The adoption of these innovations in Italy improved diagnostic accuracy, reduced margins of error, and



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*Research and Medicine*



expanded therapeutic possibilities. The integration of artificial intelligence into medicine—from diagnostic imaging to the management of clinical big data—is another area in which American leadership has provided models and standards later adopted by the Italian healthcare system.

Another key area is precision medicine and genomics. Massive American investments in human genome sequencing and molecular biotechnology opened new therapeutic frontiers. Italy participated in international research networks and developed collaborations with American institutions to apply genomics to early diagnosis and personalized treatment. This exchange improved the effectiveness of therapies, particularly in oncology and rare diseases.

Italian healthcare management has also benefited from American experience in organization and efficiency. The introduction of the DRG system for classifying and reimbursing hospital services represented an important managerial innovation, helping rationalize spending and improve planning within the National Health Service. Organizational models and performance evaluation tools developed in the United States have influenced Italian policies regarding quality standards and healthcare facility accreditation.

Continuing education remains one of the strongest pillars of this relationship. Academic exchanges, fellowships, and joint programs between Italian and American universities have consolidated an international scientific culture. Many Italian department heads and chief physicians gained experience in the United States, bringing back advanced expertise and a mindset oriented toward interdisciplinary research.

Finally, the emphasis on the “humanization of care,” promoted in numerous American hospitals, has influenced the Italian debate on

patient-centered care. The idea that clinical excellence must be accompanied by relational quality, transparency, and patient involvement has become an integral part of contemporary Italian healthcare culture.

Today the challenge is not limited to technological advancement, but concerns the building of healthcare models that are sustainable and authentically human. Sustainable, because they are called upon to combine quality of care, economic balance, and equitable access within a context of growing complexity. Human, because they are grounded in the centrality of the person, in the dignity of the patient, and in the integration of clinical excellence with relational quality.

The goal of the collaboration between Italy and the United States is to strengthen structured cooperation among institutions, universities, and businesses, promoting a vision of healthcare capable of integrating ethics, innovation, and social responsibility, with the awareness that health represents a global common good.

Overall, the contribution of the United States—strengthened by the commitment and mediation of Italian Americans—has had a profound and lasting impact on the transformation of Italian medicine. From postwar reconstruction to the biotechnology revolution, from pharmaceutical innovation to academic training, a transatlantic dialogue has developed that has raised standards of care and expanded research opportunities. This relationship, founded on cooperation, exchange of expertise, and cultural affinity, continues today to represent a strategic asset for Italian public health and for shared scientific progress.

**Alessandro Astorino** is an Italian management engineer and parliamentary advisor specializing in innovation policy, healthcare systems, and digital transformation. He is Secretary of the Italian Parliamentary Intergroup on Health and Recovery.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*



*Solidarity and Philanthropy*



Jane Biagini

## American solidarity toward Italy. Eighty years of aid, roots, and Italian American ties

Over the past eighty years, the solidarity shown by the United States toward Italy in response to earthquakes, floods, and other major natural disasters has been constant, tangible, and deeply felt. This support has never been limited to institutional aid or emergency interventions alone, but has reflected a human and cultural bond rooted in the history of Italian emigration and in the extraordinary generosity of the Italian American community, which has always been on the front lines when Italy has faced hardship.

Since the postwar period, America has viewed Italy not only as a strategic ally, but also as a country tied to it by family connections and emotional bonds. This spirit emerged powerfully during the great tragedies that struck the country. When the flood devastated Florence in 1966, American assistance was immediate and visible. Alongside official contributions, thousands of U.S. citizens, many of them of Italian descent, took part in fundraising efforts, spontaneous initiatives, and volunteer missions to support the recovery of the city and its artistic heritage. In that context, the involvement of Italian Americans took on strong symbolic meaning, turning solidarity into an act of giving back to the land of their roots.

The 1968 Belice earthquake marked another significant moment. Images of the destruction in western Sicily deeply affected American public opinion, especially within communities of Sicilian origin spread across New York, New Jersey, and California. Regional associations, parishes, and Italian American social clubs organized benefit events, collections, and donation campaigns that complemented government aid, demonstrating how American solidarity was fueled by a strong sense of cultural belonging.

This dynamic became even more evident after the 1976 Friuli earthquake. American involvement went beyond material assistance and included technical expertise and support for

reconstruction. The Friuli experience, in particular, became a model of efficient and community-driven rebuilding, closely observed in the United States as well. For Italian American communities of Friulian origin, the commitment was intense and long-lasting, with fundraising efforts aimed not only at emergency relief but also at the economic and social revival of the affected areas, including the entire Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, which managed to turn tragedy into a powerful example of resilience.

The 1980 Irpinia earthquake marked one of the highest points of mobilization. Faced with massive devastation, America responded with financial, medical, and logistical assistance, while the Italian American community launched an extraordinary wave of generosity. Families, business owners, associations, and cultural organizations raised funds to help rebuild homes, schools, and hospitals. For many Italian Americans, helping Irpinia meant helping the hometowns of their parents or grandparents, reinforcing a sense of moral responsibility that went far beyond geographical distance. This tradition of solidarity has not faded over time. After the 2009 earthquake in L'Aquila, America once again demonstrated its closeness, with institutional initiatives supported by projects promoted by foundations, universities, and Italian American organizations. A similar commitment followed the 2016 Central Italy earthquake, when Amatrice, Norcia, and other affected towns received support through benefit concerts, fundraising dinners, charity runs, and online campaigns that engaged thousands of people across the United States. Even today, in the face of new emergencies, this spirit continues to be evident. American aid and initiatives promoted by the Italian American community are also supporting the regions recently affected by Cyclone Harry, once again confirming a sense of closeness that never pauses and is renewed with every new challenge.



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*Solidarity and Philanthropy*



Overall, American assistance to Italy tells a story that goes beyond diplomacy and emergency response. It tells of a deep relationship between two countries and, above all, of the central role played by the Italian American community, which has transformed the memory of its origins into concrete and ongoing commitment. Behind every contribution and every initiative lies the determination to reaffirm that, in its most difficult moments, Italy has never stood alone. In recent decades, Italy has increasingly looked to the American model of philanthropy and structured fundraising. In the United States, a strong culture of private giving – supported by tax incentives, major foundations, and professional fundraising campaigns – has financed universities, hospitals, museums, and nonprofit organizations on a large scale. This approach has also influenced Italy, where universities, cultural institutions, and third-sector organizations have begun establishing dedicated fundraising offices, alumni networks, and major donor strategies. The impact has been not only financial but also cultural: fostering greater civic responsibility and stronger private participation in advancing the common good.

When it comes to solidarity, roots can be a strong trigger. Feeling the legacy with one's past and taking pride in one's origin inevitably creates an urge when faced with emergency, and, as mentioned before, there have been many occasions in which Italian Americans have responded promptly.

When earthquake hit the Friuli region in 1976 I was a child, but I do remember how the nearby Air Force Base immediately provided assistance with tents, machines, meals, stretchers, medics and all that was needed in the first days. The Base was in turmoil and the focus was on providing instant help. But news of the quake echoed on media and reached the USA in a wink, touching the hearts of the many Italian Americans. The dramatic event re-awakened their sense of belonging and identity with Italy bringing to concrete action. The many

Congressmen of Italian descent rapidly presented a rescue plan and funds were made available by the government. Enactment of the plan was assigned to AID – Agency for International Development – a US State Department agency operating worldwide, and the local office opened in Friuli to deal with the newborn emergency was run by my father.

AID Friuli devised a reconstruction program characterized by quality effort, speed and efficiency, and exempt of political criticism. I like to believe this is due to the fact that, at all levels, the program was in the hands of Italian Americans: the Program Coordinator in Washington was an Italian American, the Project Manager was an Italian American, the Chief Engineer was an Italian American, the Local Liason Manager was an Italian American, and the funds were moved by the Italian American congressmen under the influence of the numerous Italian American associations. All these Italian Americans felt the call of their roots and responded actively, reinforcing their sense of identity.

In those years, my house was filled with Italian Americans working at the program: engineers, architects, politicians, military and administrative staff. All built relations which enforced the bonds of friendship and reciprocal gratitude.

My father was utmostly proud of his contribution, as he himself was an Italian American. In those years especially he was serving two flags and helping two fellow communities, and today, after 50 years, plaques still inform and remind the Italian citizens of Friuli of the US assistance programs and of their extreme deep-rooted generosity.

*Born on Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina, **Jane Biagini** has attended DoDD schools in Italy and graduated in BA at John Cabot University in Rome. Jane is the daughter of Tullio Biagini, who worked on the American earthquake reconstruction program in Friuli Venezia Giulia.*



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*



*Democratic Stability*



Umberto Mucci

## A Transatlantic partnership. The United States and the consolidation of Italian democracy

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## *Democratic Stability*



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***Umberto Mucci*** holds a degree in Political Science with a concentration in International Affairs and a Master's in Marketing and Communication. He is the founder of *We the Italians*, where he also serves as Editor-in-Chief of the monthly magazine. He represents the Italian American Museum of New York in Italy.



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**  
**USA** *from Italy*

**Italy's role in America's greatness**

**Unsung Italian heroes**



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Italy's role in America's greatness



### *Costantino Brumidi,* **a Roman beneath the dome of America**

When one enters the United States Capitol and looks up toward the great dome, one unknowingly performs a profoundly Roman gesture. Because up there, in the symbolic heart of American democracy, lives the work of Costantino Brumidi – an artist born in Rome in 1805, trained in the workshops and academies of the papal city, and who arrived in the United States as a political émigré even before becoming a celebrated painter. His signature, invisible to most, is nonetheless imprinted on the very construction of the American national imagination.

Brumidi is important to the history of the United States because he played a decisive role in giving visual form to the nation's founding myth. His pictorial cycles in the Capitol – first and foremost the *\*Apotheosis of Washington\** (1865) in the dome – translate into an allegorical and monumental language the idea of a republic destined to endure, to rise, to tell its own story as a new civilization. This is not mere decoration; it is political narration through images. In a young country, lacking a long monumental tradition, Brumidi brought the grammar of Roman fresco, Baroque theatricality, and the symbolic use of figures, adapting them to a new secular pantheon made up of Founding Fathers, science, progress, and civic virtues.

In this sense, Brumidi is an integral part of the process of constructing American identity – an identity that, paradoxically, is consolidated also through the gaze and the hand of a European. The Capitol thus becomes not only the seat of legislative power, but a space for representing the nation, a place where art and politics merge explicitly, following a tradition that in Europe – and in Rome in particular – had been established for centuries.

But what makes Brumidi even more interesting today is not only what he did, but how he did it and where he came from. Brumidi was no ordinary artist: he had worked in the Vatican, knew the papal building sites, had restored Raphael, and moved within a culture of the highest figurative refinement. Yet, for political reasons tied to the Risorgimento uprisings and the repressive climate of papal Rome, he was forced to leave Italy. In the United States he began almost from scratch, facing distrust, precariousness, and uncertain commissions. Only after years of work was he recognized as the right man to decorate the institutional heart of the country.

Personally, Brumidi strikes me not only as an artist, but as a human figure: a professional of the highest level who crossed the ocean carrying with him ancient knowledge, adapting it to a completely new context without ever disavowing his training. Ultimately, it is a story of intellectual and cultural migration, not merely economic migration. And at a time when migration is often described only as an emergency or a problem, Brumidi reminds us how great movements of people are also movements of ideas, techniques, languages, and worldviews.

For us Italians – and for us Romans in particular – Brumidi is a kind of silent ambassador of our artistic tradition. His work in the United States shows how the Roman school of fresco, the ability to construct complex narrative spaces, and mastery of figure and allegory played a



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direct role in shaping American public aesthetics. This is not just a matter of stylistic influence; it is the transfer of a way of conceiving art as a civic instrument, as an integral part of institutional architecture, as a vehicle for collective values.

From the perspective of Italy's cultural sector, Brumidi represents an exemplary case of ante litteram "soft power": without cultural policies, without promotional institutes, without diplomatic strategies, it is the very quality of Italian artistic training that asserts itself as a model. Rome, with its academies, its workshops, its building sites, thus becomes indirectly part of the process of symbolic construction of the United States. It is a relationship that today should be told much more, especially in educational and museum pathways, because it helps us understand how art history is also a history of international relations, exchanges, and hybridizations.

There is also another aspect that, as an administrator and an art historian, I feel particularly close to: Brumidi worked on public commission, for a public space, for a public function. He did not produce works destined for the private market or for pure individual celebration, but contributed to building a place that symbolically belongs to all American citizens. It is a profoundly civic idea of art that today, even in Italy, we might need to reclaim with greater courage: art not only as an event, but as cultural infrastructure, as part of the urban and institutional landscape.

Ultimately, Costantino Brumidi is important to the United States because he helped give a face and an image to their nascent democracy; he is important to Italy because he demonstrates how deeply our artistic tradition has concretely shaped the construction of the modern Western imagination; and he is important to us Romans because he tells the story of a Rome that is not only a museum-city, but a forge of skills, crafts,

and intelligences capable of leaving a mark on the world.

Under the Capitol dome, between Washington transformed into an almost mythological figure and the personifications of civic virtues, a piece of Rome still lives today. And perhaps, in times of fragile identities and shouted borders, remembering that part of American history was painted by a Roman in exile can help us read history with a more complex, more truthful - and also more just - gaze.



**Giulia Silvia Ghia**, restorer, art historian, writer and, currently, councilor for culture of the first municipality of Rome, has always been committed to spreading the unparalleled beauty of the history of Italian Art in the United States and other countries and communities.



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## Italy's role in America's greatness



### *Ettore Boiardi,* **The Italian who fed America**

Ettore Boiardi, known in the United States as Chef Boyardee, is one of the great Italians who had a deep and positive impact on American society. His story is not just that of a successful entrepreneur, but of an immigrant who helped change the eating habits of an entire nation, bringing Italian cuisine into the homes of millions of families and offering concrete support to the United States during one of the most difficult moments in its history.

Born in Italy's Emilia Romagna region, Boiardi grew up in a land where food was culture, identity, and pride. From a young age he learned the craft of cooking, but his time in Italy was relatively brief. At just 16 years old, in 1914, he emigrated to the United States, following his older brother and seeking the opportunities that America promised European immigrants.

After arriving in New York, he began working in prestigious kitchens such as that of the Plaza Hotel. His talent and discipline quickly set him apart. At a time when Italian cuisine was not yet considered a major culinary tradition in the United States, Boiardi stood out for the quality and authenticity of his dishes. He worked in high-level settings and helped spread a positive image of Italian cooking among America's elite. The turning point came when he moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where in 1926 he opened the

restaurant Il Giardino d'Italia. The success was immediate. Customers loved his tomato sauce and pasta so much that they began asking to purchase them to cook at home. From this demand came an extraordinary entrepreneurial insight: package and sell ready-made sauces and pasta while preserving authentic quality and flavor.

That is how the Chef Boyardee brand was born. The name was not chosen by accident. "Boy-Ar-Dee" was a phonetic spelling of the surname Boiardi, created to help Americans pronounce it correctly. At the time, many Italian last names were mispronounced, distorted, or even changed entirely. Numerous Italian American immigrants felt pressured to Americanize their surnames in order to integrate or to avoid discrimination. Boiardi made a different and intelligent choice. He did not abandon his name. Instead, he adapted it creatively, turning it into a cultural bridge. In doing so, he preserved his Italian identity while making it accessible to the American public.

The company grew rapidly. During the 1930s production expanded dramatically, with modern plants and nationwide distribution. Chef Boyardee products became synonymous with convenience and flavor. For the first time, millions of American families could put spaghetti, ravioli, and Italian-inspired sauces on the table without going to restaurants or mastering unfamiliar cooking techniques. Boiardi helped make Italian cuisine an integral part of the American diet.

The moment when his contribution to the United States took on even greater significance came during World War II. When the country entered the war, Boiardi's company converted a large part of its production to support the war effort. The Cleveland plant operated at full capacity to provide food rations to American soldiers serving in Europe and the Pacific.



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It is estimated that during the conflict millions upon millions of rations were produced. At certain periods, the factory turned out hundreds of thousands of portions per day. Overall, tens of millions of rations were supplied to the armed forces. Pasta-based meals with tomato sauce were especially suitable for preservation and transportation, ensuring that soldiers received nutritious, calorie-dense meals that were easy to distribute. The Cleveland facility became one of the key food production centers supporting the U.S. military.

For this extraordinary commitment, the company received official recognition from the United States government, including the prestigious Army-Navy "E" Award, presented to companies that demonstrated excellence in wartime production. This was not simply a commercial success. It was a concrete contribution to the national effort. Many American soldiers, some of whom had never tasted Italian food before, encountered those flavors through Boyardee rations. In moments of fear and uncertainty, that food represented not only sustenance but also comfort.

The fact that an Italian immigrant was providing food to American soldiers, including those fighting in Italy against the fascist regime, carries powerful symbolic meaning. Boiardi demonstrated that Italian identity and loyalty to the United States could fully coexist. His story offered clear proof of how immigrants could contribute decisively to the growth and defense of the nation that had welcomed them.

After the war, in 1946, Boiardi decided to sell the company, aware that managing such a vast enterprise required increasingly complex industrial structures. He remained connected to the brand as a consultant and public face for many years. The smiling image of the chef in a white hat became one of the most recognizable icons on American supermarket shelves.

Ettore Boiardi's impact goes far beyond economic success. He helped reshape the perception of Italians in the United States by embodying competence, reliability, and entrepreneurial spirit. He spread a positive image of Italy through food, one of the most powerful cultural vehicles. He made Italian cuisine part of America's culinary identity, paving the way for its widespread popularity.

When discussing the great Italians who had a positive impact on the United States, Ettore Boiardi's name deserves a place of honor. He not only built a hugely successful brand, but he helped feed a nation at war, created jobs, innovated in the food industry, and turned his Italian heritage into a strength. His story is that of a young man who left Emilia Romagna and, through talent, vision, and determination, permanently changed the way Americans eat. It stands as proof that Italian immigration was not only a story of sacrifice, but also one of extraordinary contributions to the growth and well-being of the United States.



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## Italy's role in America's greatness



### *Francesca Cabrini,* **An Italian and American story of migration, faith, and courage**

Francesca Saverio Cabrini was born in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano in 1850, into a deeply Catholic family. From a young age she showed a strong religious vocation, despite fragile health that would accompany her throughout her life. After earning her teaching diploma, she entered a religious community in 1874 and in 1880 founded in Codogno the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which would become one of the principal instruments of her charitable work.

The decisive moment of her life came with her decision to leave for the United States, where Italian emigration was reaching enormous numbers. Between 1880 and 1920, more than four million Italians crossed the Atlantic, often in conditions of extreme poverty. When Cabrini arrived in New York in 1889, she found communities marked by unemployment, disease, illiteracy, and cultural isolation. Her response was not only spiritual but above all concrete and organizational.

Within a few years she founded elementary schools, kindergartens, girls' academies, orphanages, shelters, and hospitals. One of her most significant works was Columbus Hospital in New York. Thanks to fundraising and the work of

the sisters, the facility expanded rapidly and exceeded 150 beds by 1905, becoming a point of reference for Italian immigrants, who could finally receive medical care in a language they understood and in an environment that respected their dignity.

Cabrini understood that integration also depended on education. The schools founded by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart offered literacy, English instruction, and vocational training. In many urban areas of the United States, these institutions represented the only alternative to the streets for children and young people from migrant families.

At her death in 1917 in Chicago, the institutions she had created numbered 67 and the sisters engaged in the missions were about 1,300. In 1909 she obtained United States citizenship, further strengthening her bond with the country she had chosen as her principal field of action. Francesca Cabrini's importance for the United States lies in her ability to transform charity into an organized system of social assistance, anticipating models of welfare that would only emerge decades later. Her works concretely improved the lives of thousands of people and helped change the perception of Italian immigrants.

On July 7, 1946, she was proclaimed a saint, becoming the first American saint in history. Interpreting the role of Francesca Cabrini had an impact on me that goes far beyond the work of an actress. It was not merely a character to study, an accent to modulate, or an era to reconstruct: it was a profound encounter with a conscience, with a vision of the world, and with a collective wound that spans centuries. Telling her story meant passing through the pain and hope of millions of people, yesterday as today.

Francesca Cabrini was a woman capable of transforming her own fragility into a revolutionary strength. A migrant among



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Italy's role in America's greatness

migrants, a foreigner in a foreign land, who chose to stand with the least without rhetoric, but with concrete actions. Studying her life, I felt a responsibility growing within me: to convey not only her determination, but also her humanity, her fears, her stubborn faith, her quiet courage. I did not want to portray an icon, but a living, complex woman, capable of doubt and yet able to move forward.

What struck me most was the universal dimension of her story. Emigration is not a marginal chapter of human history: it is human history itself. All peoples, at some point in their existence, have been migrants. People leave because of hunger, war, dreams, love, necessity, or vision. They leave with a light suitcase and a heavy heart. They leave behind a language, a landscape, the scent of home. Interpreting Cabrini meant touching this condition of uprootedness and, at the same time, of rebirth.

I felt a strong pride in telling a piece of history that belongs not only to a religious community or a nation, but to all humanity. Because the migratory experience is transversal, crossing continents, cultures, and eras. It is an invisible thread that binds distant generations together. Telling this story today also means questioning the present: how we look at those who arrive, and how capable we are of recognizing in others a part of ourselves.

Cabrini did not see "foreigners": she saw people. And this gaze, so simple and so revolutionary, profoundly transformed me. In portraying her, I learned that identity is not a closed fortress, but a house with open doors. I understood that true strength lies not in defending a border, but in building bridges. And that dignity is not a privilege, but a universal right.

As a Neapolitan woman, this role had for me an even more intimate meaning. Naples is a city that carries mixture in its DNA. It is a city that over the centuries has been crossed by different

peoples: Greeks, Romans, Spaniards, French, Arabs. It is a crossroads of cultures, a land of departures and returns. By definition, Neapolitans are a people of migrants. We have crossed oceans, built communities far away, carried with us a language, a music, a way of being in the world. But at the same time we are a people who welcome. Naples is multicultural by vocation, open to the foreigner not by strategy, but by nature.

Growing up in such a city means learning early that identity is plural. That the other is not a threat, but a possibility. When I stepped into Cabrini's shoes, I felt there was a direct thread between her mission and my own belonging. Telling the story of Italian emigrants in America was not only a historical exercise: it was telling a part of my own collective memory. The faces of those migrants resembled faces I have known, stories heard within my family, departures that marked entire generations.

Interpreting this role also forced me to confront the privilege of the storyteller. Bringing such a delicate story to the stage means choosing every gesture and every silence with care. It means avoiding rhetoric and seeking truth. I worked to find a balance between the public strength of the missionary and the private vulnerability of the woman. Because I believe it is precisely in that vulnerability that her greatness lies.

Cabrini taught me that courage is not the absence of fear, but the decision not to be ruled by fear. She taught me that faith, in whatever form it takes, is also a radical trust in humanity. And she taught me that stories of migration are not only stories of loss, but also of transformation.

Bringing this story to the public made me feel part of something greater than my individual path. As an actress, one often questions the meaning of one's work. In this case, the meaning was crystal clear: to give voice to those who were invisible, to remember that behind every number there is a name, a face, a mother, a son.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Italy's role in America's greatness

I felt that I was not merely playing a role, but helping to keep a necessary memory alive. And in a time when the issue of emigration is often instrumentalized, simplified, reduced to slogans, telling the story of a woman who chose to stand beside migrants with concrete dedication was almost a political act in the highest sense of the term: an act of civic responsibility.

I am proud to have told this universal piece of history. Proud to have embodied a woman who crossed the ocean not in search of personal fortune, but to bring care. Proud, as a Neapolitan, to have given voice to a story that speaks of departures and arrivals, of nostalgia and hope, of identities that transform without being lost.

Portraying Francesca Cabrini changed me. It made me more aware of my roots and more open to the world. It reminded me that every human being, ultimately, is the child of a migration. And that recognizing this truth means recognizing the other as part of the same great human story.



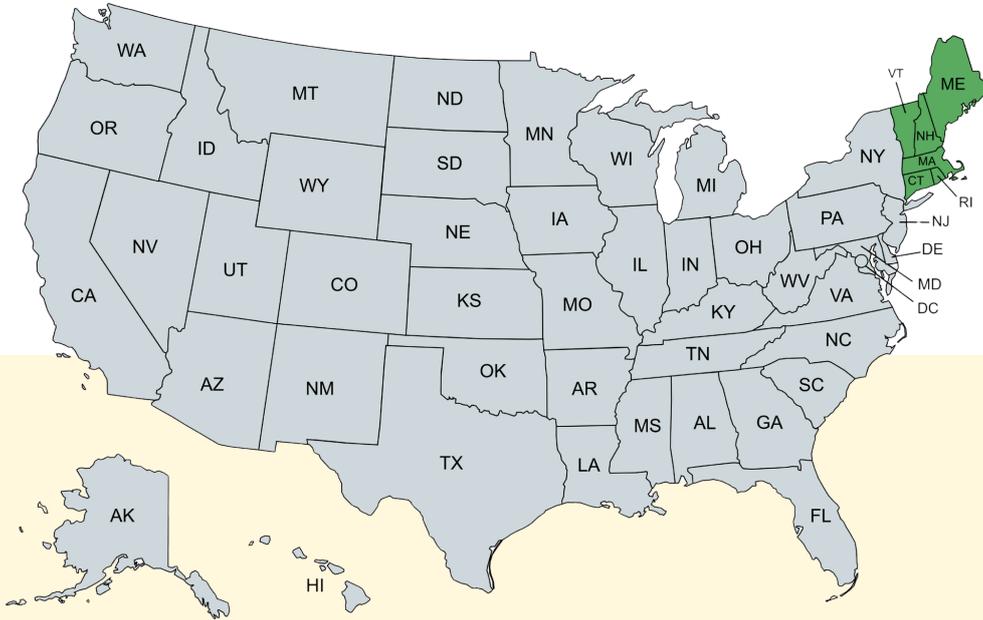
**Cristiana Dell'Anna** was born in Naples. She began her acting career in London. In the US independent feature "Cabrini," Cristiana stars as Mother Francesca Cabrini, the Italian nun who fought for equal rights in the New York of the late 1800s.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes



## New England

End of February 2026



**Connecticut** - From Italian roots to the Governor's office, Ella Grasso and Connecticut

**Maine** - Protasio Neri and the Italian stonecutters who shaped Maine

**Massachusetts (Boston)** - George Scigliano, a North End legacy of integrity and justice in Boston, MA

**Massachusetts (Brockton)** - Rocky Marciano, the champion who made his city great

**Massachusetts (Springfield)** - Theodore Di Mauro, the first Italian American Mayor of Springfield, MA

**Massachusetts (Wakefield)** - John Volpe, the Italian American who changed Massachusetts

**New Hampshire** - Eileen Dondero Foley, a life in service to New Hampshire

**Rhode Island** - John Pastore and his lasting impact on Rhode Island

**Vermont** - Angelo Ambrosini and the art of granite in Barre, VT



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes



*Ella Grasso*

### **From Italian roots to the Governor's office, Ella Grasso and Connecticut**

Ella Grasso's life and career tell a distinctly Italian American story rooted in Connecticut and marked by historic firsts. Born Ella Rose Giovanna Oliva Tambussi on May 10, 1919, in Windsor Locks, she was the only child of Italian immigrants Giacomo and Maria Tambussi. Her parents passed on not only their language – she spoke fluent Italian – but also a deep sense of discipline, community, and public responsibility that would shape her political identity. In an era when the children of immigrants were still fighting for full acceptance, Grasso never hid her background. Instead, she carried her Italian heritage into the heart of American public life.

educated in Catholic schools and later at Mount Holyoke College, where she earned both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree by age 23, Grasso combined academic rigor with practical experience. During World War II she worked for Connecticut's War Manpower

## Connecticut

E Commission, helping manage labor needs in a state heavily involved in defense production. This early exposure to employment policy and economic planning left a lasting imprint on her priorities as a lawmaker.

Grasso entered politics through the League of Women Voters, convinced that real change required a seat at the table. Elected to the Connecticut House of Representatives in 1952, she quickly rose through the ranks. By 1955 she had become the first woman floor leader in the state legislature, a milestone that reflected both her skill and the gradual opening of politics to women and ethnic minorities. In 1958 she was elected secretary of the state of Connecticut, a post she held for three consecutive terms, building a formidable statewide network and modernizing election administration.

After a brief but impactful period in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1971 to 1975, Grasso returned her focus to Connecticut. In Congress she concentrated on jobs, wages, and worker protections, delivering tangible results to her district. She supported increases to the minimum wage, expanded coverage for millions of workers, and helped bring hundreds of federally funded jobs to Connecticut communities struggling with unemployment rates that in some towns exceeded 10%.

Her defining achievement came in 1974, when she was elected governor of Connecticut. This victory made her the first woman ever elected governor of a U.S. state in her own right, not as the spouse or successor of a male officeholder. It was a watershed moment in American politics and a powerful symbol for women and Italian Americans nationwide.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes

As governor from 1975 to 1981, Grasso led Connecticut through severe fiscal challenges. She imposed budget discipline, vetoed spending bills when necessary, and earned a reputation for fiscal responsibility without abandoning social priorities. Under her leadership, the state navigated recession-era pressures while maintaining essential services. Her approval ratings remained strong, and in 1978 she won re-election with about 59% of the vote.

Grasso's career embodied the journey of Italian Americans from immigrant neighborhoods to the highest levels of government. She proved that heritage and leadership were not in conflict, and that a woman with an Italian surname could become one of the most respected governors in the country. Her legacy in Connecticut is not only historical, but civic – a reminder that public service, when grounded in community values, can reshape both a state and a nation.



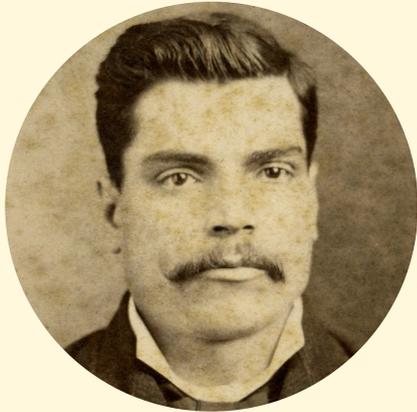
**Anna Carabetta** is a dynamic Italian American leader, the We the Italians Ambassador in Connecticut. Anna balances entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and family life, raising five children while celebrating Italian culture, community, and heritage in every endeavor.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes



*Protasio Neri*

### **Maine Protasio Neri and the Italian stonecutters who shaped Maine**

The story of Protasio Neri is closely tied to the rise of Maine's granite industry and to the broader contribution of Italian stonecutters who transformed both the economy and the labor culture of the state. Born in Levigliani, near the Carrara marble district in Tuscany, Neri arrived in Maine in 1877, part of a wave of skilled Italian artisans drawn by the demand for high-quality granite. He was 27 years old and already trained in advanced carving techniques that were rare in the United States at the time.

Neri found work in Hallowell, a river town that had become one of the most important granite centers in the country. By the late 19th century, Hallowell granite was prized for public buildings, monuments and infrastructure projects nationwide. Neri quickly distinguished himself not only as a capable stonecutter but as an accomplished sculptor, able to produce detailed decorative elements as well as large-scale architectural work. His craftsmanship helped

## Maine

reinforce Maine's reputation for precision stone carving.

At the turn of the century, Maine led the United States in granite production. Around 1901, the state counted roughly 152 active quarries employing about 3,500 workers. That year, granite sales reached approximately \$2.5 million, a massive figure for the period and equivalent to well over \$100 million today. Italian immigrants made up a significant share of this workforce, especially in skilled carving positions. In some Hallowell quarries, Italian and Scottish workers represented close to 90 % of the artisans responsible for finishing stone used in major public projects, including government buildings.

Italian stonecutters brought with them not only technical knowledge but also strong traditions of collective organization. Work in the quarries was physically demanding and dangerous. Shifts commonly lasted 10 to 12 hours a day, six or seven days a week, and accidents were frequent. Wages varied, but many workers struggled to support families, especially recent immigrants who had relocated spouses and children from Italy.

These conditions pushed many granite workers to join labor unions. Neri became an active figure in the Granite Cutters Union, which sought standardized wages, shorter hours and safer working environments. In 1892, granite workers across New England launched a coordinated strike that lasted more than five months. In Hallowell, Neri emerged as a leader, helping to organize meetings and acting as a bridge between Italian-speaking workers and the broader union movement. His ability to write and communicate across communities proved essential during the dispute.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes

The strike ended in October 1892 with meaningful gains for workers, including wage increases and improved recognition of union rights. These changes reshaped labor relations in the granite industry and strengthened the position of skilled artisans. Neri continued working in Maine for years, leaving behind carvings that still survive today and a legacy rooted in both craftsmanship and activism.

The Italian stonecutters of Hallowell did more than extract and shape stone. They helped build civic landmarks, advanced labor rights and established lasting communities. Today, about 9 % of Hallowell's population traces its roots to Italy, a reminder that Maine's granite heritage is also an immigrant story, carved by hands like those of Protasio Neri.



***We the Italians***  
*Editorial Staff*



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes



*George Scigliano*

### **George Scigliano, a North End legacy of integrity and justice in Boston, MA**

George Scigliano was born in the North End on August 26, 1874, to Calabrian immigrants who, like so many others, came to America seeking a better life. He attended the Eliot School and went on to study at Boston University School of Law, where he was admitted to the bar in 1899—an extraordinary achievement for the son of new arrivals.

Scigliano's rise was swift. In 1900, he was elected to the Boston Common Council, serving three one-year terms. In 1903, he became the first Italian American elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where he served until his untimely death. Yet it was not his titles that won him the lasting loyalty of his community—it was his tireless defense of the poor, the exploited, and the newly arrived.

He introduced legislation to regulate immigrant banks, which had been swindling working families out of their savings. Many Italian immigrants distrusted banks for good reason; their skepticism was born from bitter experience. Scigliano also founded the Italian Protective League of Boston, a benevolent society for new immigrants, and helped form the first Italian labor union in the North End. He worked to

## Massachusetts (Boston)

defeat a bill requiring workers to be naturalized citizens, fought to end the predatory “padrone” labor system, and even secured a cemetery for Italians—St. Michael’s Cemetery—after they were denied burial in others.

These were not small reforms; they were acts of dignity. They recognized the Italian laborer as fully human in a world determined to treat him otherwise.

Scigliano also confronted bigotry head-on. When a Massachusetts senator mocked Italians as inferior, he replied with biting eloquence:

“The Italian, a people descended from the ancient Roman dynasty which conquered all of the then known world and educated it; which entered and conquered England at a time when the ancestors of our able senator were roaming savages...”

In 1905, in recognition of his service to Italian Americans, King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy named him Cavaliere della Corona d’Italia (Knight of the Italian Crown).

Scigliano’s death in 1906 left a void, but his spirit remains alive in every effort to protect the rights of immigrants, workers, and the poor. He was not only a North Ender but a symbol of the immigrant’s moral struggle for fairness in a new land. His work reminds us that citizenship is not a gift granted from above but a dignity earned through service to others.



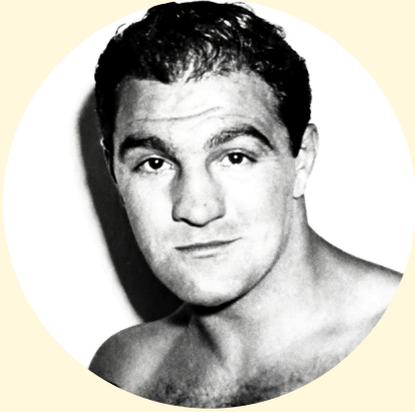
**Tom Damigella** is involved with several Italian American associations like the Italian American Alliance and the Conference of Presidents of Major Italian Organizations, and since 2022 is President of the North End Historical Society.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes



### *Rocky Marciano*

#### **Rocky Marciano, the champion who made his city great**

Rocky Marciano is one of the most legendary figures in the history of world boxing. Born on September 1, 1923, in Brockton, Massachusetts, as Rocco Francis Marchegiano, he remains to this day the only heavyweight world champion to retire undefeated: 49 wins in 49 fights, including 43 by knockout. Decades later, that record still stands as a symbol of determination, sacrifice, and sheer willpower.

His parents had emigrated from Abruzzo, Italy. His father, Pierino Marchegiano, came from Ripa Teatina, in the province of Chieti; his mother, Pasqualina Picciuto, was also from Abruzzo. Like many Italian families in the early twentieth century, they left their homeland in search of work and stability in the United States, settling in a working-class community where daily life meant hard labor and few guarantees. Rocky grew up in this environment, absorbing from an early age the values typical of Italian immigration: respect for family, discipline, humility, and a strong work ethic.

## Massachusetts (Brockton)

As a young man, he played several sports, including baseball, and at first seemed destined for a different path. Boxing entered his life almost by chance during his military service, but it quickly became his calling. The surname Marchegiano was simplified to Marciano, a common choice among Italian immigrants seeking easier integration into American society. Yet Rocky never denied his roots; on the contrary, he was proud of them, becoming a powerful symbol of redemption and pride for millions of Italian Americans.

In 1952, he won the heavyweight world title by defeating Jersey Joe Walcott in one of the most famous fights in boxing history. His style was not graceful or highly technical like that of other champions, but it was extraordinarily effective: relentless pressure, the ability to absorb punishment, and devastating punching power. His right hand, nicknamed "Suzie Q," is still regarded as one of the most formidable blows ever seen in a ring. He retired in 1956 at just 32 years old, still champion and without ever experiencing defeat. That perfect record has helped make his legacy almost mythical.

Brockton owes a great deal to Rocky Marciano. At a time when the city, known primarily for its shoe industry, was undergoing economic and social change, Marciano's success placed the name of Brockton on the front pages of newspapers around the world. To this day, the city is known as the "City of Champions," a nickname largely tied to his extraordinary achievement.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes

His image has given pride and identity to generations of residents, many of whom come from immigrant families. Marciano embodied the proof that even the son of factory workers, raised in a modest neighborhood, could rise to become heavyweight champion of the world. In Brockton, statues, commemorative events, and community initiatives keep his memory alive. But the greatest debt is symbolic: Rocky Marciano personified the fighting spirit of his city and transformed it into a universal example of perseverance and success.

The iconic film Rocky, written by and starring Italian American actor Sylvester Stallone, bears its name as a tribute to boxing legend Rocky Marciano, a lasting symbol of determination and Italian American pride.



***We the Italians***  
*Editorial Staff*



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes



*Theodore DiMauro*

### **Theodore Di Mauro, the first Italian American Mayor of Springfield, MA**

Often when we talk about “great Italian-Americans” our attention is immediately directed to our amazing heritage of explorers such as Christopher Columbus or John Cabot, or to popular musicians like Frank Sinatra. Rarely, however, do we ever talk about the great men and women who, through their assiduous and constant work, elevated the perception of Italian-Americans. In Springfield, Massachusetts, Theodore DiMauro towers above the rest in his efforts to regenerate a struggling city facing urban and industrial decline, showing the impact of Italian-American leadership in local government, obliterating the sense of corruption to which Italians are often associated.

Theodore DiMauro grew up as the youngest of five sons of Sebastiano and Sebastiana DiMauro. He has always been devoted to his local Italian-American community. Indeed, he had plenty of opportunities to escape the city’s urban blight after studying at St Michael’s College, Boston College Law School, and New York University. Instead, he took his newfound skills and

## Massachusetts (Springfield)

education and was determined to return home and serve his city. He first began his foray into public life by being elected to the School Committee, and subsequently was elected to the City Council, earning respect and admiration from his colleagues for his leadership.

Eventually, DiMauro decided to throw his hat into the 1977 mayoral race, winning the race and becoming the first elected mayor of Italian descent in Springfield when taking office in 1978. This was a huge development in a city historically dominated by its active Irish-American population, despite the existing decades-long presence of Italians. Mayor DiMauro wasted no time upon taking office, dedicated to renewing life in a decaying urban infrastructure. During his term he helped usher in Springfield’s famous Basketball Hall of Fame, secured business and government partnerships to build Springfield’s Civic Center, and refurbished the Classical-style Symphony Hall.

He cultivated partnerships with Congressman Edward Boland, who helped secure funds for urban redevelopment, together with a coalition of business partners. The riverfront, long struggling with decaying and unsightly buildings, was cleaned up, and he created a cable television endowment that continues to contribute to the city’s coffers.

DiMauro, after three successful terms, did not seek reelection in 1983. Yet his legacy is still felt throughout the city today. It’s difficult to imagine corporations like MGM choosing to invest in downtown Springfield without DiMauro’s extensive efforts. He indeed paved the way for the current incumbent Italian-American mayor of Springfield, Domenic Sarno, to be elected. Sarno is currently the longest serving mayor in the city’s history.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes

DiMauro, following the example of the millions of our own ancestors who came to this country and went around the world, gave pride to Italian-Americans not as someone who accomplished great things, but as a man who had pride in his work, had integrity, and worked to better those around him while clinging to our thousand-year culture. It's not surprising then that civic leaders in the city today are honored with the Theodore DiMauro Award for civic leadership by Springfield's St Padre Pio #3013 chapter of the Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America.

Viva l'Italia, Viva l'America, e Viva l'America Italiana!



**Dario Gagliano** is a founding member and current Vice President of the St Padre Pio Lodge #3013 of the Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America in Springfield, Massachusetts, and one of the leaders of the Future of the Order Forum.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes



*John Volpe*

### **John Volpe, the Italian American who changed Massachusetts**

John Anthony Volpe was one of the most important figures in the political history of Massachusetts and a clear example of the rise of Italian Americans in public life in the twentieth century United States. Born in Wakefield, Massachusetts, on December 8, 1908, he was the son of Italian immigrants from Pescosansonesco, in the Abruzzo region. His parents, Vito Volpe and Filomena Benedetto, had left Italy at the beginning of the century in search of opportunity and a better future, bringing with them values of sacrifice, hard work, and a strong sense of family.

Raised in a working-class community in Massachusetts, Volpe quickly learned the importance of personal commitment and education. He studied at the Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston, specializing in architectural construction. After graduating, he founded a construction company that became one of the most important in the region. His success in the building sector earned him a reputation as a pragmatic man, capable of managing complex projects and working efficiently.

## Massachusetts (Wakefield)

His entry into politics came through the Republican Party. After holding several state-level positions, in 1953 he was appointed Commissioner of Public Works of Massachusetts. He later led the Federal Highway Administration, contributing to the development of the Interstate Highway System, one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects in American history. His technical and managerial experience translated into a modern vision of transportation and infrastructure.

In 1960 he was elected Governor of Massachusetts, a position he held in two nonconsecutive terms, from 1961 to 1963 and from 1965 to 1969. His election represented a significant moment for the Italian American community: in a state traditionally led by Anglo-Saxon elites, the son of Italian immigrants reached the highest state office. During his administration he promoted important reforms: he addressed inequalities in the school system, supported public housing programs, reorganized the state administration, and introduced the first Massachusetts sales tax to strengthen public finances.

Wakefield, the city where he was born, owes much to Volpe not only for the prestige he brought to the community, but also for the example he represented. His career demonstrated that even starting from an immigrant family, one could rise to the highest levels of American institutions without giving up one's roots. His name is still associated with public facilities and initiatives that recall his civic commitment.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes

Massachusetts also owes him a great deal. Volpe helped modernize infrastructure, strengthen the state's financial management, and promote a more balanced vision of transportation that included roads, railroads, and urban mobility. He was later appointed United States Secretary of Transportation and then Ambassador to Italy, the first Italian American ever, further consolidating his role as a bridge between America and his parents' homeland.

His story is that of an Italian American who was able to combine technical expertise, respect for institutions, and pride in his origins. For Wakefield and for Massachusetts, John Volpe remains a symbol of leadership, integration, and public service – a man who transformed the opportunities he received into a concrete and lasting contribution to his community.



**We the Italians**  
*Editorial Staff*



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes



*Eileen Dondero Foley*

### **Eileen Dondero Foley, a life in service to New Hampshire**

Eileen Foley was one of the most influential and enduring public servants in New Hampshire history. Born Helen Dondero in 1918 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, she was the daughter of Mary Ellen Carey Dondero, who was the city's first female mayor. At just five years old, Foley famously cut the ribbon at the 1923 opening of the Memorial Bridge connecting Portsmouth to Kittery, Maine - a ceremony she repeated 90 years later at the bridge's reopening in 2013.

Foley grew up in a working-class Italian American family at a time when immigrant communities were still establishing themselves socially and economically in New England. Her grandparents had immigrated from Italy, and like many Italian-American families of the era, the Donderos placed strong emphasis on faith, family, and civic responsibility. These values would shape Foley's lifelong commitment to public service.

## New Hampshire

Foley's career in government spanned more than four decades and made her a central figure in Portsmouth's political life. She first entered public service in the 1960s and went on to serve multiple terms as mayor of Portsmouth, holding the office for a total of 16 years over different periods. At a time when relatively few women held executive political roles at the municipal level, Foley became a trailblazer. Her leadership helped redefine what was possible for women in New Hampshire politics, and she became widely respected across party lines for her dedication and steady approach.

During her tenure, Portsmouth experienced significant economic and social change. The city, historically reliant on the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and maritime industries, faced the broader challenges affecting many New England communities in the late 20th century. Foley played a key role in guiding the city through redevelopment efforts, downtown revitalization, and infrastructure improvements.

Foley was known for her accessibility and hands-on style. Residents frequently described her as approachable and deeply invested in the well-being of the community. She attended countless local events, met regularly with constituents, and maintained strong relationships with business owners, civic leaders, and neighborhood groups. Her ability to connect with people personally strengthened trust in local government during times of transition.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes

Beyond city hall, Foley was active in numerous civic organizations and charitable causes. Her work reflected the traditional Italian American ethic of service to both family and community. She became a symbol of the contributions Italian immigrants and their descendants made to New Hampshire's civic life, demonstrating how second-generation Americans were shaping leadership in towns and cities across the state.

In recognition of her service, Foley received numerous honors, and Portsmouth later dedicated public spaces in her name. Even after stepping down from office, she remained an influential voice in local affairs. When she passed away in 2016 at the age of 98, tributes poured in from across New Hampshire, praising her integrity, resilience, and commitment to public service.

Eileen Foley's legacy endures not only in Portsmouth's physical landscape but in its civic culture. She exemplified steady, community-centered leadership and stands as one of New Hampshire's most notable Italian-American political figures.



**Frank Ferraro** served in numerous civic and Italian American organizations, most recently as Director and President of the Friends of Italian Americans, the most important Italian organization of in New Hampshire.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes



*John Pastore*

### **John Pastore and his lasting impact on Rhode Island**

John Orlando Pastore remains one of the most consequential political leaders in the history of Rhode Island and a landmark figure in the broader story of Italian American achievement in public life. His career was not only defined by the offices he held, but by the barriers he broke and the lasting impact he had on the state he served for more than four decades.

Born in Providence in 1907 to working-class Italian immigrant parents, Pastore grew up in a community where opportunity had to be earned through discipline and sacrifice. He carried those values into public service. After beginning his career in the Rhode Island House of Representatives, he quickly developed a reputation for seriousness, preparation, and integrity. His rise was steady – assistant attorney general, lieutenant governor, and then governor at just 38 years old.

When Pastore became governor in 1945 and was later elected in his own right, he made history as

## Rhode Island

the first Italian American ever elected governor in the United States. For Rhode Island, this was more than symbolic. It signaled that the children of immigrants were no longer on the margins of political life but at its center. For the state's large Italian American population, particularly in Providence's Federal Hill neighborhood, his election was a source of enormous pride.

As governor, Pastore focused on modernization and fairness. He strengthened the state's fiscal structure, introduced reforms to make elections more democratic, and supported policies that improved infrastructure and public health. He also ensured that World War II veterans received meaningful support upon returning home. His leadership helped move Rhode Island into the postwar era with greater stability and stronger institutions.

In 1950, Pastore once again broke new ground when he was elected to the United States Senate, becoming the first Italian American ever to serve in that body. His election was a milestone not just for Rhode Island but for the entire nation. At a time when ethnic prejudice was still common, his victory demonstrated that merit and dedication could overcome bias.

In the Senate, Pastore became known for his independence and focus on substance over spectacle. He supported civil rights legislation during a transformative period in American history, backed the development of Medicare, and worked on issues related to nuclear energy and national security. He believed that science, education, and responsible government investment were essential to America's future. He also played a key role in supporting public broadcasting, recognizing its importance for education and civic life.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



## Unsung Italian heroes

For Rhode Island, Pastore's long Senate tenure meant influence and stability in Washington. He ensured that the state's economic and industrial interests were represented at the national level. His seniority translated into tangible benefits for Rhode Islanders, strengthening infrastructure and expanding opportunities.

Yet perhaps his greatest legacy lies in what he represented. Pastore never distanced himself from his Italian heritage. He spoke openly of his parents' sacrifices and of the values instilled in him by his community – hard work, loyalty, and faith in democratic institutions. He embodied pride without arrogance, achievement without forgetting one's roots.

Today, John Pastore stands as a symbol of possibility for Rhode Island and for Italian Americans across the country. His life demonstrated that public service grounded in integrity and cultural pride can leave a lasting mark on both a state and a nation.



**Joe Rocco** is the President of the Rhode Island Italian American Hall of Fame, whose mission is to provide financial support to outstanding students pursuing higher education, honor distinguished Italian Americans, and promote the rich Italian heritage.



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### *Angelo Ambrosini*

#### **Angelo Ambrosini and the art of granite in Barre, VT**

Angelo Peter Ambrosini's life traces a classic Barre story: a skilled craft brought from northern Italy, transformed into an American livelihood in the granite sheds, and woven into a tight-knit immigrant community that left a mark far beyond central Vermont.

Ambrosini was born in Varese, Italy, in 1880 and came to Vermont in 1901 –first landing in Northfield, where he carved granite memorials for Elmwood Cemetery. That path – Italy to Vermont to stone – mirrored the broader migration that made Barre the “Granite Capital of the World,” drawing stone cutters, sculptors, and quarrymen (especially from northern Italy) to meet the demand for skilled hands.

What made Ambrosini stand out, even among elite craftsmen, was that his work connected Barre's sheds to some of the country's most prominent public commissions. According to a Barre mayoral proclamation honoring the Ambrosini family, Angelo P. Ambrosini worked with Louis St. Gaudens on the monumental Bethel white granite statues created for Union Station in Washington, D.C. Union Station – meant to project permanence and civic pride – required sculpture and carving that could read at a grand scale, and the fact that a Vermont-

## Vermont

based Italian immigrant helped execute that work is a reminder of how often America's “national” monuments were, in practice, shaped by immigrant hands and union-trained craft.

In 1916, Ambrosini moved with his family to Barre, stepping into an Italian community that was unusually organized, politically engaged, and culturally self-sustaining. Italians in Barre didn't just work together; they built institutions. The Socialist Labor Party Hall—where there is a room dedicated to the Ambrosini family –was constructed in 1900 by Italian immigrants and became a community hub for education, entertainment, mutual aid, and labor organizing. The hall's history reflects how the granite industry wasn't only an economic engine, but also a social and political one, where unions and immigrant associations provided belonging, protection, and a shared public voice.

Ambrosini himself is remembered as part of that fabric: the same proclamation notes his memberships and connections to Barre's Italian fraternal and labor worlds. Yet the Barre granite story also carried a harsh cost. The proclamation records that Ambrosini contracted silicosis from granite dust exposure—an all-too-common fate in the sheds – underscoring that the beauty of Barre's carving tradition was often purchased with workers' health.

Taken together, Angelo P. Ambrosini's career—local memorials, Barre community life, and work tied to Union Station – captures what Barre's Italian stonecutters contributed: not only granite shaped into art, but a durable civic culture. In honoring Angelo Ambrosini, we also honor the thousands of immigrant craftsmen whose skill, resilience, and determination left an indelible mark on Barre – and on the American landscape itself.



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**Lisa DeNatale** grew up in New England, surrounded by a large extended Italian family. She became the Marketing Chair of the Vermont Italian Cultural Association in July, 2020 and in June, 2021 was elected its President.