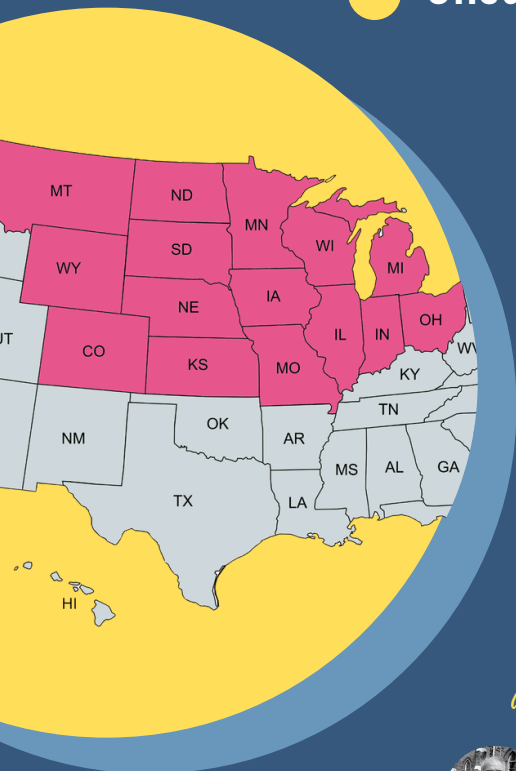


HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

● Italy's role
in America's greatness



● Unsung Italian heroes



HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*



Entertainment



Security and Defense



Made in Italy

250 ^{★ ★ ★} 80
USA YEARS ITALY YEARS



We the Italians

TWO ANNIVERSARIES ONE HEART

AUGUST 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*



Entertainment



Valeria Altobelli

Hollywood, Broadway, and beyond. America's impact on Italian entertainment

Over the last eighty years, the impact of the United States on Italy's entertainment industry has been profound and, overall, highly positive. American influence was not limited to the importation of cultural models; it became a true engine of modernization, technological innovation, and international openness. Italian cinema, television, and music developed through a constant dialogue with the United States, gaining an increasingly global dimension while preserving their own distinctive identity.

In the years following World War II, Italy became one of the primary production hubs for major American film studios. Rome's Cinecittà studios offered highly skilled professionals and competitive production costs. During the 1950s and 1960s, the period known as "Hollywood on the Tiber" emerged. Major productions such as *Ben-Hur*, *Quo Vadis*, and *Cleopatra* were filmed in Italy with American financing and direction, while also relying heavily on the expertise of Italian professionals. This exchange helped raise domestic production standards and established Cinecittà as an international center of excellence.

American influence did not lead to mere imitation. Italian filmmakers reinterpreted American genres in original ways. The Italian western, known worldwide as the "spaghetti western," reinvented the mythology of the American frontier through innovative visual styles and leaner, often grittier storytelling, achieving remarkable international success. At the same time, cultural influence flowed in both directions: Italian Neorealism profoundly affected American directors and producers, helping reshape the language of global cinema.

Over the decades, collaboration expanded through co-productions, film festivals, international distribution networks, and professional exchanges. The adoption of digital technologies, advanced special effects, and new filmmaking techniques – many developed in the United States – allowed the

Italian film industry to remain competitive on a global scale. Without this ongoing exchange, Italian cinema would have faced greater challenges in adapting to international competition.

Italian television also looked to the United States as a model. Since the launch of RAI in 1954, quiz shows, variety programs, and entertainment formats drew inspiration from American television, adapting those ideas to Italian culture and audiences. This influence helped make television a central part of everyday Italian life and contributed to social cohesion during a period of rapid economic and cultural transformation.

One of the most iconic figures bridging these two worlds was Mike Bongiorno, an Italian American who became one of the defining personalities of Italian television. Through his direct, pragmatic style, he introduced the modern quiz show to Italian audiences. His simple and accessible language helped make television more inclusive and popular, shaping its social role for decades.

American television series also had a significant influence on Italian storytelling, introducing more complex narrative structures, greater attention to screenwriting, and a faster pace. In recent decades, Italian producers have invested heavily in high-quality series capable of reaching international audiences. Technologically, the United States pioneered many innovations – from color television to streaming platforms – that Italy gradually adopted, helping reduce the technological gap.

In music, American influence was equally important. Genres such as jazz, swing, and rock and roll introduced new rhythms and musical languages that profoundly influenced Italian artists. During the 1960s and 1970s, American pop music helped renew both musical styles and youth culture. Italian performers successfully



HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*



Entertainment



blended these influences with the country's melodic tradition, creating distinctive and recognizable sounds.

The recording industry also modernized through American models. Marketing strategies, music charts, radio and television promotion, music videos, and international tours became essential tools for artists and record companies. This evolution strengthened the industry and increased its competitiveness. American influence also encouraged the creation of major music events and television formats capable of connecting Italian artists with international audiences.

Another important area of exchange was musical theater. Broadway productions were adapted and staged in Italy with high artistic standards, helping train new generations of performers capable of working in an international environment.

American popular culture – through film, television, and music – contributed to the creation of a shared global imagination. Promotional techniques such as product placement and integrated marketing campaigns also transformed how content was produced and distributed in Italy.

Italian Americans played a particularly significant role in this exchange. Artists, directors, producers, and musicians proudly embraced their Italian roots while helping strengthen cultural ties between the two countries. At the same time, many Italian professionals found opportunities in the United States, while American artists worked in Italy, creating valuable and lasting creative cross-pollination.

Looking back at this history, it is clear that Italy's entertainment industry owes much to the United States. Without postwar economic support, technological innovation, and the influence of American production and storytelling models, the growth of the sector would have been slower and more difficult. Yet Italy never abandoned its own identity. Instead, it absorbed and reinterpreted these influences, transforming them into original expressions of Italian creativity.

It can therefore be said without hesitation that Italy and the United States have shared one of the most intense and fruitful cultural dialogues in the Western world's

entertainment industry. One particularly fascinating example of this ongoing exchange of "viae pulchritudinis" – pathways of beauty – is found in Italian American musicians, who built a permanent bridge between the two nations, paving it with beauty, authenticity, and artistic excellence.

Among the artists of Italian descent who left an indelible mark on American music are Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Dean Martin, Madonna, Frank Zappa, Jon Bon Jovi, and Lady Gaga.

Many of them maintained – and still maintain – elements of Italian tradition while fully participating in American culture, proudly celebrating their Italian heritage.

Another fascinating aspect is that these great American artists viewed Italy not merely as a geographic place, but as a permanent school of beauty – a country where painting, architecture, music, and daily life seem to merge into a single aesthetic experience.

A few brief quotations say more than pages of analysis. During his stay in Italy in the 1930s, George Gershwin wrote: "Italy is a place where one feels that art is part of everyday life," a reflection often cited to describe the impression Italy left on American artists.

It is well known that Frank Sinatra frequently spoke with pride about his Italian roots: "I'm proud of my Italian heritage," a simple statement that became symbolic for millions of Italian Americans.

Finally, Tony Bennett often remarked: "Italy taught the world beauty." The son of Italian immigrants, Bennett frequently said that Italy's artistic tradition shaped his aesthetic sensibility both as a singer and as a painter.

God bless the USA! God bless Italy!

Valeria Altobelli is an Italian artist whose career combines music, law, and international relations. Recognized in the United States for her artistic and social commitment, she has collaborated with Diane Warren, John Debney, the Juilliard School, and UNICEF. She created WOMEN AID, an international project uniting female musicians from five continents, featured in a Rai documentary broadcast on Rai 1.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*



Security and Defense



Carmine de Pascale

Italy and the United States, from common defense to the new space frontier

In 2026, Italy and the United States are celebrating 2 anniversaries that belong not only to our shared memory, but also to our identity. On one side is the 250th anniversary of the United States, the world's oldest constitutional democracy. On the other is the 80th anniversary of the Italian Republic, born from the ruins of war and strengthened within a system of alliances that has ensured stability, freedom, and modernization. As both countries mark these milestones, the history of defense and security may be the most candid chapter of all – one that explains, without rhetoric, why Italy today has so much for which to thank the United States.

When the Italian Republic took its first steps, the world was already divided into opposing blocs. Italy was a vulnerable country, with a military to rebuild, an unstable Mediterranean, and a democracy still in its infancy. Joining NATO in 1949 was more than a geopolitical decision – it was a choice that shaped Italy's destiny. The United States offered Italy not only protection, but also a model of collective security that allowed its democracy to grow without the constant threat of isolation. For decades, America's strategic umbrella enabled Italy to focus on its economic, social, and industrial development. Security was no longer a solitary undertaking – it had become a shared responsibility.

This cooperation took tangible form at American military installations across Italy, including Sigonella, Aviano, Vicenza, Gaeta, and Camp Darby. These locations are often mentioned and sometimes debated, but their true function is rarely fully understood. At these installations, Italians and Americans have worked side by side to maintain stability in the Mediterranean, monitor crises, prevent threats, and train according to common standards. During the Cold War, these bases provided essential deterrence. In the decades that followed, they became logistical and operational platforms supporting missions in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf, as well as counterterrorism efforts. They are hubs of

interoperability – places where Italian and American security intersect and where procedures, technologies, and military doctrines merge into a common language.

The most profound contribution to the transformation of Italy's defense establishment, however, has come through innovation. The United States introduced a technological and doctrinal culture into the Italian military system that accelerated the modernization of the Armed Forces. A great many Italian officers have studied at American military academies and institutions, gaining an approach to security based on rapid decision-making, interoperability, and integration across operational domains.

Industrial cooperation has enabled Italy to participate in advanced programs ranging from 5th-generation aircraft and missile systems to secure communications, transport aircraft, and major naval projects. These have not been simple procurement arrangements. They have been genuine partnerships that strengthened Italy's domestic technological base and created an industrial ecosystem capable of competing globally.

Then there is space, the new strategic domain. Artemis II, the first crewed mission toward the Moon in more than 50 years, symbolizes a partnership that no longer looks only at Earth. Artemis is not a repetition of the Apollo missions – it marks the beginning of a new era. The objective is not merely to return to the Moon, but to establish a lasting presence there by building permanent infrastructure, transforming the lunar surface into a scientific and operational laboratory, and preparing for the journey to Mars.

Italy is not merely an observer in this endeavor – it is a leading participant. The country contributes to the European Service Module, or



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Security and Defense



ESM, of the Orion spacecraft, which is essential to the crew's propulsion, power supply, and life-support functions. Leonardo manufactures the 11-kilowatt solar panels that power the spacecraft's onboard systems. Thales Alenia Space and Telespazio provide tracking, control, and mission-support technologies. In addition, an agreement signed in Washington in 2026 calls for Italy to participate in the construction of lunar habitation modules, bringing Italian engineering excellence into space.

Artemis II demonstrates that cooperation between Italy and the United States is no longer confined to the land or air – it now extends into space, which has become a strategic domain alongside land, sea, air, and cyberspace. In this new environment, security is measured not only in bases, fleets, and aircraft, but also in the ability to operate in orbit, protect satellites, develop dual-use technologies, and build infrastructure that may one day prove essential to both defense and the economy.

This cooperation is further reinforced by NASA's selection of Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano as the crew pilot for Artemis III, with testing scheduled for 2027 and a lunar landing planned for 2028.

The Italian Republic's 80-year history tells the story of a country that learned to grow within a system of alliances, international missions, and technological partnerships. The United States has been Italy's most consistent partner – in the Balkans, Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf, as well as in counterterrorism operations, maritime security, and airspace defense. Italy's gratitude is not rhetorical. It reflects an awareness that Italian democracy was able to develop in a protected environment, where threats were contained by an alliance greater than any single country.

And so, as we celebrate "Two Anniversaries, One Heart" in 2026, we recognize that the history of security is also a history of trust. The United States helped Italy become a secure, modern, and forward-looking republic. Italy, in turn, has contributed to American security through its role

in the Mediterranean, NATO missions, space exploration, and industrial programs. Two anniversaries, one heart – because freedom is never an isolated gift, but the result of a shared commitment.

That is why, today as in the past, the American and Italian peoples stand on the same side of history. They stood together during the Cold War, defending Europe against the threat of division. They stood together in peacekeeping missions, during crises in the Mediterranean, in the fight against terrorism, and in the defense of allied airspace. Now they also stand together in deep space, where Artemis II signals the beginning of a new era.

They will continue to stand together tomorrow, when security will be measured not only by military strength, but by the ability to protect digital infrastructure, space ecosystems, energy networks, and democratic identities. In a changing world, Italy and the United States will remain allies because they share what matters most – the conviction that freedom must always be defended, that human rights are universal, and that democracy is a daily commitment rather than an inheritance that can be taken for granted.

Two anniversaries, one heart – and a future that will once again find Italy and the United States standing together on the side of history where freedom does not retreat, dignity does not fade, and democracies do not surrender.

*General (Ret.) **Carmine De Pascale** previously served as Commander of the Garibaldi Bersaglieri Brigade, Defense Attaché to Italy's Permanent Representation to the European Union, Commander of the Italian Contingent in Nasiriyah, Iraq, Chief of Coalition Operations at Multinational Force - Iraq Headquarters, and Commander of Italy's 2nd Defense Forces Command. His U.S. decorations include the Bronze Star Medal and the Legion of Merit.*



HAPPY BIRTHDAY
ITALY *from the US*



Made in Italy



Alberto Improda

Made in Italy, powered by America

Made in Italy represents one of the fundamental strengths of our country's economy on the global stage.

It is a distinctive hallmark of Italian production, giving everything that comes from the Italian peninsula a unique degree of originality and competitiveness.

People often ask what the essence of Made in Italy truly is. I believe the most convincing answer lies in the distinctive relationship between the Economy and Culture in Italy.

As the respected journalist Armando Massarenti wrote: "Why, despite everything, is our brand so extraordinarily successful? And what is this brand made of? It may seem surprising, but it can be summed up in a single word: Culture. We are the Country of Culture. Everywhere in the world."

The 2012 Federculture Annual Report, "Culture and Development," had already stated: "In the world, Italy means art and its cities. It is known for Bernini's Colonnade, the Sassi of Matera, and Milan Cathedral. We have an extraordinary brand that remains powerful in the international imagination and highly effective commercially. Just as the Ferrero and Armani brands evoke Italian quality in the confectionery and fashion industries, the Amalfi Coast, Salento, and the Colosseum represent an extraordinary asset in terms of global visibility and reputation – one whose value we have yet to fully appreciate."

Made in Italy can therefore be regarded as what might be called an "endocrine" element of our country – something that originates from within and permeates the entire national system.

This does not change the fact that Italy's relationship with the United States over the past 80 years has been essential to its development.

Without the American contribution, for a combination of reasons, Made in Italy would probably have remained smaller, less prosperous, less organized, and less influential around the world.

The first reason is historical. After World War II, Italy was a wounded country – physically devastated and psychologically exhausted. In that context, the United States was not merely a political and military ally, but also a driving force behind Italy's economic reconstruction. The Western framework guaranteed by America provided stability, access to markets, international confidence, and an environment favorable to investment. Within this ecosystem, many Italian companies were able to recover, modernize their production processes, and prepare for the coming economic boom.

The second reason concerns the market. America has always been one of the most important markets for absorbing, appreciating, and paying a premium for Italian products. This is crucial. An industry does not truly grow simply because it produces quality – it grows when it finds consumers willing to recognize that quality economically. The United States has done exactly that for Italian fashion, furniture, food, wine, yachting, jewelry, specialized machinery, and luxury goods.

Then there is the cultural factor. The United States helped make Made in Italy desirable, not merely available. Movies, television, newspapers, advertising, major department stores, lifestyle magazines, and later digital media all served as enormous amplifiers of the Italian image. For millions of American consumers, Italy became synonymous with elegance, pleasure, quality of life, conviviality, everyday beauty, fine materials, and attention to detail. This symbolic capital had a direct impact on Italian businesses.



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Made in Italy



A fourth factor is the human bridge created by Italian Americans. Communities of Italian descent in the United States played a vital role in keeping familiarity with Italian culture alive and gradually transforming it into broader economic demand. First through family ties, and later through restaurants, importers, clubs, associations, local media, festivals, and commercial and professional networks, Italian Americans made Italy feel less distant and more accessible to the American market. They served as cultural interpreters, informal ambassadors, and often the first buyers or promoters of Italian products.

Nor should we underestimate the fact that the United States also compelled Made in Italy to improve. Entering the American market has never been easy. It means meeting high standards and dealing with professional distribution, advanced branding strategies, intellectual property protection, competitive packaging, effective communication, and demanding expectations regarding customer service. This competition benefited Italian companies. It forced them to move beyond a purely production-oriented approach and embrace a more comprehensive model based on brand identity, storytelling, consistency, reliability, and customer experience.

Italy's relationship with capital, management, and modern commercial practices also benefited from its interaction with America. For many Italian companies, the United States became a practical school of organization, internationalization, and growth. Italy did not always imitate America successfully, but engagement with the United States almost always made the country more aware of its own strengths and weaknesses. One emblematic example is Adriano Olivetti and the educational journeys he made to the United States.

The relationship between Made in Italy and the United States has historically been extremely close and fruitful. It is highly desirable that it remain so in the future.

As noted at the beginning, Made in Italy finds its deepest essence in our country's Culture – in other words, in our history and our roots.

At times, however, these roots can become an obstacle on our journey toward Tomorrow – a burden that slows the country's progress toward the Future.

With its natural, historic, and deeply ingrained drive toward the New, the United States represents an irreplaceable source of inspiration for Made in Italy and a powerful force propelling it forward.

Alberto Improda is CEO of Studio Legale Improda and president of Centro Studi Cross Route Impresa, Malacoda, and Fondazione Città Italia. He holds roles with the ESG European Institute, Ream SGR, Fondazione Messina, Art Thinking Project, and Italian Sharing Economy Association. He lectures at ISIA Rome, is a Senior Fellow in Turin, and has authored numerous essays and scholarly publications.



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



Maria Montessori,

Maria Montessori, innovation and educational excellence in America

In 1909, the American journal *The Kindergarten Primary Magazine* published an article comparing different approaches to early childhood education. It introduced the Italian experience of the Casa dei Bambini, founded in Rome by Maria Montessori in 1907, highlighting its role in fostering the holistic development of young children.

It was the first sign of an interest that would grow exponentially, eventually making the United States the country where the Montessori educational approach achieved its widest and most sustained expansion. Through the dedication and expertise of hundreds of educators and teachers, Montessori principles became deeply integrated into the American public education system.

The pioneers of this movement were the first American teachers and education scholars who traveled to Italy between 1909 and 1911 to observe Montessori's work firsthand and study the foundations of her method. Upon returning home, they became its earliest and most influential advocates.

Building on these experiences, in February 1911 Professor Henry W. Holmes of the Harvard University Division of Education encouraged Montessori to translate *The Montessori Method: Scientific Pedagogy as Applied to Child Education in the Children's Houses* into English to reach a broader audience.

"This suggestion," Montessori wrote in the preface to the American edition published in 1912, "represented one of the greatest events in the history of my educational work" because it opened the door to the spread of both the Montessori Method and the Casa dei Bambini in the United States. The first American Children's House had already been established in 1911 in a suburb of New York by Anne George, a dedicated teacher who had spent an extended period in Italy observing Montessori's classrooms and who personally helped translate her work into English.

The popularity of the American edition inspired 68 American teachers and educators to travel to Rome in 1913 to attend the first international Montessori teacher training course. The growing interest in Montessori's educational philosophy – particularly its remarkable success in addressing the needs of children with learning differences – attracted the support of influential American figures such as Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Helen Keller, and Margaret Woodrow Wilson, daughter of President Woodrow Wilson. Each recognized the transformative potential of Montessori's ideas.

In 1913, American journalist and publisher Samuel McClure persuaded Montessori to travel to the United States for a lecture tour that included Washington, New York, and Boston. He described it as "a journey to conquer the world."

Her lectures, meetings with educators, scholars, public officials, and intellectuals, together with the extensive coverage in *McClure's Magazine*, gave tremendous momentum to the creation of Montessori schools and the emergence of a genuine educational movement.

The Montessori American Committee was established in New York in 1912, followed in 1913 by the Montessori Educational Association in Washington, D.C. Both organizations played a key role in promoting the Montessori Method throughout public and private schools across the country.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Italy's role in America's greatness

That same year, Alexander Graham Bell and his wife Mabel published an article in the *Evening Star* expressing their hope that Washington would become the headquarters of Montessori education in America.

The Bells also arranged a meeting between Montessori and Washington State's Superintendent of Public Instruction, who declared that Montessori education brought to the United States "the seed of true freedom – the freedom that liberates individuality from constraint and subjugation and allows the human personality to develop naturally."

Montessori's emphasis on independence, self-directed learning, and respect for the child's natural development sparked an intense national conversation about the need to modernize educational practices. Numerous experimental programs followed, many of them achieving remarkable success.

When Montessori returned to the United States in 1915 with her son Mario, 130 Children's Houses were already operating successfully across the country.

During this second visit, she met with hundreds of educators in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego. She also participated in the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, where she presented one of the most memorable demonstrations of her method through the famous "Glass Classroom." Visitors were able to observe 30 children working independently in a fully functioning Montessori classroom, witnessing the method in action.

Montessori's two visits to America, together with the English translations of many of her educational writings, significantly accelerated the spread of her educational philosophy. However, it was the founding of the American Montessori Society (AMS) in 1960, inspired by Mario Montessori, that firmly established the Montessori Method as a respected educational model within American public education.

In 1967, Hilltop School in Reading, Ohio (now closed), became the first public Montessori school in the United States. From that pioneering initiative, the

method expanded into public schools serving students of all grade levels throughout the nation.

Building on these early successes, the American Montessori Society, together with the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the Montessori Children's Academy (MCA), helped launch a quiet but lasting educational revolution. Today, the United States is one of the countries where Montessori education is most widely represented, with approximately 5,000 public and private Montessori schools, including about 500 accredited public schools recognized by the AMS.

American public Montessori schools have become models of educational excellence. One notable example came in 2010, when Clark Montessori Junior and High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, was selected as a finalist in the Race to the Top Commencement Challenge, a nationwide competition launched by the Obama administration and the U.S. Department of Education. Public high schools were invited to submit creative applications and videos demonstrating how they prepared students for college and careers. The winning prize was a commencement address by President Barack Obama.

Maria Montessori made an extraordinary contribution to educational innovation in the United States. Her work advanced educational research, elevated the professional development of teachers and educators, and laid the foundation for the continuous improvement of American public education. More than a century after her ideas first crossed the Atlantic, her vision continues to inspire schools committed to nurturing the intellectual, social, and personal growth of every child.



Maura Striano is Full Professor of General and Social Pedagogy at the University of Naples Federico II and Councilor for Education and Families for the City of Naples. A leading scholar of John Dewey, she served two terms on the Board of the John Dewey Society, contributing to the international advancement of educational research and democratic education.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Italy's role in America's greatness



Enrico Caruso,

Enrico Caruso, the singer who changed the history of music and Italian immigration

Described as "the greatest tenor of all time," Enrico Caruso was born in Naples in 1873. He grew up in modest, if not impoverished, circumstances. His father worked in an iron foundry, while his mother earned a living cleaning houses. Despite the family's financial struggles, Caruso attended school regularly and showed an early talent for drawing. He first sang in church choirs and later performed in the streets and cafés of Naples as a posteggiatore singer. Rather than attending the city's renowned conservatory, he studied privately with vocal teacher Guglielmo Vergine.

Caruso made his operatic debut in 1895 at Naples' Teatro Nuovo, launching a remarkable career that soon took him far beyond Italy. Between 1897 and 1900, he toured extensively, performing in Egypt, Russia, Buenos Aires, Lisbon, London, and other international destinations. Admired by Giacomo Puccini, he sang the role of Rodolfo in the London premiere of *La Bohème* before opening La Scala's 1900 season under the baton of Arturo Toscanini.

In 1901, Caruso returned to Naples to perform in *L'elisir d'amore*. Although he was not booed – as legend has often claimed – part of the local press criticized his performance. At the time, fierce rivalries divided opera enthusiasts, and the influential critic of *Il Pungolo* favored the more traditional tenor Fernando De Lucia.

Deeply disappointed, Caruso vowed never to sing in Naples again, and he kept that promise for the rest of his life.

Caruso was an innovator and a modern artist. His expressive verismo style, emotionally rich interpretations, and remarkably clear voice enabled him to reach audiences on an unprecedented scale. In 1902, he became the first great bel canto singer to record his voice commercially, making ten opera recordings in Milan for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company. Those recordings helped transform what had initially been considered an office technology into the foundation of the modern recording industry. They also reached New York, where executives at the Metropolitan Opera invited him to perform.

After relocating to New York in 1903, Caruso began an extraordinary 18-year relationship with the Metropolitan Opera that permanently linked his career to the city. He quickly became the first true celebrity of the age of mass communication. He was one of the most photographed people of his era, appearing constantly in newspapers and magazines around the world. His recordings effectively created the American record industry, giving rise to the famous saying, "Caruso made the record, and the record made Caruso." His recording of "Vesti la giubba" became the first recording ever to sell more than one million copies.

By conquering the world's leading opera stages and bringing opera into middle-class homes through recordings, Caruso fundamentally changed the way audiences experienced music. He also recorded Neapolitan songs, helping popularize Italian music well beyond Italy's borders.

Proud of his Italian heritage, Caruso maintained close ties with fellow Italians living abroad. In New York, he became part of the city's vibrant Neapolitan entertainment community, associating with performer Eduardo Migliaccio, better known as Farfariello, with whom he even co-wrote several songs. He was also close to



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Italy's role in America's greatness

Guglielmo Ricciardi, founder of the first professional Italian theater company in the United States, and Cesare Gravina, a musician and actor whom Caruso had already known at La Scala and who later became a popular character actor in New York's emerging film industry. Italian American newspapers frequently published Caruso's humorous caricatures, another artistic talent at which he excelled.

Like today's global celebrities, Caruso also found his private life under constant media scrutiny. Newspapers closely followed the scandal surrounding his longtime companion, soprano Ada Giachetti, who had given birth to his sons Enrico and Rodolfo before leaving him for his chauffeur. Caruso's heartbreak inspired the famous Neapolitan song "Core 'ngrato," written for him in New York by Alessandro Sica and Salvatore Cardillo. His later marriage to Dorothy Benjamin, the young daughter of a wealthy Northeastern American family, also attracted widespread attention. Newspapers eagerly published photographs of their daughter Gloria with her mother. Far less publicized was the fact that Dorothy had been disinherited by her father because he opposed her marriage to "the son of an Italian peasant."

Caruso's popularity eventually caught the attention of the film industry. In 1918, Famous Players-Lasky – later known as Paramount – offered him the extraordinary sum of \$200,000 to appear in two silent films, *My Cousin* and *Splendid Romance*. While *Splendid Romance* has been lost, *My Cousin* survived after a long and difficult history and was eventually restored by the Cineteca di Bologna. In the film, Caruso plays both an immigrant cousin who makes plaster figurines and the internationally celebrated opera star, revealing remarkable natural acting ability and the charisma that had always defined his relationship with audiences.

By 1920, the relentless physical demands of breathing technique, vocal performance, and his extraordinary workload – 863 performances at the Metropolitan Opera – had severely damaged his health, leading to pleurisy.

While recovering with his family in Sorrento, he suffered a final medical crisis and died in Naples in 1921. His funeral in Naples drew enormous crowds, while a packed memorial Mass was celebrated at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York.

Caruso occupies a central place in the history of Italian immigration. He helped elevate the social standing of Italians in America both directly and indirectly. Quietly, he assisted struggling immigrant families and courageously reported extortion attempts by the notorious Black Hand criminal organization.

His extraordinary success at the Metropolitan Opera transformed the company from a competitor of the more popular Manhattan Opera House into New York's leading opera institution. In 1910, Giacomo Puccini composed *La fanciulla del West* specifically for the Metropolitan and for Caruso, adapting David Belasco's western drama. The arrival of Arturo Toscanini and former La Scala general manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza reshaped the company's artistic direction, replacing a repertoire dominated by French grand opera with Italian opera. The Metropolitan consequently became one of New York's defining cultural institutions. As people would later say, "Caruso made New York, and New York made Caruso."

Through his performances, recordings, public image, and appearances in newspapers and newsreels, Caruso helped redefine the perception of Italians in the United States at a time when they often faced prejudice and discrimination. He associated Italian identity with artistic excellence, innovation, and modernity. His tireless work on stage, his naturalistic acting style, and his unique ability to connect emotionally with audiences transformed the image of Italian immigrants, restoring Italy's reputation as the cradle of the arts – a reputation that has long been admired in the United States.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Italy's role in America's greatness

During World War I, Caruso devoted himself to numerous fundraising performances benefiting the Italian Red Cross while also supporting the sale of American Liberty Bonds.

In doing so, he contributed not only to the Allied war effort but also to the emergence of a shared Italian American identity, helping lay the cultural foundations of the Italian American community.



Giuliana Muscio *Professor of Film Studies (University of Padua). She holds a Ph.D. from UCLA, where she also taught as a Visiting Professor. She has published 18 books, the most recent being Napoli/New York and data e ritorno (2025). She is the curator of the exhibitions "Italy in Hollywood" (Ferragamo Museum) and "Enrico Caruso: From Naples to New York" at the MANN and currently at the Italian Cultural Institute in NYC. Additionally, she is the author of the documentary Enrico Caruso: The Greatest Singer in the World, produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Italy's role in America's greatness



Luigi Del Bianco,
**the Friulian who helped carve an
American symbol**

There are stories that reveal the deep bond between Italy and the United States better than any scholarly study ever could. Luigi Del Bianco's story is one of them. It is the story of a man born into a Friulian family, raised in Meduno, in the mountains of western Friuli, who through his talent helped create one of the most iconic monuments in the United States: Mount Rushmore.

Del Bianco was a stone carver of extraordinary skill. After training in Austria and Venice, he emigrated to the United States at a very young age, where his expertise in stonework led him to collaborate with sculptor Gutzon Borglum. When the great Mount Rushmore project took shape, Borglum wanted Luigi Del Bianco by his side, entrusting him with the role of chief carver, the master craftsman responsible for shaping the details and expressions of the four American presidents carved into the mountain in South Dakota. It was a task that required not only technical mastery, but true artistic sensitivity. Borglum came to describe him as the only sculptor fully capable of interpreting the language of the work he was creating.

For many decades, his contribution remained almost unknown to the general public. Only through the efforts of his family and a long process of historical research was his role finally given official recognition, culminating in the installation, in 2017, of a permanent plaque at Mount Rushmore National Memorial honoring his fundamental contribution.

This is certainly a story of emigration, but above all it is a story of talent, dedication, and the ability to build bridges between different cultures. Del Bianco brought to the United States the artisanal knowledge he had developed in his homeland, transforming it into a decisive contribution to the creation of one of the symbols of American identity. His story shows how the heritage of knowledge, creativity, and hard work expressed by Italian communities helped support the growth of the United States while also strengthening Italy's prestige around the world.

For the people of Friuli, this story carries an even deeper meaning. Friuli Venezia Giulia is a land that knows well the value of emigration. For more than a century, thousands of our fellow Friulians left their homes in search of opportunity, bringing with them skills, a spirit of sacrifice, and a strong work ethic. Many of them contributed to the economic, cultural, and social development of the countries that welcomed them, without ever severing their bond with their homeland.

Luigi Del Bianco embodies that identity perfectly. His hands carved stone, but his story also carved out a shared memory that now belongs to both Italy and the United States. It is proof that talent knows no borders and that dialogue between peoples is also built through the daily, often quiet work of men and women who place their abilities in the service of something greater.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Italy's role in America's greatness

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States and the 80th anniversary of the Italian Republic, remembering Luigi Del Bianco means paying tribute to all those Italians who, through their ingenuity, contributed to the growth of American society and strengthened a friendship that still stands today as one of the pillars of relations between our two countries.

Friuli Venezia Giulia looks to this legacy with pride. Not only because Del Bianco was one of our own, but because his story continues to convey an extraordinarily timely message: roots matter, but they gain even greater value when they become the foundation for building something that belongs to the whole world.

Mount Rushmore will continue to stand as one of the most recognizable monuments in the United States. Knowing that behind the expressiveness of those faces carved in stone there is also the talent of a Friulian means remembering that great history is often shaped by the work of extraordinary people who remained in the shadows for far too long. Today that name has finally returned to the place it deserves, and it is a source of pride not only for Friuli Venezia Giulia, but for all of Italy.



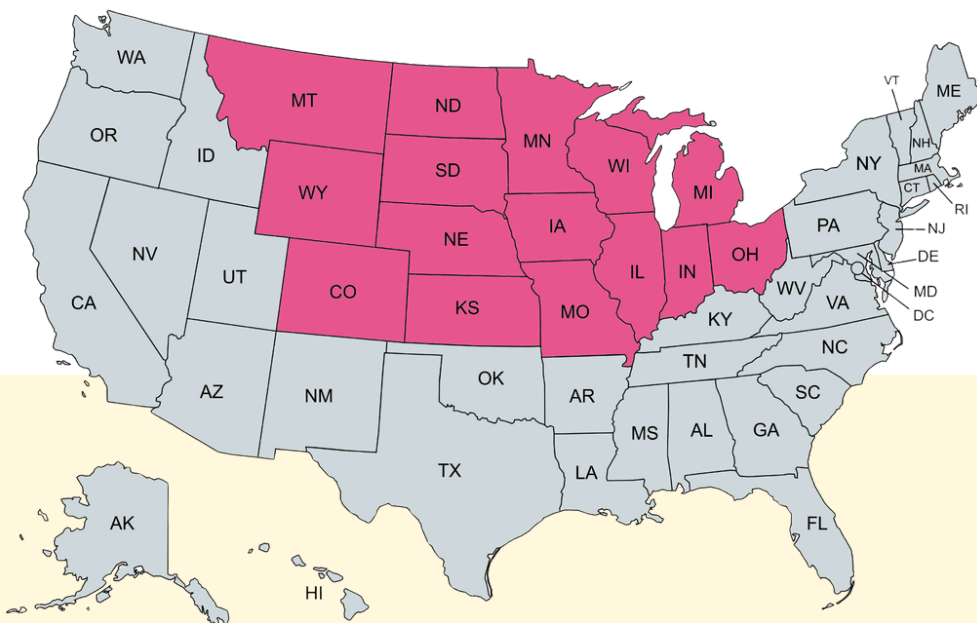
Massimiliano Fedriga, born in Verona in 1980 and raised in Trieste, has served as President of the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia since 2018 and was reelected in 2023. A Communication Sciences graduate, he served three terms in Italy's Chamber of Deputies. Since 2021, he has chaired the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces, representing Italy's regional governments nationally.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

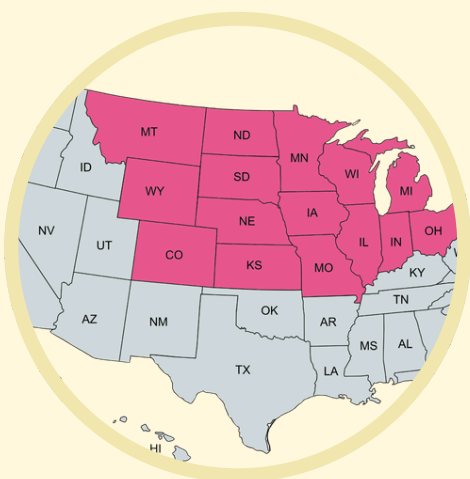


Unsung Italian heroes



Midwest

End of August 2026



Colorado - Lillian Covillo

Colorado (Denver) - Angelo Noce

Illinois - Florence Scala

Illinois - Dominick Formento

Indiana - Francesco Vigo

Indiana - Margaret Gisolo

Iowa - Mary Treglia

Missouri (Kansas City) - Rosalie Strada

Michigan - Lee Iacocca

Michigan - Corrado Parducci

Kansas - Mary Pallucca

Minnesota - Giacomo Beltrami

Missouri (St. Louis) - Giuseppe Rosati

Montana - Antonio Ravalli

Nebraska - Al and Grazia Caniglia

North Dakota - Mary D'Angelo

Ohio (Cleveland) - Mary Costantino Zone

Ohio (Columbus) - Casto Marrapese

South Dakota - Luigi Carbonetti

Wisconsin - Samuel Mazzuchelli

Wyoming - Gianni Rizzi



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Lillian Covillo,

**the Italian American visionary who
helped build Colorado Ballet**

From wistfully watching ballet classes outside a snowy window, to eventually founding the renowned Colorado Ballet, Lillian Covillo more than deserves her share of history's spotlight.

Lillian was born in Denver in 1921 to Italian American parents, during a time when Italians were still struggling to carve out a place in American culture and society. She attended Saint Philomena's Grade School and often stopped outside the garden-level windows to watch the ballet classes being held within. On one fateful, wintry day, teacher Lucille Brush noticed her behind the glass and quickly invited her inside and out of the snow; lending the eight-year old girl ballet slippers, tights, and a tutu in order to join in with the class. From there, Covillo's destiny took a dramatic turn – or pirouette if preferred – as she discovered a passion for dance that would devote her life to the arts.

Following several years of training and study, Covillo had excelled to the point of performing in Denver operas. She attended Loretto Heights College and the University of Denver, and became a teacher of dance when Lucille Brush retired and left her studio in Covillo's exceptional care. Covillo likewise took a job as the physical education teacher at Cathedral

Colorado

High where she taught dance of all kinds (including ballet, modern, and folk), and coached girls' basketball and softball – all the while, continuing her own artistic studies.

She traveled to other states and worked hard with notable dancers around the country to expand her skills; combining classic training with contemporary twists that would serve her career well after she returned to Colorado and resumed her role as a dancer in Denver operas, and became a choreographer for the Denver Grand Opera Company. She was quickly recognized as both an incredible dancer and an inspired visionary – with great ambitions for Colorado's professional dance scene.

In the late 1940s, Covillo partnered with her friend and fellow dancer, Freidann Parker, to found the Covillo-Parker School of Dance. To supplement their early company, both women worked as freelance choreographers. When they produced their first ballet in 1951, *The Betrothal*, the pair danced the leads, sewed the costumes, designed the staging, and even engineered the lighting together. In 1961, they reformed as a non-profit in order to survive with tax-deductible donations and became the Colorado Concert Ballet; later shortened to the Colorado Ballet in 1978.

As the once small dance studio grew into the world-class dance company that continues to entertain and educate thousands of Colorado dancers and audience members each year, Covillo and Freidann eventually retired but never withdrew from their love of the arts. Despite suffering macular degeneration in her final years, Lillian continued to watch dance performances from the center of the front row until her death in 2010; having forever changed Colorado's artistic identity and elevating the contributions of Italian Americans in American art and culture.



As owner and publisher of "Andiamo!", Colorado's Italian Community Newspaper, Jenna Capra has dedicated her career to celebrating Italian culture. Inspired by her family's immigration from Molise to America, she grew up loving her heritage. After several years and issues, Jenna remains committed to documenting the stories that make us proud to be Italian and Italian American.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Angelo Noce

The Italian who brought Columbus Day in the United States

Angelo Noce stands as one of the most iconic yet unjustly forgotten figures in Colorado's history. A printer, activist, and journalist who immigrated from Italy to the United States in the late 19th century, Noce served as the catalyst for a vital and lasting process of integration and social empowerment, earning him the undisputed title of a true Colorado *unsung hero*.

Upon arriving in Denver around 1872, Noce encountered a rapidly growing yet deeply disenfranchised Italian-American community. Italian immigrants in Colorado were largely relegated to the most grueling and hazardous labor—from coal mines to mountain railroad construction sites. Often facing open discrimination, pervasive stereotypes, and substandard living conditions in impoverished settlements along the South Platte River, Italian workers struggled to find genuine representation and social recognition. In response to these harsh realities, Noce turned his strong Italian heritage into a civil, political, and cultural mission. A printer by trade, he founded *La Stella*, the state's first Italian-language newspaper. Through its impactful pages, he gave voice to workers' rights, fought tirelessly against anti-Italian sentiment, and created an essential rallying point to preserve his countrymen's identity, traditions, and dignity.

Colorado (Denver)

Angelo Noce's positive impact on Colorado culminated in his passionate, decades-long campaign to establish an official state holiday honoring Christopher Columbus. For Noce, the Genoese explorer represented far more than personal or regional pride; he was a powerful symbol of civic assimilation and mutual respect. Honoring Columbus meant inextricably weaving Italian history and culture into the American tapestry, demonstrating that Italian Americans were not mere foreign laborers or a subordinate class, but an essential, hardworking, and foundational part of the nation's roots.

To achieve this ambitious goal, Noce organized petitions, mobilized local Italian-American organizations, and persistently lobbied state lawmakers for years. His unwavering determination led to an initial executive proclamation in 1905 by Governor Jesse F. McDonald. Soon after, working closely with State Senator Casimiro Barela, Noce achieved a historic legislative breakthrough: on April 1, 1907, Colorado officially enacted legislation declaring Columbus Day an official state holiday. In doing so, Colorado and its capital city of Denver set an absolute precedent, becoming the very first jurisdiction in the United States to legally recognize Columbus Day as an official state holiday.

This remarkable achievement originated right on the streets of Denver and paved the way for the holiday's rapid adoption across more than fourteen states over the next five years, laying the groundwork for its eventual federal recognition in 1937. Through his selfless dedication, Angelo Noce transformed the story of Italian immigration in Colorado from an era of marginalization into a lasting legacy of civic participation, pride, and dignity.



We the Italians
Editorial Staff



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Florence Scala,

A little lady, a strong will and Chicago's Little Italy

As city neighborhoods are developed and re-developed, and as generations of pioneer families move to the suburbs, few community leaders are remembered over time. Especially those who made their arguably greatest impact more than sixty years ago. In Chicago, one of the most notable exceptions to the rule was Florence Scala.

Florence was considered a boisterous combination of Joan of Arc and Mother Frances Cabrini. A local warrior of slight build with a huge heart and fearless demeanor focused on the preservation of more than a simple Chicago neighborhood.

Italian immigration in Chicago began in the 1850s. Most settled outside of the main downtown district where Italian workers began to build and re-build Chicago, especially after the famed fire of 1871 that destroyed much of the area. Treated as low-class, uneducated immigrants, the terrible conditions did not hinder their ability to establish their families and thrive as hard-working citizens.

Illinois

The Mayor at the time, Richard J. Daley was on a mission to create a local university affordable to his constituents. Federal assistance towards a creation of an expressway system was inevitable and the promise of an expansion of the Illinois Medical District was lurking.

Florence and her husband "Chick" Scala worked tirelessly to block these developments as the city deemed the "Little Italy" area as the location for these initiatives. She and forty-nine other female activists held a "sit-in" at the mayor's office until he took an appointment with her. He dismissed her brave presentation, brave because the voice of a woman at the time would usually fall on deaf ears. Nonetheless, she was unscathed by the disrespect and fought on.

She fearlessly fought hard taking the matter to the Supreme Court. The judge ruled that the benefit to the community outweighed the "collateral damage" that would occur at its expense. Her home also fell victim to two bomb blasts set to scare her off, but she braved the storm in a sea of defiance. That's what I mean by "fearless!"

More than 3000 families were displaced, 600 business closed and 500 buildings were razed. The Illinois Medical District greatly expanded, the University of Chicago Circle Campus was built, and the Eisenhower and Dan Ryan Expressways were constructed.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

Her home at 1030 West Taylor Street was just outside of the re-development area, so she spent her entire life there. She would run unsuccessfully twice for a seat on Chicago's City Council. Florence cleared the first floor of her building and would open the popular Florence Restaurant serving homemade Italian specialties she learned from her mother as a little girl.

Florence passed away in 2007. She spent her life defending her neighborhood. She fought ethnic stereotypes, gender discrimination and the highest form of "bullying." The area is now home to many ethnic groups, but the original "Little Italy" she so loved still stands strong.

In October of 2026, the "Florence Scala Chicago Italian American Museum" is set to open on Taylor Street, just four blocks from her home. The facility will house the famed Christopher Columbus Statue that was unceremoniously removed from its original Taylor Street area home at Arrigo Park located just a few blocks away.



Ron Onesti is president and founder of Onesti Entertainment Corporation and won three Emmys for PBS "The Happiness Club. He produces over 200 live shows a year at the historic Arcada Theatre in Chicago. Ron is President of the Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans (JCCIA) and the Italian American Sports Hall of Fame (NIASHF) and serves on the annual Columbus Day Parade committee in Chicago.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Dominick Formento

and the Cherry mine disaster, a story of extraordinary heroism

Deep beneath the heart of Illinois lies one of the most tragic and inspiring stories of Italian immigration to the United States. It is the story of Dominick Formento, a forgotten hero – an authentic Italian American unsung hero whose name deserves to be remembered among the nation's greatest examples of courage and self-sacrifice. Born in Italy and drawn to America in search of a better future, Formento embodied the values of bravery, brotherhood, and unwavering devotion to others. His actions forever shaped the history of Bureau County and the town of Cherry, making him an enduring symbol of Italian American character and heroism in Illinois.

The defining moment came in November 1909, during what would become known as the Cherry Mine Disaster. At the time, the underground tunnels were filled with hundreds of miners, many of them immigrants from Northern Italy. They were hardworking men bound together by a shared language, a demanding profession, and the hope of building a better life for their families. When a devastating fire suddenly erupted deep within the mine, the underground workings were transformed into an inferno. Thick smoke spread rapidly through the shafts, trapping hundreds of miners and leaving them at the mercy of flames and suffocating gases.

Illinois

As panic spread above ground and smoke poured from the mine openings, Formento's extraordinary character emerged. Faced with an unimaginable catastrophe, he and 11 other volunteers made a decision that defies comprehension: they willingly descended into the burning mine to rescue their fellow workers. No one ordered them to go. They acted out of compassion, solidarity, and a profound sense of duty – values deeply rooted in their Italian heritage.

Using the mine's fragile elevator cage, Formento and his fellow rescuers made 6 perilous trips into the smoke-filled depths. With each descent, they confronted unbearable heat, toxic fumes, and the constant threat of collapse. Time after time, they brought survivors back to the surface, saving dozens of men who had already given up hope. Their determination, courage, and selflessness became one of the most remarkable rescue efforts in American mining history.

But their final descent ended in tragedy. On the seventh and last trip, the elevator cage was engulfed by flames before it could be raised back to safety. Dominick Formento and the other rescuers perished while trying to reach the miners who remained trapped below. They gave everything they had in an act of absolute selflessness, sacrificing their own lives so that others might live.

Today, Dominick Formento is far more than a name carved into a memorial. He is an enduring part of the history of Bureau County and the State of Illinois. His story honors the extraordinary courage of Italian immigrants, men who helped build America not only through hard work, but through an unshakable sense of responsibility and duty. Remembering Formento means honoring the Italian roots of America and celebrating a hero who, when confronted with hell itself, chose to risk – and ultimately give – his life for others. His legacy will endure forever.



We the Italians
Editorial Staff



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Francesco Vigo

Come un immigrato italiano venne in aiuto della Rivoluzione americana

Francesco Vigo came to Indiana in 1778, a spy for General John Rodgers Clark against the British.

But Francesco had been in North America since 1769, arriving with the Spanish Army as a soldier.

We cannot know the reasons why he left his birthplace of Mondovì, Italy in the province of Piedmont to join the Spanish Army, but some of the clues may lie within his surname.

“Vigo” has Spanish and Italian origins. There is a city named Vigo in northwestern Spain and history tells us that in 1492, Spanish Jews were expelled from the country. Some of them settled in Mondovì where they thrived until a ghetto was formed only 25 years before Francesco’s birth.

We don’t know that this was Francesco’s lineage, but he must have felt the pull toward adventure and opportunities in the New World, because he left his home and whatever family he had in Italy and never looked back.

The Spanish Army landed in New Orleans in 1769 to defend their interests against the British but by 1772, young Francesco was discharged and set his sights on business.

Indiana

He chose St. Louis and fur trading, a lucrative enterprise that attracted mostly French adventurers who had come to help the colonies’ quest to become an independent country.

Francesco provided supplies, information and financing to George Rogers Clark who was endeavoring to take British-occupied Fort Sackville in Vincennes, Indiana.

Francesco set off for Vincennes and was taken prisoner by the British. They had no case against this fur trader, so he was released, on condition that he return to St. Louis and do no harm to the British cause.

He complied with the first part but then returned to Vincennes.

His time as a prisoner had been well spent. He had a detailed map of the Fort, and other critical intelligence which he shared with the General. The ensuing victories during Clark’s winter campaign were the breakthrough that secured Indiana and surrounding territories, for which the General credited Francesco.

Francesco also showed his support for the American cause by providing funds from his own pocket. The fur trading business must have given him a largesse, because the loans he made to Clark were the equivalent of \$50,000 in today’s money.

He made Vincennes his home and was a financier of Vincennes University, still in existence today.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

Vigo County was named for this brilliant and enterprising Italian immigrant in 1818, and this honor came prior to his death. Sadly, the loans he made were not paid during his lifetime. He died at 88 in poverty, never having married. Perhaps tellingly, he left a provision in his will that if any monies were paid, they were to be used to make a bell for the Vigo County Courthouse. Fifty years later, some of the money came through and a two-ton bell was installed, and to this day tolls the hours.

I like to think that in his last days Francesco Vigo was remembering the sound of the bells in his hometown of Mondovi, Italy.



Carol Faenzi is the President of the Italian Heritage Society of Indiana. She owns the lifestyle brand "My Tuscan Aria", which offers small group, luxury excursions to Tuscany. Carol is also the author of the historical novel, "The Stonecutter's Aria", based on the true stories of her marble-carving ancestors from Carrara, Italy.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Margaret Gisolo,

**the Italian American girl who put
Indiana at the center of women's
Baseball history**

Some people leave their mark by building cities, founding businesses, or holding public office. Margaret Gisolo did it with a baseball glove. At just 13 years old, this daughter of Italian immigrants transformed a small Indiana town into the center of one of the earliest national conversations about girls in competitive sports. Nearly a century later, her story remains one of the most inspiring examples of how a young Italian American helped shape Indiana's sporting identity.

Margaret Gisolo was born on October 21, 1914, in Blanford, a coal-mining community in western Indiana where baseball was more than a pastime – it was part of daily life. As the youngest of six children in an Italian immigrant family, she developed extraordinary baseball skills from an early age. Those abilities earned her a place on the Blanford Cubs, an American Legion junior baseball team, where she was selected not because she was different, but because she was one of the team's best players.

The 1928 season became unforgettable. With Gisolo contributing both offensively and defensively, the Blanford Cubs captured the Indiana American Legion state championship.

Indiana

Suddenly, one of the smallest communities in Indiana found itself making headlines across the country. Newspapers from coast to coast told the story of the talented Italian American teenager who was competing – and winning – against boys. Reporters compared her to baseball's greatest stars, earning her the nickname "The Girl Babe Ruth."

For Indiana, this was far more than a remarkable sports story. It became a defining cultural moment. When opposing teams challenged her eligibility simply because she was a girl, the controversy reached Major League Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis. His decision that no existing rule prevented her from playing kept Gisolo on the field and placed Indiana at the center of a national debate about opportunity, fairness, and merit in youth sports.

Although the American Legion changed its regulations the following year to exclude girls from competition, Margaret Gisolo had already accomplished something extraordinary. She proved before a national audience that talent could outweigh prejudice, and that athletic excellence knew no gender. Her success became one of the earliest widely recognized examples of a young woman challenging barriers in organized American sports – decades before such conversations became part of the national mainstream.

Her influence extended beyond the baseball diamond. Gisolo graduated from Indiana State Teachers College before serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II and later building a distinguished career as an educator and dance professor. Yet Indiana continued to celebrate the young woman who had brought national attention to the Hoosier State through courage, determination, and exceptional athletic ability.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

Indiana State University eventually inducted her into its Athletics Hall of Fame, honored her as a Distinguished Alumna, and awarded her an honorary doctorate, recognizing both her accomplishments and her enduring example.

Margaret Gisolo's greatest contribution to Indiana cannot be measured simply by wins or championships. She gave the state one of its most enduring stories of perseverance and possibility. At a time when opportunities for girls in organized sports were extraordinarily limited, an Italian American teenager from a small Indiana mining town demonstrated that excellence deserves recognition regardless of gender. In doing so, she elevated Indiana from the site of a remarkable baseball season to the birthplace of a story that continues to inspire athletes, educators, and historians alike.

Today, Margaret Gisolo stands as one of the most significant Italian American women in Indiana's sporting history. Her legacy reminds us that history is often changed not by the most powerful voices, but by those with the courage to step onto the field, perform at the highest level, and quietly redefine what others believe is possible.



We the Italians
Editorial Staff



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Mary Treglia

How an Italian immigrant's daughter changed the face of Iowa

Long before immigration services became formalized and community advocacy became commonplace, one woman dedicated her life to ensuring that every newcomer in Sioux City, Iowa had the opportunity to belong.

Mary J. Treglia devoted herself to helping immigrants build new lives in Sioux City, Iowa. As director of the Community House, she became one of the Midwest's most influential advocates for immigrant families, believing that every person—regardless of where they came from—deserved dignity, opportunity, and a place to call home. Born on October 7, 1897, Mary Joanna Treglia understood the immigrant experience because it was her own family's story.

Her parents immigrated from Italy during the 1880s in search of the same dream shared by millions of newcomers: a better life in America. When Mary's father died, leaving her mother to raise her alone to raise a baby. Her mother supported the family by operating a small confectionery store in Sioux City, teaching Mary firsthand the resilience, sacrifice, and determination required to survive as an immigrant family—shaping Mary's lifelong compassion.

Iowa

Sioux City was booming. Meatpacking plants, railroads, and industry had attracted thousands of immigrants from Italy. Immigrants from Italy, Poland, Greece, Ireland, Russia, Lithuania, Mexico, and many other nations, creating one of Iowa's most culturally diverse communities.

Many immigrants arrived with little money, limited education, and no English. Some could neither read nor write. Without language skills or citizenship, families often faced poverty, discrimination, isolation, and limited opportunities. Like many first-generation Americans, Mary understood that story because it was her family's story.

Mary attended the opening of Sioux City's new Community House, established to help immigrant families learn English, prepare for citizenship, and successfully adapt to life in America. She first volunteered, quickly became assistant director, and in 1926 was named director.

Under her leadership, the Community House became much more than a social service agency. It became a true neighborhood home where immigrants found education, legal guidance, youth programs, recreation, cultural understanding, and hope.

She founded the Women of All Nations Club, bringing together women from different backgrounds. Her vision was simple; diversity was not something to overcome—it was something to celebrate.

Mary also established clubs for girls. She also worked with young people referred by the juvenile court.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

In recognition of her extraordinary service, the Community House was officially renamed the Mary J. Treglia Community House in 1956—an honor rarely bestowed during a person's lifetime.

Mary's legacy endured beyond social work. Mary J. Treglia Community House continues serving Siouxland today with the same mission: welcoming and advocating for people new to our country by providing immigration, family, and educational services.

She knew what it meant to lose a parent, to struggle. She knew the courage it took to begin again in a new country. But perhaps most importantly, she recognized that beneath every language, every tradition, and every nationality was a shared human desire—to be accepted, respected, and given the opportunity to pursue the American Dream.

Mary J. Treglia did not simply serve immigrants—She built community.

And in doing so, she left a legacy that continues to remind us that the strength of Iowa and America has always been found in its ability to welcome, support, and unite people from every corner of the world.



Jenifer Caito-Ellingson is the President of the Little Italy Foundation—Midwest, a mentor for Italian American Future Leaders (IAFL), and an active member of the Council of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations. Deeply rooted in her Sicilian American heritage, Jennifer has proudly served on numerous Italian American nonprofit boards and committees to preserve and promote Italian American culture.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Rosalie Strada,

the matriarch of Kansas City's Little Italy

Rosalie Strada never sought the spotlight. Her leadership was quiet, steady, and rooted in kindness. She had a remarkable ability to bring people together, earn the trust of government officials and neighborhood residents alike, and accomplish extraordinary things without asking for recognition. While others made speeches, Rosalie went to work. She devoted countless hours to improving her neighborhood – not for a paycheck, political influence, or personal recognition, but because she believed serving her community was simply the right thing to do.

Born and raised in Kansas City's Little Italy, known locally as the North End and today as Columbus Park, Rosalie spent her life watching the neighborhood evolve. As what many called "progress" tore it apart with highways, urban renewal, and demolition projects, she made it her mission to rebuild and improve the neighborhood she loved.

At a time when most leadership positions were held by men, Rosalie emerged as one of Kansas City's most respected civic leaders. Although she was Protestant in a predominantly Catholic neighborhood, faith never became a barrier to service. She worked closely with Holy Rosary Catholic Church because improving lives was more important than religious differences.

Missouri (Kansas City)

Determined to help the neighborhood move beyond its declining image and negative stereotypes, Rosalie envisioned a new future. She came up with the idea to rebrand the North End, and in April 1967 the community voted to officially rename the neighborhood Columbus Park, marking a new chapter while honoring its history.

Whether organizing neighborhood cleanups, advocating for better housing, serving on community organizations, assisting families, or simply picking up trash because she wanted the neighborhood to look its best, Rosalie led by example. She never considered any task beneath her. Beyond Columbus Park, she served on numerous civic, community, and governmental boards, helping shape public policy and neighborhood development throughout Kansas City.

Of all her accomplishments, none meant more to Rosalie than the Don Bosco Senior Center. She founded the center to ensure older adults had a place to gather, receive support, and enjoy the friendships that had always defined the neighborhood. She spent decades volunteering there and often said it was the accomplishment she treasured most. Although she received numerous honors, including the Commendation for Volunteer Service Award presented by President Gerald Ford, her greatest reward was helping the people and the neighborhood she loved.

Rosalie helped establish the Columbus Park Community Council, along with organizations and programs that continue serving the neighborhood today.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

When Rosalie passed away in 1998, Missouri State Representative Henry Rizzo described her death as "a blow to the neighborhood" and called her "the absolute matriarch to the area." It was a title she never would have claimed for herself, but one she earned through a lifetime of selfless service.

Rosalie Strada's story is woven into the history of Columbus Park itself. Through decades of loss, rebuilding, and renewal, she remained devoted to the people and the neighborhood she loved. Decades after her passing, the organizations she built, programs she started, and lives she touched continue to shape Columbus Park. For those who knew her, she wasn't just a leader. She was the neighbor who always showed up, the volunteer who never stopped giving, and the quiet force behind countless acts of kindness. That's why Rosalie Strada will forever be the matriarch of Kansas City's Little Italy.



Jody Valet is a local author and researcher focusing on the Italian American community in Kansas City. She is building an archive of Italian items from KC, hoping to help establish a local Italian American museum. Jody is producing a documentary about Kansas City's Little Italy and writing a book sharing her family's immigration from Sicily and their life in America.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Lee Iacocca,
**the Italian American who helped keep
Michigan rolling**

"If You Can Find a Better Car, Buy It!" This slogan was popularized by Lido Anthony Iacocca, better known to millions of Americans as Lee Iacocca. Born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, on October 15, 1924, he was the son of Nicola Iacocca and Antonietta Perrotta, immigrants from San Marco dei Cavoti in the province of Benevento, Campania. Yet it was in Michigan that Iacocca built his career and left his most enduring legacy.

In August 1946, Iacocca arrived in Dearborn as an engineering trainee at Ford Motor Company. He soon realized that his greatest talents lay in sales, marketing, and management. After attracting national attention with a successful sales campaign in Philadelphia, he returned to Ford's Dearborn headquarters and rapidly rose through the company's executive ranks.

His most celebrated Ford achievement was the Mustang, developed by a team working in the heart of Michigan's automobile industry. Introduced in April 1964, the Mustang combined sporty styling, affordability, and extensive customization options. Ford sold 418,812 Mustangs during its first year, creating a new

Michigan

automotive category and reinforcing Metro Detroit's position as the center of American car design and innovation. Iacocca became Ford's president in 1970 but was dismissed by Henry Ford II in 1978 after years of tension between the two executives.

His departure from Ford led to an even greater contribution to Michigan. Iacocca joined Chrysler in 1978 when the Highland Park-based company was approaching financial collapse. Its failure would have devastated not only Chrysler employees but also Michigan dealerships, parts manufacturers, engineering firms, and communities already suffering from recession and growing foreign competition. Iacocca persuaded Congress to authorize up to \$1.5 billion in federal loan guarantees. The rescue required painful sacrifices, including plant closures, layoffs, concessions from workers, and aggressive cost reductions. Nevertheless, it prevented the immediate disappearance of one of Michigan's three major automakers. Chrysler repaid its guaranteed loans in 1983 – seven years ahead of schedule.

The company's recovery was driven by vehicles closely associated with Michigan ingenuity. The compact, front-wheel-drive Dodge Aries and Plymouth Reliant, built on the versatile K-car platform, gave Chrysler competitive and fuel-efficient products. The Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager, introduced for the 1984 model year, transformed family transportation and established the modern minivan market. Their success generated work across Chrysler's Michigan-based network of designers, engineers, managers, suppliers, and dealers.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

Iacocca also helped secure Chrysler's long-term presence in Michigan by supporting the creation of the Chrysler Technology Center in Auburn Hills. Construction began in 1986, and the facility was dedicated on Iacocca's birthday, October 15, 1991. It brought engineering, design, research, testing, and product development together on one enormous campus. The complex later became Chrysler's world headquarters and remains the North American headquarters of Stellantis.

Nationally, Iacocca became a corporate celebrity, acquired American Motors and Jeep, and led the campaign to restore the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. In Michigan, however, his greatest legacy was more tangible: he helped preserve a major automaker, sustained Metro Detroit's industrial ecosystem, encouraged a new generation of vehicles, and ensured that Michigan remained central to the global automobile industry. His extraordinary success also embodied the finest qualities of his Italian heritage – determination, creativity, resilience, family pride, and an instinctive passion for transforming bold ideas into enduring achievements.



Sandra Tornberg is a proud first generation Italian American of Abruzzese descent. Her passions are her family and her volunteer activities. In addition, she is an ambassador for the Michigan Opera Theatre and volunteer at the Anton Art Center. She is a member of the Dante Alighieri Society of Michigan, the Italian American Chamber of Commerce of Michigan, and the National Italian American Federation.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Corrado Parducci

The sculptor of Detroit. Corrado Parducci and the Motor City's soul of stone

In the American architectural landscape, few artists have shaped the visual horizon of a metropolis as much as Corrado Parducci, yet for decades his name has remained a secret guarded among Detroit's spectacular facades.

Parducci is, in every sense, an unsung hero of Italian American art who gave the "Motor City" its monumental soul during the golden age of the 1920s and 1930s, transforming an industrial capital into a dazzling open-air art gallery.

Born in Buti, Tuscany, in 1900, Parducci immigrated to the United States bringing with him an Italian heritage that was not merely a biographical note, but a true visual grammar rooted in the great tradition of Renaissance decorative sculpture. When the famous architect Albert Kahn convinced him to move to Detroit in 1924, Parducci found the perfect stage: a city in the midst of an economic boom that needed beauty to legitimize its newfound worldly wealth.

His impact was immense; throughout his incredibly long career, he decorated over six hundred buildings, moving with extraordinary ease from the most rigorous classicism to the

Michigan

geometric dynamism of Art Deco, as well as Neo-Gothic and Romanesque styles. His influence is visible wherever you look in the downtown core, having literally given "skin and character" to the steel skeletons of American skyscrapers.

His art was characterized by a prodigious versatility and an exquisitely physical, handcrafted method: he created full-scale clay models, sculpted directly onto plaster, and supervised the stonework on-site, infusing lines with fluidity and bas-reliefs with extraordinary plasticity. In a Detroit that celebrated the mechanical precision of the assembly line, Parducci represented the return of the human hand—the element that transformed a corporate building into an eternal monument through the softness of organic forms, vine tendrils, and stylized human figures.

Among his most iconic and significant works, two stand out without a doubt: the Guardian Building, the famous "Cathedral of Finance," where he fused geometric sensibility and Native American motifs in a triumph of exterior and interior details, and the monumental Fisher Building, considered Detroit's gift to the world, where his allegorical figures and finest bronze friezes evoke the majesty of a Florentine palace in the heart of the Midwest.

Working tirelessly in the shadow of great architects, Parducci never sought fame, driven by an absolute dedication to his craft that stemmed directly from the Italian immigrant work ethic. Today, as Detroit experiences a profound period of cultural rebirth, rediscovering this extraordinary architectural sculptor means restoring well-deserved credit to a giant who knew how to clothe the industrial heart of the United States in beauty, dignity, and Italian genius, leaving an immortal imprint on the American visual heritage.



We the Italians
Editorial Staff



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Mary Pallucca

The story of Mary Pallucca and her Italian spirit in Kansas

In the heart of America, where the Kansas plains stretch as far as the eye can see and the wind sings through the wheat fields, lies a story you won't find in traditional history books. Yet, it is etched in letters of fire into the soul of a community. This is the story of Mary Pallucca, a true unsung hero – a pillar of Italian heritage who redefined the meaning of hospitality and community in the Midwest.

Mary's origins were deeply rooted in the strong, resilient history of Italian immigration. Born and raised on the legacy of the pioneers who left Italy to seek their fortune in the coal mines of Southeast Kansas, Mary inherited far more than just a last name from her ancestors. She inherited an unshakeable value system: a fierce work ethic, the sanctity of family, and, above all, the dining table as a place of unity and dignity. Southeast Kansas, particularly the Frontenac and Pittsburg area, became known as "The Little Balkans" due to its incredible diversity of European immigrants. However, it was the Italian footprint, championed by extraordinary figures like Mary, that gave this land its unmistakable flavor.

The true legend of Mary Pallucca took shape at the famous Pallucca's Meat Market & Deli in Frontenac. Founded by her family in 1909, this was never just a grocery store—it was the beating

Kansas

heart of the community, an embassy of culture and human warmth. Mary didn't just run a business; she nourished souls. Behind that counter, with her homemade Italian sausage crafted from recipes passed down through generations, Mary built bridges between different cultures. For decades, the aroma of garlic, fennel, and Mediterranean spices defied the Kansas blizzards, offering a warm refuge to anyone in need.

Mary's impact on the social fabric of the state of Kansas was immense and enduring. At a time when Italian immigrants had to fight hard to integrate and overcome prejudice, Mary responded with radical generosity. Through economic downturns and grueling coal miner strikes, the doors at Pallucca's never closed. If someone couldn't afford to pay, Mary always found a way to ensure they didn't go without bread or comfort. She transformed the Italian identity from "foreign" to a synonym for generosity and the backbone of the local community.

Today, Mary Pallucca's legacy lives on in the spirit of Kansas. She proved that a hero doesn't need to perform flashy deeds on a battlefield to change history. Sometimes, it is enough to keep your roots alive, serve your neighbors with love, and turn a small small-town shop into the center of the world for generations of citizens. Mary left an indelible mark: she taught Kansas the true meaning of the word *family*—written, naturally, with a distinct Italian accent.



We the Italians
Editorial Staff



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Giacomo Beltrami, **the Italian visionary still celebrated across Minnesota**

Giacomo Costantino Beltrami was born in Bergamo, Italy, in 1779. He served as a magistrate under Napoleon's government in northern Italy and later in the Marche region, where his family owned homes and land. Yet it was as an explorer that he left an enduring and remarkably positive mark on the history and geography of the state of Minnesota.

Following Napoleon's downfall, Beltrami was accused of belonging to the Freemasons and forced into exile. That exile marked the beginning of his life as an explorer, eventually bringing him to the United States in 1823. There, he ventured into the largely unexplored lands of the Upper Midwest, forever linking his name to the region through an expedition that became legendary.

The achievement that secured Beltrami's place in Minnesota history was his determined, solitary search for the source of the Mississippi River. In 1823, after joining an expedition led by Major Stephen Long, the Italian explorer chose to separate from the group and continue alone. Initially accompanied by Native guides, he crossed swamps and unknown wilderness wearing animal skins and carrying a distinctive red umbrella, which served both as protection from the elements and as a symbol of peace and recognition.

Minnesota

On August 28, 1823, Beltrami reached a heart-shaped lake in northern Minnesota, which he named Lake Julia in honor of his beloved friend Giulia de' Medici Spada, who had died at a young age. He identified the lake, located along the Continental Divide, as the northernmost source of both the Mississippi River and the Red River. Although later expeditions established nearby Lake Itasca as the officially recognized source of the Mississippi, Beltrami's solitary journey remains an extraordinary testament to courage, determination, and scientific curiosity.

Unlike many explorers and settlers of his era, Beltrami approached Native peoples—particularly the Dakota and the Ojibwe—with genuine empathy, intellectual curiosity, and deep respect. He compiled what is considered the first dictionary of the Sioux language, a work of tremendous scholarly value that helped document and preserve the language at a time when the traditions of Native peoples were often ignored or deliberately erased.

During his travels, Beltrami collected numerous artifacts, including ceremonial pipes, clothing, and musical instruments. Among the most remarkable are two wooden flutes, now preserved at the Natural Sciences Museum in Bergamo, which are considered among the oldest surviving Native American flutes in existence. Many additional documents and artifacts from the Indigenous peoples of North and Central America are preserved in the museum housed in his former villa in the Marche region. In his travel journals, Beltrami described Native customs, traditions, and daily life with a sensitivity that was exceptionally rare in the nineteenth century, providing an invaluable record of an America that still retained much of its original character before westward expansion transformed it forever.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

The bond between Minnesota and the Italian explorer remains so strong that the state chose to honor his legacy by naming several significant landmarks after him. Today, northern Minnesota is home to Beltrami County, encompassing many of the lakes and territories he explored, as well as the Beltrami Island State Forest, one of the state's largest public forests. A neighborhood and park in Minneapolis also bear his name, reflecting the area's long-standing connection to Italian American families who settled there during the twentieth century.

Giacomo Beltrami was far more than an adventurer. He became a true cultural bridge between Italy and the American frontier. His idealism, commitment to scientific discovery, and profound respect for the first inhabitants of those lands earned him a lasting place in Minnesota's history. Nearly two centuries later, his remarkable legacy continues to be recognized and celebrated throughout the state.



*Born and raised in Ancona, **Sandra Gengler** came to the US to attend Indiana University where she received a BS and an MBA. She has been President of the Italian Cultural Center of Minneapolis/St. Paul from 2018 to 2022. From 2024 she is Chair of Outreach and Chapter Communication Coordinator of the Minnesota chapter of ISSNAF, Italian Scientists and Scholars in North America.*



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Giuseppe Rosati

Before the Gateway Arch, an Italian story in St. Louis

Italian immigrants and their descendants left an indelible mark on St. Louis, Missouri. Among the many Italians and Italian Americans who contributed to the city, one Italian changed St. Louis forever: Bishop Giuseppe Rosati, the Vincentian missionary who became the first Bishop of St. Louis and one of the foundational figures of the Catholic Church in the American Midwest.

Born on January 12, 1789, in Sora, Italy, in the Lazio region, Rosati entered the Congregation of the Mission in Rome and was ordained a priest in 1811. His life changed when his theology professor, Felix de Andreis, persuaded him to join a pioneering mission to the United States.

Rosati arrived in Baltimore in 1816, studied English, and taught theology in Kentucky before moving to Perryville, Missouri, in 1818. There he served as rector of St. Mary's of the Barrens Seminary, an important center of Catholic education on the American frontier.

Recognized for his administrative abilities and missionary commitment, Rosati was consecrated coadjutor bishop in 1824. In 1826, when Pope Leo XII

Missouri (St. Louis)

created the Diocese of St. Louis, Rosati became its first bishop. His enormous jurisdiction included Missouri, western Illinois, and vast American territories west of the Mississippi River and north of Louisiana.

Despite the challenges of the frontier, Rosati built institutions that would shape St. Louis for generations. He helped strengthen Saint Louis University and recruited religious communities to serve the rapidly growing region. Among them were the Sisters of Charity, who established the first hospital west of the Mississippi in St. Louis in 1828.

Rosati's most visible legacy is the Cathedral of St. Louis, King of France, today known as the Old Cathedral. He planned, financed, and supervised its construction. The historic church remains one of the city's landmarks, standing beside the Gateway Arch as a reminder of the religious foundations of early St. Louis.

Rosati's work extended far beyond Missouri. He supported missionary activity throughout the Mississippi Valley and toward the Rocky Mountains, Oregon, and Texas, while participating in the first four Provincial Councils of the Catholic Church in the United States.

His diplomatic abilities eventually brought him back to the international stage. In 1840, Pope Gregory XVI appointed him Apostolic Delegate for negotiations with Haiti. After completing the mission, Rosati traveled to Rome, where his health deteriorated. Hoping to return to St. Louis, he became too ill to make the journey and died in Rome on September 25, 1843, at age 54.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

More than a century later, in 1954, his remains were returned from Italy to St. Louis and reinterred beneath the main altar of the Old Cathedral – permanently reconnecting Rosati with the city he had helped build.

In 2019, the Italian Community of St. Louis, together with the Archdiocese of St. Louis and the Consulate General of Italy in Chicago, commemorated the 230th anniversary of his birth with a solemn Mass celebrated in Italian.

The year 2026 brings together three important anniversaries: 250 years since the Declaration of Independence, 80 years of the Italian Republic, and 200 years since the establishment of the Diocese of St. Louis. It is therefore especially fitting to remember Giuseppe Rosati – an Italian missionary whose courage, vision, and faith helped shape St. Louis and whose legacy remains alive two centuries later.



Michael Cross is a St. Louis cultural organizer active in Italian American life. He founded the Italian Community of St. Louis in 2017 and led it in the past. Today he chairs St. Louis-Bologna Sister Cities, serves on community and Club Italiano Per Piacere boards, teaches in-person Italian classes, and leads Vacanze Italiane tours to Italy for American travelers.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Antonio Ravalli

**Father Antonio Ravalli, Montana's
Leonardo of the Rockies**

Antonio Ravalli was born on May 16, 1812, in the medieval city of Ferrara, Italy. When he joined the Society of Jesus, he was trained in many subjects, including literature, philosophy, chemistry, natural science, mathematics, and theology. He also studied medicine at the Jesuit Roman College.

Rome left a lasting impression on him, and he fell in love with its art and architecture, as well as the remote mission churches he helped design and build.

In 1843, he was ordained to the priesthood and volunteered to come to North America to minister to the Indians in the Rocky Mountain region.

On August 5, 1844, Father Ravalli arrived in Vancouver, Washington, bringing medical supplies, smallpox vaccine, surgical and medical instruments, and carpenter's tools. During the winter of 1844-45, he lived among the Kalispel Indians near present-day Cusick, Washington, providing medical care and sharing their daily lives. The following spring, he helped the Colville Indians build St. Paul's chapel near present-day Colville, Washington.

Montana

Later in 1845, he was assigned to serve the Salish Indians at St. Mary's of the Rockies. While there, he helped bring the first grist and sawmills to Montana for this mission. His mechanical skills helped him create a saw blade to run the mills.

He helped women maintain hygiene to prevent disease and improve reproductive healthcare. He integrated the study of Indian herbal medicine into his medical education to provide more comprehensive care.

The mission closed in 1850 amid fears that Blackfoot warriors were regularly raiding Salish encampments and St. Mary's of the Rockies. Father Ravalli was reassigned to the Coeur d'Alene Indians in Cataldo, Idaho, where he oversaw the construction of Sacred Heart Church.

He returned to Montana in 1863. He helped build St. Michael's Church at Hellgate (near Missoula) with Brother Claessens and Indian laborers. He served the Blackfoot Indians at St. Peter's Mission and miners from the Sun River area who needed treatment for harsh winter conditions. He saved many lives through his medical expertise.

Although he was widely respected as a physician, Father Antonio Ravalli's remarkable abilities extended far beyond medicine. His many talents earned him the well-deserved nickname "Leonardo of the Rockies."

He planned, designed, and decorated the St. Mary's mission in Stevensville. A cabin was built next to the chapel and served as his living quarters.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

The chapel was expanded to twice its original size. It still stands today as a lasting testament to Father Ravalli's architectural vision and craftsmanship. Father Antonio Ravalli completed the decorative scrollwork throughout the interior and painted the Stations of the Cross. He shaped the candlesticks, table, and chair legs on a hand lathe. He carved a statue of the Blessed Mother from a cottonwood log and created the eight-foot filigreed cross, which stands atop the red roof dome. That same year, he suffered a stroke that paralyzed one side of his body. Yet he continued to make house calls from a cot fitted into a wagon, driven by a kind friend, until he could no longer serve.

Father Antonio Ravalli died in his cabin on October 2, 1884. People across Montana mourned his passing, and flags flew at half-staff in his honor. His only request was to be buried in St. Mary's Cemetery among the native people he had served. In 1893, the third Montana legislative assembly named Ravalli County and the mountains in his honor, ensuring his legacy would endure for generations. In 2005, he was also honored with a place in the Gallery of Outstanding Montanans at the state capitol.

Father Antonio Ravalli's life remains a lasting testament to the contributions of Italian immigrants whose faith, compassion, and ingenuity helped shape Montana's history.



Claudia Stefania Blanchard is a first Generation Italian American. Both her parents are from Calabria. She has an Associates Degree in Travel and Tourism Management. Claudia is married to a Military (Army) man who lived all around the United States and Europe, now retired and settled in Montana.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Al and Grazia Caniglia

Sicily and Nebraska, the human bridge built by Grazia and Al Caniglia

There are figures who do not immediately make their way into history books, yet profoundly help change the fate of a community. Grazia Bonafede Caniglia and Al Caniglia belong to that category: little-celebrated Italian heroes of Nebraska, and of Omaha in particular, who through very different means – social solidarity on the one hand, business and hospitality on the other – left a tangible mark on the growth of the state.

Grazia Bonafede Caniglia represents one of the highest expressions of Italianness lived as responsibility toward others. When she arrived in Omaha from Sicily, from Carlentini, she brought with her not only religious devotion and a bond with Saint Lucy, but also a deeply Italian idea of community: the belief that identity, faith, family, and mutual aid must go hand in hand. When she founded the Saint Lucia Festival in 1925, she did not simply create a popular celebration. She created a stable gathering place for Omaha's Italians, a space where the most vulnerable could find support, relationships, dignity, and material help. At a time when many immigrant families were living with poverty, difficult adjustment, and instability, that festival also functioned as a mutual aid network and a social lifeline.

Nebraska

Her Italianness revealed itself precisely in this: in transforming a tradition from her homeland into a civic resource for the American city that had welcomed her.

Grazia's contribution to Nebraska was therefore cultural, social, and human. She strengthened Little Italy as a space of cohesion, helped immigrants feel less isolated, and offered Omaha a concrete example of how Italian traditions could foster inclusion and the common good. Even today, the Santa Lucia Festival remains one of the city's longest-running ethnic and religious celebrations, and that alone is enough to measure the strength of her legacy.

Al Caniglia, by contrast, embodies the other great face of Italianness in the United States: the entrepreneurial one. The Caniglia family was among the protagonists of Omaha's commercial and food-and-wine development, and Al Caniglia helped consolidate that presence through restaurants, venues, and initiatives that turned Italian cuisine into both an economic force and a marker of identity. In this case, Italianness was not simply memory of one's origins, but the ability to build a business, create jobs, establish a reputation, and raise the level of urban life. The Italian tradition of the table, hospitality, and family work was translated into a network of enterprises that employed many people and helped define the city's culinary profile.

That is precisely Al Caniglia's importance: he showed that Italian heritage could be a force for modernization. The family's restaurants were not merely places to eat, but spaces of social life, symbols of Italian American success, and landmarks for generations of Nebraska residents. Through business, the Caniglias contributed to Omaha's economic growth and made the Italian contribution to the state's development visible.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

Grazia and Al Caniglia, each in his or her own way, therefore tell the story of two complementary forms of greatness. She built bonds, protection, and belonging. He helped build prosperity, employment, and commercial prestige. Together they show that Italianness, when it remains faithful to its deepest values – community, work, sacrifice,

hospitality, and creativity – can become a positive force capable of improving a city and leaving a lasting legacy. That is why Grazia and Al Caniglia deserve to be remembered not only as figures in Italian American history, but as true unsung heroes of Nebraska.



We the Italians
Editorial Staff



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Mary D'Angelo

The silent heroism of Mary D'Angelo in early North Dakota

At the turn of the twentieth century, North Dakota was one of America's harshest and most isolated frontiers. Within a vast territory marked by relentless winters and a dramatic absence of doctors or healthcare facilities, the birth of a child was an event filled with hope, but also with immense danger for the lives of both mothers and newborns. Against this backdrop of extreme rural solitude, the exceptional figure of Maria "Mary" D'Angelo stood out—an Italian midwife whose courage and dedication transformed her into a true protector of life for hundreds of pioneer families.

Emigrating from Italy, bringing with her not only traditional childbirth management skills but also a deep and innate empathy, Mary chose to put her vocation at the service of the state's most isolated communities. What makes her a shining example of silent heroism is the total selflessness with which she answered every call for help. It did not matter if a blizzard was raging outside or if temperatures were well below zero; Mary would climb onto rudimentary wagons, mount a horse, or set out on foot, braving the perils of the Great Plains for miles just to reach a laboring mother in time.

North Dakota

Mary D'Angelo's merits extended far beyond the extraordinary medical value of her work; her true greatness lay in her role as a formidable force for social cohesion and a bridge between different cultures. At the time, the frontier was a fragmented mosaic of ethnic enclaves that often lived in mutual distrust and linguistic isolation. Mary, however, made no distinctions. With the same care, gentleness, and professionalism, she assisted Italian, Norwegian, German, and Native American mothers from neighboring reservations, overcoming every cultural barrier through the universal language of care and motherhood.

Inside the sparse rooms of the homesteaders' early sod or wooden houses, Mary did not limit herself to delivering babies. She often stayed in the homes for days, teaching young mothers the fundamental rules of neonatal hygiene and nutrition, contributing decisively to lowering the incredibly high infant mortality rate that plagued the rural frontier at the time. Her presence in a home brought a sense of security and community that eased the harshness of pioneer life.

Maria "Mary" D'Angelo demonstrated how the determination, spirit of sacrifice, and excellence of care rooted in her Italian heritage could nurture and humanize a challenging land. Her name deserves to be enshrined among the great builders of North Dakota, standing as a symbol of that silent, female heroism that, one step at a time and one life at a time, literally gave birth to the future of a new nation.



We the Italians
Editorial Staff



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Mary Costantino Zone

How Mary Zone turned personal loss into a lifesaving Cleveland legacy

Mary Zone's career in public service began under circumstances she never could have anticipated. Yet from personal tragedy, she helped create a lasting legacy that continues to benefit the people of Cleveland, Ohio more than 50 years later.

Born Mary Constantino in Cleveland, Ohio in 1919 to Italian immigrant parents, Zone grew up in the city's Italian American community centered on W. 69th and Detroit Ave. and later married Michael J. Zone. Together, the couple raised nine children on Cleveland's West Side, where the family became deeply involved in neighborhood and civic life.

Michael Zone was elected to Cleveland City Council in 1960, representing the city's Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood. He remained on Council until 1974, when he suffered a fatal heart attack. The tragedy exposed a serious weakness in Cleveland's emergency response system. The Zone family reportedly waited nearly an hour for emergency medical assistance.

Ohio (Cleveland)

At the time, Cleveland did not have the type of dedicated emergency medical service residents know today. Following her husband's death, Mary Zone was appointed to fill his vacant City Council seat. Rather than allowing her family's experience to remain simply a personal tragedy, she made improving emergency medical care in Cleveland one of her priorities.

Zone championed the creation of a dedicated emergency medical service for the city. On October 13, 1975, Cleveland EMS answered its first call, beginning a service that would eventually respond to hundreds of thousands of Cleveland residents in need of emergency care. It remains one of the most significant parts of Zone's public-service legacy.

Zone went on to win election to Council in her own right. In doing so, she became the first Italian American woman elected to Cleveland City Council. She also broke another barrier when she became the first woman to serve as Council's majority whip.

Her work extended well beyond City Hall. Zone was active in efforts to strengthen and preserve the West Side neighborhoods she represented. She was a founding board member of the Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization and the Nolasco Housing Organization and advocated for neighborhood development and recreational space. The Michael J. Zone Recreation Center, named in honor of her late husband, opened in 1982.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

Mary Zone's commitment to public service also became a family tradition. Her son Matt Zone later represented the same West Side community on Cleveland City Council for nearly two decades, while other members of the Zone family have remained active in Cleveland civic life.

Mary Zone died in 2005, but her influence can still be felt throughout the city she served. Her story is particularly meaningful within Cleveland's Italian American history. She was a daughter of Italian immigrants who broke barriers for women in local

government, but her legacy reaches far beyond any single ethnic community. Every ambulance dispatched by Cleveland EMS is, in a small way, part of the legacy of a woman who experienced a devastating loss and decided that other Cleveland families deserved something better.



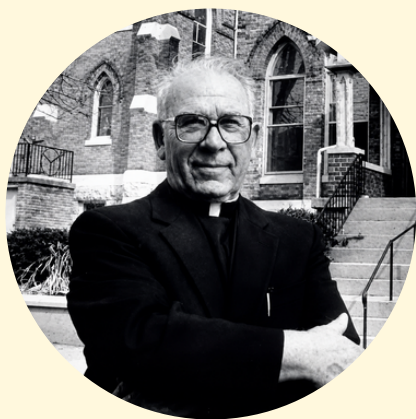
Pamela D'Orazio Dean is a Curator of Italian American History with the Western Reserve Historical Society and Director of the Italian American Museum of Cleveland. She is also a contributing writer for *La Nostra Voce*, the newspaper of the Italian Sons & Daughters of America. Pamela obtained her Master of Arts in History with a concentration in public history from Kent State University and is a Certified Archivist.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Casto Marrapese

Father Casto Marrapese, the man who gave Columbus its Italian festival

Fr. Casto Marrapese is one of the most important figures in the history of the Italian community in Columbus, Ohio. Born on November 26, 1918, in Calvi, near Caserta, Italy, he was ordained a Catholic priest in 1944 and arrived in the United States in 1949. For decades he served the Italian community of Columbus, becoming a beloved pastor, community leader, and champion of Italian heritage.

His greatest contribution was the creation of the Columbus Italian Festival, an event that transformed the cultural life of both Columbus and Central Ohio. In 1980, the Catholic Bishops of the United States designated the year as the "Year of the Family." Concerned about preserving both faith and cultural identity, Fr. Marrapese envisioned a celebration that would bring people together while strengthening family values and pride in Italian heritage.

After discussing the idea with parishioners at St. John the Baptist Italian Catholic Church, the decision was made to launch an annual Italian

Ohio (Columbus)

Festival. The response exceeded every expectation. More than 10,000 people attended the very first festival in 1980, demonstrating an enormous appetite for a public celebration of Italian culture.

For Fr. Marrapese, however, the festival was never simply about food, music, or entertainment. It was about preserving identity and passing traditions to future generations. He built the event around three guiding principles: "Faith – Family – Friends." He often explained that these values represented the fundamental characteristics of Italian culture and should remain at the center of community life.

What began as a parish initiative quickly evolved into one of Columbus' most important annual events. During its early years, from 1980 to 1990, the festival was held at the Ohio State Fairgrounds under Fr. Marrapese's leadership. Later it returned to its historic home at St. John the Baptist Church, where it continues to thrive today.

Over the decades, the Columbus Italian Festival has grown into a major regional attraction, welcoming more than 35,000 visitors each year from throughout Ohio and the Midwest. It features authentic Italian cuisine, cultural exhibits, live entertainment, religious traditions, a popular parade, and a high school marching band competition. More importantly, it has become a symbol of pride for generations of Italian Americans in Columbus.

The impact of Fr. Marrapese on Columbus extends far beyond the festival itself. His vision helped strengthen St. John the Baptist Church, revitalize the Italian Village neighborhood, and preserve the visibility of Italian culture within a rapidly changing city. He created a lasting institution that continues to unite families, support community programs, and celebrate the contributions of Italian Americans.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes

His legacy remains visible throughout Columbus today. Marrapese Hall at the church's Italian Cultural Center bears his name, and the annual Fr. Casto Marrapese Scholarship supports high school students of Italian descent. A monument topped by a large bust honors his memory and carries an inscription recognizing his lifelong devotion to God, his parishioners, and the Italian community.

More than four decades after its founding, the Columbus Italian Festival remains one of the most successful celebrations of Italian heritage in the Midwest. That enduring success is the clearest measure of Fr. Casto Marrapese's impact on Columbus, Ohio. He did not simply organize an event – he created a tradition that continues to strengthen faith, family, community, and Italian identity year after year.



Richard Leto currently lives in the Capital City of Ohio, Columbus. Rich was born and raised in the Little Italy enclave of South Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is a proud third-generation Italian American and is associated with several Italian American clubs/organizations. Rich has authored multiple articles regarding his Italian immigrant grandparents and his upbringing within the Italian American experience.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Luigi Carbonetti

Iron joints and an Italian heart. Luigi Carbonetti, the savior of South Dakota's railroads

In the early 1900s, the great Black Hills gold rush was radically reshaping the economic and geographic landscape of South Dakota. The discovery of rich deposits in iconic boomtowns like Lead and Deadwood demanded an unprecedented infrastructure expansion: hauling tons of ore and connecting isolated mountain communities to national markets required daring rail lines capable of scaling sheer rock faces and spanning deep gorges. Set against this backdrop of towering, unforgiving wilderness, the exceptional skill and quiet heroism of Luigi "Louis" Carbonetti left an indelible mark, saving lives and securing the state's economic future.

Emigrating from Liguria with centuries-old expertise, Carbonetti embodied the excellence of Italy's master shipwrights and naval carpenters. In his homeland, woodworking was an exact science, refined over generations in maritime shipyards to withstand the relentless strain of the open sea and the structural pressures on massive hulls. When Louis settled in rural South Dakota, he immediately recognized that those same geometric and framing techniques could solve the complex engineering challenges of the American frontier.

South Dakota

The primary hurdle railroad builders faced in the Black Hills was the fragility of wooden trestle bridges. Hastily erected with untreated timber, these trestles were under constant threat from violent spring runoff caused by snowmelt, as well as the relentless wear and tear of heavy freight trains. This is where Carbonetti's ingenuity proved decisive. Drawing directly from Ligurian shipbuilding, he introduced a revolutionary bracing system for the joints and spans. Working with local Black Hills ponderosa pine, he applied master craftsmanship to modify the interlocking joints, allowing the bridges to flex under heavy loads without breaking.

The defining test of his impact came during a catastrophic seasonal flood. With a vital railroad trestle on the verge of collapse under the onslaught of raging waters and debris, Louis risked his life without hesitation. In the pouring rain, he directed a crew of laborers to secure emergency tie rods and structural shores using his unique method. The bridge held, saving dozens of railroad workers and preventing a complete shutdown of gold shipments and vital supply lines.

Luigi "Louis" Carbonetti was far more than a frontier laborer; he was a true builder of the modern era. Through grit and determination, he proved that the practical ingenuity and fine craftsmanship of his Italian heritage could provide the structural backbone for South Dakota's boom, turning fragile timber trails into the durable, secure infrastructure that fueled the growth of a rising nation.



We the Italians
Editorial Staff



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Samuel Mazzuchelli

The frontier builder. How the Italian Samuel Mazzuchelli changed Wisconsin

When we talk about the pioneers who shaped the face of the American Midwest, the name of Samuel Mazzuchelli (born Carlo Gaetano Samuele Mazzuchelli) shines with a unique light. This Dominican friar and missionary, born in Milan in 1806 to an aristocratic and influential family, left an indelible and extraordinarily positive mark on the state of Wisconsin. His legacy inextricably links the genius, culture, and humanitarian spirit of his Italian origins with the very birth of the state's civil society.

Arriving on the complex American frontier in 1828 at just 22 years old, Mazzuchelli faced a wild and multicultural territory inhabited by Native Americans, French fur traders, and immigrant miners. Backed by a vast cultural background that ranged from classical languages to architecture, he threw himself headfirst into his mission. To get around, he braved harsh winters on foot, on snowshoes, or by canoe, covering areas that today exceed 50,000 square miles.

His importance to Wisconsin developed on three main fronts.

As a builder and architect, drawing on the architectural principles he learned in Italy, Mazzuchelli personally designed and built more than 24 churches and several civic buildings across the Midwest.

Wisconsin

He was responsible for the first Catholic church in Wisconsin, St. John the Evangelist in Green Bay (1831). His structures, characterized by elegant proportions inspired by European neoclassicisms, brought the beauty of Italian art into the heart of the American frontier.

In terms of education, firmly believing it was the key to social empowerment, he founded pivotal schools and academies. Among these were the Sinsinawa Mound College and the St. Clara Female Academy in Benton, one of the first institutions to offer advanced science and arts courses to young women. He also founded the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, a congregation that remains highly active in education today.

Finally, as an advocate for human rights – and contrary to the colonial mindset of the era – Mazzuchelli showed deep respect for Native Americans (specifically the Menominee, Ho-Chunk/Winnebago, and Ojibwe/Chippewa). He learned their languages and published prayer books and liturgical almanacs for them, which actually represent the very first printed texts in the state of Wisconsin. He was also a staunch opponent of slavery.

His influence was so vast that in 1836, at the birth of the Wisconsin Territory, local lawmakers asked him to open the legislature's first official session with a prayer and a speech on civic duties. The Irish settlers, who deeply loved him for his selflessness, even "adopted" him, affectionately Americanizing his surname to "Father Matthew Kelly."

Father Mazzuchelli died of pneumonia in Benton in 1864 at the age of 57, after walking through the winter freeze to give the last rites to a sick parishioner. Declared Venerable by Pope John Paul II in 1993, he stands today as the noblest symbol of the Italian contribution to Wisconsin history: a perfect blend of lived faith, artistic genius, and total dedication to the common good.



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HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Unsung Italian heroes



Gianni Rizzi, **the shepherd of the Italian Alps who shaped the Wyoming prairies**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Wyoming's economy was defined by its endless horizons and a merciless climate, where high altitudes and relentless winds constantly tested human endurance. While the collective imagination of the American frontier is dominated by the figure of the cattle cowboy, it was actually the sheep industry that stabilized and enriched much of the state's agricultural basin. Within this highly competitive and rugged sector, the exceptional legacy of Gianni Rizzi lies in his ability to fuse the centuries-old wisdom of Italian Alpine pastoralism with the wild prairies of the West, transforming a struggle for pure survival into a triumph of economic sustainability and agricultural innovation.

Emigrating from the Alpine valleys of Northern Italy, Rizzi brought with him a wealth of biological and practical knowledge that rural America did not yet fully possess. In the Alps, managing flocks was not just a trade, but an exact science based on transhumance – the art of carefully timing the seasonal movement of livestock to preserve pastures and guarantee the highest yield of wool and meat, even under the harshest climates. When John settled in Wyoming, he faced a geographical environment remarkably similar in its harshness, but managed with crude methods that frequently exposed flocks to devastating losses during the Great Plains' terrible winter blizzards.

Wyoming

Rizzi's primary ingenuity and merit lay in introducing livestock rotation and protection techniques borrowed directly from Italian valleys. John understood that to survive the Wyoming freeze, it was not enough to leave the animals to open-range grazing. He designed strategic, semi-underground winter shelters capable of utilizing the natural topography of the land to block polar winds, and he introduced a controlled management system for winter water sources to prevent dehydration caused by freezing. Furthermore, he applied Alpine methods of natural genetic selection, crossbreeding local livestock to obtain sheep with thicker, more weather-resistant fleeces, which drastically improved the quality of wool produced in the state.

His exceptional capability was also fully demonstrated in his management of both human and environmental resources. In an era marred by violent territorial conflicts between cattle ranchers and sheepmen – the historic Sheep Wars – Rizzi chose the path of diplomacy and ecological rationality. He scientifically demonstrated to neighboring landowners that sheep grazing, when managed according to Alpine rotation rhythms, did not destroy the rangeland but instead promoted soil regeneration and prevented erosion.

Gianni Rizzi was not just a frontier rancher, but a true pioneer of modern American animal husbandry. Through his determination and deep connection to his Italian roots, he proved that a culture of hard work and respect for the land could tame the Wyoming winter, leaving behind a resilient, integrated, and lasting industry that nourished and enriched generations of Americans.



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