



Il Notiziario

[The Newsletter]
of the

Friends of Isola delle Femmine, Inc.



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Volume 6, Issue 1

Editor: A.A. Grillo

Winter: January 1, 2025

News from our Executive Board

by Frank "Ciccu" Bruno

Buon Anno a Tutti!

Hope you and your family had a great Holiday season.

Wow, another year is now in the books. Time flies, doesn't it?

Well, the last quarter of 2024 finished up on a positive note. Our longtime and history making friends from Isola delle Femmine, Sicily visited the Bay Area on the first two weeks of October. The group consisted of Stefano Bologna (past Isola mayor) & his wife Maria Grazia, Letizia Micali Croce (wife of the Chief of Polizia), Michele Lucido & Maria Costanzo, Rocco Rappa (Former City Council member and original committee member-1992) & Marianna Riso, and Tonino Scala (Former City Council member, original committee member-1992, and president of the Pittsburg-Isola Sister City Forever Committee). See pictures of their visit on the following page.

While here, they visited Napa Valley, San Francisco, Reno, Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, Pittsburg, Monterey, and Martinez. FOI invited members and friends to a welcome dinner at the wonderful Sicilian restaurant, Isola Osteria-Danville. The no-host dinner was fantastic and the owner, Angelo Dalo, created an exquisite Sicilian family style dinner for 75 attendees. Our great friends from Isola delle Femmine enjoyed it all.

Shortly, you will receive your membership dues renewal invoices for 2025 by email. Please send in your dues as soon as possible. Membership dues are the lifeblood of our organization. It allows us to pay the bills and keep us operational. You will be receiving your invoice via email. Look for emails from Quick-Books or Intuit, which will contain your invoice. This comes from our bank account system! You can pay directly online by opening your invoice and clicking on the credit card and debit card icons that appear on your invoice, this is very secure! Your payment goes directly to our bank account. If you would prefer that we mail your invoice to you, please let us know by emailing us at friendsofisola@gmail.com or call Mary at 925-584-1738 for more information. Thank you in advance.

And another announcement closing out the year, Rosalie Bruno Tamajo won the 2024 membership renewal contest, taking home \$50. Congratulations!

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

Co-founder & Chairman of the Board: V.S. Di Maggio, Co-founder & President: F.B. Bruno, Vice-President: M. Pappas-Coniglio, Secretary: D. Pellegrini, Treasurer: V.M. Mafitano D.M.D., Liaison to Isola delle Femmine: S.N. Coniglio, Advisor & Business Consultant: A.D. Seeno, Jr., Historian: V.S. Ferrante, Historian & Researcher: A.A. Grillo Ph.D.

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What's Happening

by Frank "Ciccu" Bruno

The year just finished, 2024, was a stellar year with many activities and celebrations. For 2025, we have a fantastic line-up of wonderful memorable cultural events planned.

First up will be our Monterey High Tea Italian Style to be held at the Moose Lodge in Monterey, but this year it will be on Saturday, March 1st. **SAVE THE DATE**. You can reserve your seat or table on line, www.friendsofisola.org.

Next up will be the Pittsburg High Tea Italian Style, again held at the Pittsburg Elks Lodge (Marina Event Center) on Sunday, May 4th.

Both events will be extraordinaire and something not to miss. **Flyers for both events on the next page. SAVE THE DATES.** These events sell out fast and seating is limited so sign up early.

This June, date to be determined, we will have another traditional FOI Scholarship Awards Picnic. The Waterfront Park in Martinez will again be our venue. Check the website for details. We will again award \$1,000 scholarships to members' families' college bound students. To date we have awarded 31 scholarships totaling \$28,500, thanks to your support.

Other wonderful, fun events are in the works, Stay Tuned. If you are interested in helping our committees with these events, please contact VP Mary Coniglio via our email at friendsofisola@gmail.com.

On November 3, 2024, FOI, in conjunction with the Colombo Club of Oakland, showed the historic documentary *Potentially Dangerous: When it was a Crime to be Italian* to an audience of over 100. Our first screening was in Pittsburg 2021 to over 220 attendees. Since then, we have shown this important documentary a total of 7 times throughout the Bay Area. Frank Bruno also presented the power point slides of author Lawrence DiStasi's book *Branded: How Italian Immigrants Became "Enemies" during WW II*. If you would like us to present this program to your group, contact us at friendsofisola@gmail.com. Future dates of the showing to be published on our website.

Find your name hidden somewhere in this newsletter. When you do, contact us at friendsofisola@gmail.com to claim your prize



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Adam Betta, Realtors*

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MONTEREY CHAPTER FOI

GIFT BASKETS... AND MORE....

ENTERTAINMENT

Speakeasy High Tea "Italian Style"

Saturday, March 1, 2025
1:30 pm to 4:30 pm
Monterey Moose Lodge
555 Canyon Del Rey Oaks 93940

Full High Tea Menu
"Italian Style"
Men & Teens are welcome
\$75 per person

Table of 8 \$550 (\$50 Discount)
all additional seats are \$75.00
..... kids 12 and Under \$55

for tickets visit our website
www.friendsofisola.org

You can email us at
friendsofisola@gmail.com

or call Roselyn 925-519-4301.....
or to Volunteer.....

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ALL FUNDS BENEFIT OUR SCHOLISHIP PROGRAM....

No tickets sold at the door....
All sales are final ...
Alcohol is NOT included



PITTSBURG CHAPTER FOI

GIFT BASKETS... AND MORE....

ENTERTAINMENT

Speakeasy High Tea "Italian Style"

Sunday, May 4, 2025
1:30 pm to 4:30 pm
Pittsburg Elks Lodge
200 Marina Blvd. Pittsburg, CA 94565

JOIN OUR COOKIE CONTEST
WIN! \$100
DEADLINE APRIL 1ST

Full High Tea Menu
"Italian Style"
Men & Teens are welcome
\$75 per person

Table of 10 \$700
all additional seats are \$75.00
..... kids 12 and Under \$50

for tickets visit our website
www.friendsofisola.org

You can email us at
friendsofisola@gmail.com

by email or call Mary 925-584-1738

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News from Isola

by Giuseppe Lucido

The build of a new pedestrian area

A new pedestrian area has recently been built in Isola delle Femmine. This area is located in a relevant part of the shoreline road from the end of Via dei Villini (in front of the last wharf of the port) to the end of Via Amerigo Vespucci. The project concerning this extensive work consisted of a huge restyling of this shoreline road as shown with the colored lines in the Figure at right. For reference, the Isolotto is just off shore above the area shown.

The roadway was split into two parts. The inner roadway loop has been partially paved, allowing the circulation of cars and motorbikes; the outer roadway loop, instead, has been transformed into the new pedestrian area, accessible to people and bicycles. Both roadways are separated by a series of vertical marble bricks, necessary to prevent cars from accessing the pedestrian area. This restyling work was difficult and complex for several reasons. The project, in fact, was first planned at the end of 2016, with the approval of a three-year plan of public works by the local administration, and then at the end of 2019, it received another approval. However, because of the Covid-19 pandemic and other bureaucratic problems including public funding allocation issues, the work only started at the end of 2022. Finally, since the first half of 2024, this area has been accessible and ready for use.



An External Part with Isolotto in Background

To better understand it, we will focus on the outer roadway where there is the new pedestrian area and suppose to divide it into 3 parts: two end parts (orange and green lines in the Figure above, respectively numbered 1 and 3) and a central part (yellow line in the Figure, numbered 2). The entire pedestrian area is illuminated by a series of street lamps and it is bordered on its outer edge by a low wall that separates it from the rocks at water's edge, and on its inner edge by the bricks mentioned before. The end parts (orange and green lines) are very similar and consist of brick roads, dedicated to pedestrians and cyclists. These two parts of the pedestrian area allow us to take a walk during any time of day and to enjoy an amazing view of the sea and the Isolotto (Figure at left) if we come from Via dei Villini (part 1), and to enjoy an amazing view of the beach and the Carini Gulf if we are on Via Amerigo Vespucci (part 3). The central part, as



The New Pedestrian Area in Colors Surrounding the Isola delle Femmine Peninsula with the Isolotto Offshore Above

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viewed in the Figure here at right is the heart of the new pedestrian area. It consists of a large area, with a small lane for cyclists at the picture's left and a big space for people to congregate on the right. Both spaces of the central part are separated by a green lawn. In the part on the right there are many benches with an elongated shape, which can host several people, and some waste baskets. This central part is located facing the Isolotto, in that area commonly known as "curvone" because of its curved shape. Here the large space allows people to enjoy themselves having fun together, to spend a part of the day and to see a stunning sunset with a mix of colors between sky and sea (Figure below left).



Central Part of the New Pedestrian Area



Sunset View from the Central Part, Isolotto in Background

they usually visit this area. Some photographers usually frequent this area in order to take amazing pictures of the sunset using their advanced techniques. Unfortunately, sometimes tourists or vandals dirty this area, leaving trash or damaging the surrounding space, because nowadays crime is a problem that also concerns our small city and that we struggle to face.

Future projects should concern the extension of the pedestrian area also into the next part of the shoreline road, which includes Viale Marino and Viale dei Saraceni. Currently we are very proud of this new amazing area and we have to safeguard it in order to show to everyone the best version of our city.

This new pedestrian area, and in particular its central part, has provided great added value for all of us. Many citizens of Isola delle Femmine usually go there during the early morning and the late afternoon in order to train outdoors; others go there during all day just to have a walk and see the landscape; and others go there during the night to spend their time just to stay far from the city center. Many tourists coming from everywhere are attracted by this opportunity, and when they come to Isola delle Femmine,



A Closer View of the Isolotto from an External Part of the Pedestrian walkway

I Ricordi di Isola [Memories of Isola]

by Giuseppe Lucido

Il Fortino Militare [The Military Pillbox]

Facts, findings and memories of the World War II are still tangible in Isola delle Femmine. Despite the small extension of our city and a secondary role it played during the war, those years have profoundly influenced the social life of the citizens, and the oldest ones currently living in Isola delle Femmine retain many memories of that time. Some events in Isola delle Femmine during World War II, deriving from the memories of citizens, have already been mentioned in *Il Notiziario* of October 2022, regarding the destruction of the Isolotto's tower, and in *Il Notiziario* of January 2024, regarding the sinking of the steamer "Loreto" with the realization of a grave. For this paper, it will be necessary to recall some more old memories in order to discuss another interesting testimony of World War II.

Along the shoreline in front of the beach area on the west coast of Isola delle Femmine, we can see an old concrete structure (Figure at right) located inside a parking area. This structure is the so-called Military Pillbox, built at the beginning of 1940s. The Military Pillbox is a circular station that could accommodate up to 3 surveillance soldiers. It is a concrete structure, internally covered with barbed wire, divided into two areas: one for combat with 3 slits, and the other to supply the rifles and the machine guns. The location, in front of the coast, allowed the soldiers to counter a possible Allied landing. In fact, its main function was to prevent landings, and it was camouflaged in order not to be identified by the enemy from a distance. However, citizens remember that from the Military Pillbox probably the soldiers did not fire any shots since the war took place mainly in the east of Sicily. In July 1943, when the American army came to Palermo, the Military Pillbox was already demobilized. Some young fellows of that time, who are now more than 90 years old, remember that the American army gave them food and sweets, and suggested that they hide inside the Military Pillbox, if needed. The Military Pillbox was, therefore, a sort of coastal bunker and, still being in good condition, now represents one of the main testimonies of World War II in Isola delle Femmine. Some years ago, in July 2017, the value and importance of the Military Pillbox was brought up and celebrated by the Public Local Administration of Isola delle Femmine, under Mayor Stefano Bologna and Assessor Anna Maria Lucido, and by "BC Sicilia - Isola delle Femmine", a local association managed by Agata Sandrone. They opened the Military Pillbox to the public and organized a visit inside where they displayed some memorabilia and objects of World War II. It was a great occasion to discuss the past of our territory and to valorize a symbol of World War II still present in our city. This event even attracted many people from the neighboring municipalities. In October 2023, the BC Sicilia - Isola delle Femmine association also organized another visit to the Military Pillbox, involving the students of the middle school of Isola delle Femmine and some representatives of the local political parties. However, this Military Pillbox discussed until now is not the only pillbox built in Isola delle Femmine during the World War II years.

In fact, on the east coast of Isola, along the reef known as Punta Catena, it is still possible to find some traces of another pillbox (Figure below right) with a smaller and different form than the previously discussed one. It was a sort of circular and single enclosure, used by one soldier at time even for defensive strategies and, due to its location, was



Current State of the Military Pillbox

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designed to prevent attacks from the other side of the sea. In front of it, along the State Highway coming from Sferracavallo, there is a big military area, inside of which we still can glimpse another pillbox, bigger than the previous one and with a totally different form. Nowadays access to this military area is strictly forbidden, and that is why I would rather not include a picture of it. Instead, along the reef near the pedestrian area in front of the Isolotto, we can find many big stones, much bigger than the other stones on the reef. These stones belonged to the structure of another pillbox, built there during the World War II, and still present in Isola delle Femmine at least until the end of 1960s. In fact, from research conducted by the association BC Sicilia - Isola delle Femmine, in a scene of a movie set in Isola delle Femmine in 1967, called *A*



1967 Film Frame with a Pillbox at Left
and Isolotto in the Background

ciascuno il suo [To Each His Own], we can briefly see a structure very similar to a pillbox (Figure at left) in front of the Isolotto. This pillbox had a small structure with just room for one person. Later, it might have been demolished in order to realize a new street in that area, nowadays called Viale Amerigo Vespucci, along which a new pedestrian area has recently been realized. Moreover, an ancient picture (Figure below) taken in the beach area on the boundary with Capaci, shows another concrete structure very similar to a pillbox. This structure no longer exists, and we have no news about it. Therefore, in the war period, at least 5 pillboxes were built in Isola delle Femmine, and due to their location in

all the strategic areas of the city (two on east, two on west and one in the north), they represented a defense system needed to guarantee the safety of the territory.

We currently don't know with certainty if there were other pillboxes in Isola delle Femmine, but it is assumed that in the coast between Palermo and Trapani (northwest Sicily) there have been more than 40 pillboxes. Isola delle Femmine, in fact, belonged to the 208th Defensive Coastal Division of Palermo, established on November 15th 1941 and dismissed on July 23rd 1943. The presence of these pillboxes was strictly necessary for war and defensive purposes. In fact, in the coastal areas where the landings were possible, the fortification of the coast was organized by creating some defensive structures around the cities, often skillfully masked from sight, in order to provide mutual support with weapons or to continue resisting even if exceeded, and they were built at points of fundamental importance in order to protect their accesses.



Current State of a Circular Pillbox
on the Reef of Punta Catena



Pillbox on the Beach

Over the years, due to their state of total abandonment and exposure to atmospheric phenomena, the risk of further damage for these structures is high, in particular for the remains of the circular pillbox (Figure top of page) placed on Punta Catena in Isola delle Femmine, which is extremely exposed to the wind and the waves of the sea. Even though it is difficult to safeguard these ancient findings, also because of their location in the territory, it is always important to remember what they have represented and what value they have had in the history of our city. The past of our city must never be forgotten, and we have to assign the right value to each ancient heirloom present in our territory.

A Bit of History that Is Ours

by Vincent S. Ferrante

What's In A Name? St. Peter Martyr Catholic Church, Pittsburg

Today's writing focuses on the name of the first Catholic church in Pittsburg, St. Peter Martyr or SPM. Many of those my age (59) and older have an affiliation with SPM going back generations as it was the only Catholic church in town from the late 1800s until Good Shepherd Parish was established in 1970 and Our Lady Queen of the Word earlier in 1965, thereby splitting up the Catholic congregation. Many of the Italian families relocated to new housing south of the freeway and joined the new Catholic Good Shepherd Church during the downtown redevelopment era. I was personally baptized in SPM in 1965, however, I received my first holy communion and confirmation at Good Shepherd Church as an example.

That being said the man, Saint Peter Martyr is not to be confused with the man, Saint Peter the Apostle, who was one of the original Twelve Apostles that followed Jesus Christ during his ministry. St. Peter Martyr (1205-1252) was born in Verona, Italy, which is in the Northern locale at the base of the Alps Mountain Range. This fact led me to wonder as the Historian of Pittsburg, one who is very familiar with the history of Pittsburg and its archives, what was the connection of a Northern Italian Saint to Pittsburg, or at the time, to the town of Black Diamond? The 1964 SPM 50th Anniversary publication has a very detailed account of the church's history, however, I had a question. What's in a name? I was curious to know how could a Catholic church in a predominantly Sicilian fishing village be named after a Northern Italian Saint? For that answer let us turn back the pages of history.

St. Peter Martyr was accepted into the Dominican order by none other than Dominic himself, a Spanish priest and the founder of the Order of Preachers in 1216. Fast forward to the 1850s when the Dominican Order was charged with establishing the Western Dominican Province, headquartered in Benicia, which included Contra Costa and Solano Counties, half a world away. A book titled *Mission West: The Western Dominican Province 1850-1966* was published in 1995 by the Dominican Province which includes many historical details of the formation of the province during California's transition from Spanish and Mexican to U.S. governance. From their base in Benicia, the Dominicans started traveling throughout this area, responsible to serve the population on a missionary bases, which was populated in large part by coal mining towns in our local foothills. The commercial fishing industry along the Sacramento Delta was in its infancy. In 1864, a missionary church was built in the area that was to become Antioch, dedicated to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. A missionary church, not to be confused with one of the missions established by the Jesuits or Franciscans as a large complex of facilities, was a place of worship without resident clergy. The Holy Rosary mission was elevated to a parish in 1874 where a resident priest of the Dominican Order was installed.

It was in the latter part of 1878, one Sunday Morning in the neighboring town of Black Diamond, now Pittsburg, that a small band of members of the Roman Catholic Church gathered into a small barn to hear the first mass in this community. The mass was given by Father Callahan from Holy Rosary to a score of worshippers or about 20 people. The barn was donated by Cornelius McCue and was located approximately where Los Medanos Street and East Second Street crossed. This history was found in the 1931 Pittsburg Post-Dispatch newspaper, however, the writer does not indicate names of the congregation that made up the early Catholic worshippers. It is noteworthy that the first Black Diamond resident to receive a Catholic baptism was Anna McCue in 1875, and the first Italian surname listed in the baptismal record was Paul Junta in 1877, both baptized at Holy Rosary Catholic Church, which served as a new parish at that time. It must be noted that by 1875, Black Diamond was home to a sizable commercial fishing community, large enough to sustain the Black Diamond Fishing Cannery. At this time the commercial fishing workforce was quite diverse inclusive of northern Italians and early Sicilians. The McCue barn would serve as the temporary Catholic church until 1884.

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We have a firsthand account of the dedication of a “new” Catholic church building on December 14, 1884, in Black Diamond. It was about 50’ x 30’ and very well received. Interestingly enough, as per the Antioch Ledger newspaper article, the Catholic church was christened as St. Peter’s Church. This would lead one to believe that the honor of the name was given to St. Peter The Apostle. The first mass was held by Father Lawless from the Dominican order of Benicia. Reportedly, “The church, though large, did not begin to be large enough to hold the immense congregation. In fact the auditorium of the church was surrendered entirely to women and children and even then it was packed, and the men thronged at the entrance and in the yard.” Father Glesen from Oakland delivered the dedicatory sermon focusing on “the Catholic Church was the one true church beginning with Christ’s apostle.” St. Peter as we all know from our catechism days is one of the Twelve Apostles. Prior to that he was a fisherman by occupation when Jesus then instructed him to “Come, follow me and I will make you a fisher of men.” St. Peter was also known to be the Patron Saint of Fishermen as well as being credited with being the founder of the Christian Church. Initially St. Peter’s Catholic Church here in Black Diamond served as a missionary church and would have been funded and built by the local citizens. This new church was located in the vicinity of the old West 2nd Street and Cutter Street, now a place of modern residential homes. Today, a historical plaque, commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the parish can be found near this location.

We must stop here and take note of the landscape of Black Diamond around 1884. The village’s primary industry had become commercial fishing. The local coal mining industry, after a period of 25 years or so, would, in fact, shutter its doors on January 1, 1885, and the coal mining town of Nortonville would rapidly fade away along with it. It’s noteworthy to mention that the local coal mining community did in fact have a church of their own, the Congregational Church, which was established in 1882 in Nortonville, located in our southern foothills. To be certain, there were many coal mining families that were also of the Catholic faith, and by the end of the coal mining era, many were in fact Italian. That entire Congregational Church building would eventually be relocated by a railroad flatcar to the town of Black Diamond in 1892. As previously mentioned, the commercial fishing cannery was established here in 1875. As of 1882, the *History of Contra Costa County* tells us that a network of nine canneries operated along the Sacramento River and Suisun Bay to take advantage of the bountiful salmon runs that occurred several times a year. The fishing force, while of mixed ethnicity, was primarily made up of Sicilians, who immigrated here in great numbers in the 1880s, many of whom brought their Catholic faith with them from their homeland. I point this out to illustrate that the naming of the Catholic church, St. Peter’s after the apostle and a former fisherman may have been very agreeable to many who would have made up the Catholic congregation at that time.

In 1906, the wooden church burned down. Once again the Antioch Ledger covered the story indicating that “a gasoline stove exploded in the Italian Quarter, opposite the Catholic church, burning on both sides of the street, destroying nine homes before it was controlled. After the church began to blaze, the wind veered and this, together with a number of evergreen trees which surrounded it, was undoubtedly why the town is not in ashes today.” One must keep in mind that during this time most, if not, all buildings were constructed of wood and this predates a fully equipped and manned fire department as we know it.

We will continue the churches evolution including its 1910 replacement after the fire in the next issue of *Il Notiziario*.

Sources

Mission West: The Western Dominican Province 1850-1966, © 1995.

Pittsburg Post (1900-1930) merged with Pittsburg Dispatch, Post-Dispatch, issues through 1931.

Antioch Ledger, issues 1884 through 1931.

History of Contra Costa County, 1917.



The 1910 Church

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Mangiate Bene Tutti [Eat Well Everyone]
by Mary Pappas-Coniglio "Cooking with Mary's Village Style"

Salute!

A Recipe from Mary
Bugie, Sweet Bow Ties or Lovers Knots



You can't beat the simplicity of the cultural, traditional fried dough and Italy's bugie are one of the best!

You can use your creative imagination on this one by replacing the liqueur with spirits such as Marsala or Grappa, the lemon rind and juice with orange, and the vanilla with anise. Perfect with sweet wine! Great dessert!

This recipe was given to me by my Grandmother Virginia Cataldo Lombardo Costanza

Ingredients:

4 cups of flower
3 tablespoons sugar
2 teaspoons of baking powder
1/8 teaspoon salt
Zest of one lemon
3 tablespoons room temperature soft butter
5 eggs well beaten
1 oz. or more of your preferred liqueur (rum, brandy, etc.)
Juice of 1 lemon
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
Canola oil for frying
Powder sugar for dusting after frying



Directions:

Sift all dry ingredients together in a large bowl: flour, sugar, baking powder.
In a small bowl, beat eggs and melted butter together.
Add vanilla, lemon juice, zest to the egg mixture.
Moisten dough as needed with liqueur, no water.
Treat dough as you would pie dough. Separate dough into six balls and keep cold for best results.
Roll out one ball at a time on a flour-dusted work surface until dough is very thin. Use a pasta machine for the best results.
Cut into wide strips with a pastry/ravioli cutter. Loosely cut a slit in the upper portion of the strip and loosely slip the bottom end of the strip through the slit! It forms a loose knot.
Refrigerate until cold before frying for about 10 minutes. Fry until golden!
Immediately sprinkle with powdered sugar. Let cool completely.
Store in a box or tin can, not in Plastic.
Do Not Freeze

Visit our Facebook pages
Friends of Isola delle Femmine & Cooking with Mary's Village Style

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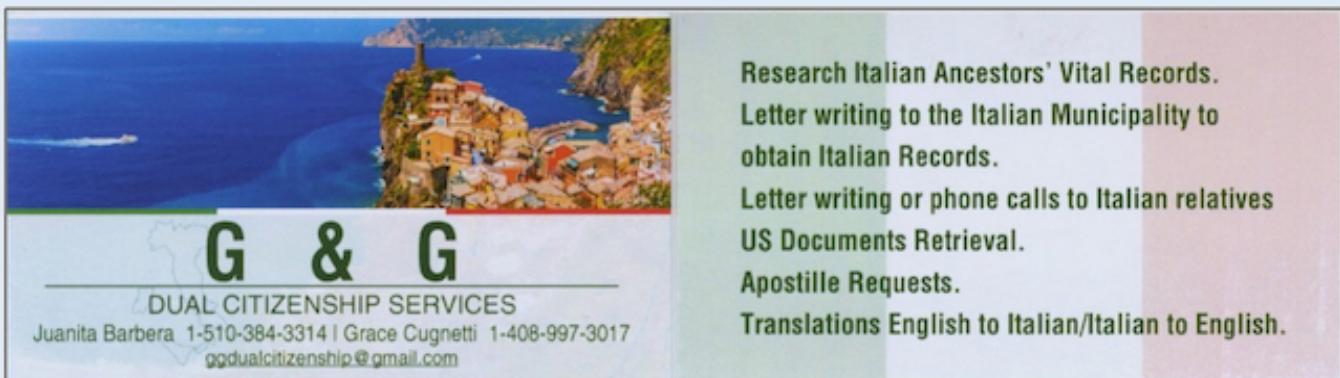
We have again added new members this past quarter.

Robert Freeman

Teresa Ferrante Freeman

Angelo Dalo

more to be published in future issues



Research Italian Ancestors' Vital Records.
Letter writing to the Italian Municipality to obtain Italian Records.
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