

# JCCIA Journal

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*The Joint Civic Committee  
of Italian Americans*  
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~ Organized in 1952 ~



## A proud Italian tradition is reborn

by Jo Ann Serpico, President

Reading Anthony Sorrentino's book "Organizing the Ethnic Community" is always a font of information. Regarding the Italianettes, our JCCIA children's dance troupe, Anthony wrote: "Italian entertainment has been in great demand in recent years, and the JCCIA has received many requests for performers. The late Pauline Jo Cusimano, an indefatigable worker, organizer and teacher, who combining her talents with those of her sister Marilyn Fredericks, recruited adults, teenagers and children and taught them ethnic dances and various drills. These children and young people over the years have appeared at Festa Italiana, at the Daley Plaza in Christmas Around the World, at the Museum of Science and Industry. The Italianettes, as the young dancers are called, also entertained at community and social gatherings, and appeared on television."

During a recent interview with Marilyn Fredericks, I learned that her late sister Pauline Jo, the program director for the JCCIA in 1975, made an announcement at a meeting asking to form an Italian dance troupe with the children and grandchildren of JCCIA members. The response was overwhelming. Marilyn went on to say that back then the families made their own costumes for their children. Marilyn's mother, Josephine Cusimano, handed out the patterns, and the families followed through. The first performance of the Italianettes was at the 1976 Cotillion. The troupe consisted of 53 children ranging in age from 6 to 16. The performers appeared at summer programs at Daley Plaza, the city of Chicago's cultural programs, Villa Scalabrini, the Italian Cultural Center, neighborhood churches, various Italian community feast days and many appearances on TV, including the Bozo Show, to celebrate Italian Heritage Month. The high point was performing with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, during which they danced along with an Italian composition.

There was a hiatus for a few years with our young dancers. They were truly missed. I always aspired to have an Italian children's dance troupe. When I became president in 2005, I asked Marilyn to please regroup. Marilyn, with her endless energy and dedication to the JCCIA, did just that. When the regrouping occurred, the costumes were only satin blouses, skirts and sashes. My ultimate vision, though, was of beautiful outfits. These materialized through the generosity of Don and Sue Mazzoni. Don so willingly agreed to be the sponsor. As the troupe has grown in number, Don has continually purchased additional costumes. Our Italianettes are now referred to as Don and Sue Mazzoni's Italianettes. They were invited to dance for the St. Joseph's Day dinner in the town of Cicero in 2008. They have performed at Mayor Daley's Columbus Day reception kickoff, held in 2008 at the Chicago Cultural Center and in 2009 at

the Harold Washington Library Garden Room. Also in 2008, they appeared at the Winter Wonderfest at Navy Pier. Their most recent performances were at the Museum of Science and Industry's Christmas Around the World 2009 and Winter Wonderfest at Navy Pier 2009.

This year's Christmas program opened with a commentary by Marilyn accompanied by a guitar and violin, as well as Dominick and Izzy Glimco singing "Silent Night." A special Christmas song followed and was sung by Dominick, Izzy and Caitlin Glimco. The tarantella followed, danced by our Italianettes. Then the Legend of La Befana was read in English by Marilyn Cusimano Fredericks and in Italian by Sara Gullo. La Befana, with her legendary broom and gifts, was performed by Anna Gullo Arthur.

An authentic Italian fashion show followed, with the mothers of the Italianettes modeling Italian regional costumes. Many were compliments of the Calabrese in America Organization. Sound was provided with the assistance of TJ and Gary DeCesare with special assistance by AJ Avolio. The finale was a special Buon Natale from the Italianettes.

Our Italianettes are currently Alessia and Arianna Arthur, Alexandra Avolio, Jack Burriesci, Giorgia Cozzo, Armand DeCesare, Olimpia Giacalone, Kelly and Kerry Glimco, Izzy Glimco, Nicasia and Nino LaCorte, Luigi Laudando, Maggie and Katie McDermatt, Anne Marie Novack, Gianna Petrucci, Sabrina Scola, and Priscilla and Lucia Scola.

Mothers who modeled in Italian regional costumes were Anna Maria Gullo Arthur, Jackie

Avolio, Giovanna Cozzo, Maria Giacalone, Beth Glimco, Marianna LaCorte, Julie McDermatt, Debbie Novack, Isabella Scola and Tena Scola.

On behalf of the JCCIA, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to the parents and grandparents of our Italianettes for instilling the love of our heritage in their children, and for the sacrifices made to attend rehearsals and performances. The parents are Christian and Mary Rose Giacalone, Mr. and Mrs. Avolio, Giovanna and Andre Cozzo, Marianna and George LaCorte, Kathy and Pasquale Laudando, Steve and Karen Burriesci, Anna Marie and Chad Arthur, Greg and Beth Glimco, John and Rebecca Glimco, Mr. and Mrs. DeCesare, Julie and John McDermatt, Debbie and Paul Novack, Linda and Tony Petrucci, Isabella and Tony Scola, and Tena and Luigi Scola.

My sincere gratitude also goes to Salvatore Ferrara of Ferrara Pan Candy Company, for the generous donation for our annual Christmas Party. Salvatore is the son of Nello Ferrara, a past Columbus Day chairman and a great contributor to the JCCIA for many years. His grandmother Serafina was very active with the JCCIA. She always walked in the front line of the parade because she was a prominent Italian-American leader.

