

All about legacy: annual Festa Italia celebrates generations of Italian-American locals



Fishermen's Wharf decorated for last year's Festa Italia. (Arianna Nalbach – Monterey Herald)

By [Andrea Valadez](#) | avaladez@montereyherald.com

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Downtown Monterey got a little taste of Italy this past weekend, as thousands gathered to honor the city's Italian and Sicilian roots through a shared love of food, music and family.

The 91st Festa Italia Santa Rosalia Fishermen's Festival took place over the span of three days and welcomed both locals and tourists to indulge in Italian culture. Many of the excited attendees have

family roots in Monterey that span generations and have been attending this festival for as long as they can remember.

“One of the things that the city of Monterey prides itself on is our history and our traditions,” said Mayor Tyller Williamson. “We really need to make sure we hold tight to that because it’s what brought us to where we are today. (Festa Italia) is a really great time to come out with everybody in the community and celebrate that tradition and heritage and have a good time while you’re doing it.”

Hundreds of people packed into the Custom House Plaza Saturday afternoon to enjoy the wide variety of vendors, wine, authentic Italian dishes, local bands and the yearly Bocce Tournament. Many people arrived before the day’s official festivities began at 11:30 a.m. to get a good seat to watch the opening ceremonies and remarks by various city officials.



Congressman Jimmy Panetta gave opening remarks at Saturday's

Festa Italia. (Andrea Valadez – Monterey Herald)

Congressman Jimmy Panetta recognized his grandfather, Carmelo, who settled in Monterey in the early 1930s and resided on “Spaghetti Hill,” the block of Old Town named after the Italian-American residents who flocked there decades ago in search of community.

“Today is a day in which we get to celebrate our Italian heritage and we get to celebrate ... our family’s roots and when we do that, we celebrate Monterey’s roots,” said Panetta.

Following the remarks, there was a procession to Fisherman’s Wharf for the traditional Blessing of the Fishing Fleet with a float dedicated to Santa Rosalia, the festival’s namesake.

The first festa in 1933 was created by Francesca (Ferranti) Giamona, Giovanna Balbo, Rosa Ferrante and Domenica Enea after a statue of Santa Rosalia, patron saint of Sicilian fishermen, was donated to the San Carlos Cathedral in Monterey. The cathedral opened its doors in 1794, making it California’s first cathedral.



A statue of Santa Rosalia was donated to Monterey in 1933. The patron saint of Sicilian fishermen is prayed to for safe passage and a bountiful fishing season. (Andrea Valadez – Monterey Herald)

This year's Grand Marshall was Anthony (Toni) Davi, who has been a Monterey local since he and his brother Peter made the journey from Sicily to Monterey in 1957.

"I'm happy to be recognized by the Sicilian population here in Monterey," said Davi. "There's many of them that could have been chosen to be Grand Marshall, but to choose me is special and something that's very close to my heart."

Davi has owned three boats, "Sandi D," named after his wife, "Di Mi Ann," and "Silver Streak." He fished mostly herring for many years. "This is my home away from home," he said. "All my life has been in Monterey." Out of all of the jobs he's had over the years, Davi said fishing has always been his favorite. He passed this love on to his

own son, Frank, who fished with his father on “Silver Streak” in San Francisco for years.



Toni Davi was honored as this year's Grand Marshal. Davi was born

in Isola Delle Femmine, Sicily in 1944 and moved to Monterey at 13. (Andrea Valadez – Monterey Herald)

Another family legacy is that of Antoinette Spadaro Crivello, whose grandparents came from Sicily to Monterey in the early 1900s and her grandfather took a job fishing sardines.

The men in the Spadaro family were all captains of their own Purse Seiner fishing vessels. Years later, Antoinette's father took over one of those boats and carried on the legacy fishing salmon, black cod and albacore up and down the California coast for years. For Antoinette Crivello, it has never been an option to not continue her family's history on the Central Coast.

"I would never leave the Monterey area. It's our community," she said. Antoinette Crivello was raised on "Spaghetti Hill," the same area her grandparents first moved to. "My roots are here. My children didn't even move out of Monterey, they're still here," said Antoinette.

Antoinette and her husband Sebastian (Buster) have dedicated hours to making sure Festa Italia properly honors their families and dozens of others like them.

After arriving in Monterey in 1961, Crivello worked for Sea Products, a fish processing company for 43 years and fished in Alaska for salmon and calamari on the "Sea Diamond." He was then one of the founding members of the Festa Italia Santa Rosalia Foundation and previously served as the president of the foundation for 35 years. "It's a wonderful way to spread our culture with other people," said his wife.

“Today, we are proud of our Italian heritage, we celebrate our Italian heritage,” said Panetta. “We celebrate that this is a nation of immigrants, but more importantly we are a nation of risk-takers: the people before us who took the risk to come here to give their progeny a better life.”

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