

A Magical Little Feast

Darrell Fusaro (October 04, 2009)



Frankie Competelli, born on New York City's renowned Mulberry Street in Little Italy, is one of those pioneers who helped bring the Feast of San Gennaro to L.A. While they were celebrating its 8th edition late last month, October was being proclaimed as Italian Heritage Month by the City of Los Angeles, the fifth metropolitan area in the US with the highest number of Italians.

HOLLYWOOD, CA. A wiser man than I once told me that, "a man isn't happy because he is rich, he is rich because he is happy." Today I have my proof. Restaurateur, Frankie Competelli, an Italian American born on New York City's renowned Mulberry Street in Little Italy. He spent his childhood attending the yearly Feast of San Gennaro and he appears to be the richest man in Los Angeles.



Standing with Frankie in the middle of a crowd at this year's Feast of San Gennaro in Los Angeles, it's obvious why he's so happy; he's one its four founders.



Celebrating its eighth year in Los Angeles, located in Hollywood, on Highland Avenue just a block from Mann's Chinese Theater, it is still unbelievable to the founders of this event, that their dream to bring the Italian American tradition of their ancestors in New York City to Los Angeles, has continued to flourish. When Frankie Competelli, Late Night Television Host Jimmy Kimmel, Radio Personality Adam Carolla and TV Producer Doug Deluca would get together at Frankie's restaurant, "Frankie's New York Italian Restaurant on Melrose," they would often reminisce about the ol' "Feast" back in New York City. Then one day they decided to make a commitment to bring it to life in sunny California.

In 2001, with a lot of faith, some luck and the support of Precious Cheese, their very first sponsor, the very first Feast of San Gennaro in Los Angeles took place on a small church parking lot across from the Capitol Records building. "That was a very magical little festival," says Frankie Competelli. Apparently, when looking for their first location, Frankie decided to talk to the Priest at Christ the King Church on Rossmore Avenue and when it was discovered that the Father just happened to be an actual Italian Priest from Naples, Italy, he just knew it was meant to be.

Their goal was clear and their motive true. Bring Italian American heritage to life in Los Angeles with the Feast and in the spirit of St. Gennaro, the patron saint of Naples, Italy, give help to those who



need it in the community. "We formed the San Gennaro Foundation, a non-profit, and all of our proceeds go to helping charitable institutions in Hollywood, such as the Battered Women's Shelter and the homeless children."

A very humble man, Frankie made it clear that credit for the success of the Feast does not just belong to the four founders. "There are so many people, Italian Americans from all over Los Angeles that make this possible every year." As Frankie begins to name them, he realizes that there are so many to thank he couldn't possibly name them all.

Thanks to Frankie and his friends there has been a new interest in preserving Italian American heritage throughout Los Angeles, CA. One of the first fruits of the Feast was the formation of a Los Angeles chapter of The Sons of Italy, "the Hollywood Lodge which is four to five hundred people strong from zero." Frankie proudly notes. This paved the way to getting a financial commitment from the City of Los Angeles to restore the Italian Hall on North Main Street in downtown Los Angeles, as a showcase of Italian American History in CA. And, just recently, October has been proclaimed as Italian Heritage Month by the City of Los Angeles.

California ranks as the third state with the highest Italian American population, after New York and New Jersey. Los Angeles is the fifth metropolitan area in the US with the highest number of Italians. For a long time you wouldn't know it because we were all spread out. But no longer. Now gatherings of Italian Americans in Los Angeles are becoming the norm, rather than the exception.

CITY OF LOS ANGELES RESOLUTION WHEREAS, The City of Los Angeles supports "Italian-American Heritage Month" and recognizes the contributions of Italian-Americans to the City of Los Angeles, State of California and the United States; and **WHEREAS**, In April 1524, Giovanni da Verrazzano, a mariner from Florence, Italy, set foot in what is now Rhode Island. His arrival at Block Island and his observation that it was about the size of the island of Rhodes later gave Rhode Island its name; and **WHEREAS**, Other Italians, like Amerigo Vespucci and Christopher Columbus, were some of the first explorers to explore the American continents and illustrate the geography; and **WHEREAS**, Italians and Italian-Americans have made great contributions to America's society economically, artistically, culturally, scientifically and politically; and have won prestigious prizes, such as the Nobel Prize, the Pritzker Award for architecture, and the Fields Medal for mathematics; and **WHEREAS**, Italians and Italian-Americans invented pianos, violins, calendars, radios, telescopes, compasses, microscopes, thermometers, eye glasses, steam engines, typewriters, and batteries; and **WHEREAS**, Italian-Americans have toiled and labored while helping to build our Nation's infrastructure, including railroads, tunnels, highways, and subways; and **WHEREAS**, A great many Americans have enjoyed the entertainment provided by Italian-Americans, such as Hall of Fame baseball player Joe DiMaggio, singer and songwriter Frank Sinatra, world-renowned composer Henry Mancini, and Oscar-winning actor Robert DeNiro; and **WHEREAS**, Great Italian-American political figures, such as Fiorello La Guardia, Anthony Celebreeze (who, in the Kennedy administration, was the first Italian-American Cabinet member), Antonin Scalia (the first Italian-American Supreme Court Justice), and John O. Pastore (who, in 1945, became the first Italian-American governor of Rhode Island), have enriched the political process and brought national pride to our country; and **WHEREAS**, Over 5.4 million Italians immigrated to the United States between 1820 and 1992, which today has resulted in over 26 million Americans of Italian descent in the United States, making them the fifth largest ethnic group; and **WHEREAS**, The Italian presence in Los Angeles began in 1827 with Giovanni Leandri, a native of Sardinia, who established a business and built a home in the pueblo, adjacent to where Union Station currently stands. **WHEREAS**, The heart of the Italian enclave was located at what is today El Pueblo Historical Monument, Chinatown and Lincoln Heights. **WHEREAS**, Italians made significant contributions to the development of Los Angeles and California, from the fields of banking, science, agriculture, transportation, and entertainment, and are responsible for landmarks such as the Watts Towers, Guasti Villa, Venice Canals, and the Biltmore Hotel. **WHEREAS**, the City of Los Angeles' Italian-American community boasts a bountiful history and unequaled vitality, adding to the rich cultural diversity of the Golden State and, in the process, has made so many remarkable contributions that enhance the quality of life in the community; now, therefore be it **NOW**,



THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Council of the City of Los Angeles hereby declares the month of October as "Italian-American Heritage Month" and recognizes the significant contributions that Italian-Americans have made to the City of Los Angeles, State of California, and the United States of America.

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