Italian-American CULTURAL CENTER OF IOWA

Newsletter NOV/DEC 2026



A Message from Board Chair

Jeff Lamberti

A New Chapter for Our Italian American Community

Dear Friends,

What an extraordinary moment for the Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa! After years of dreaming, planning, and hard work, we have officially opened the doors to our new home. Seeing so many families, friends, supporters, and community members come together for our grand opening was a powerful reminder of why we began this journey.

This Center represents far more than a beautiful new building. It is a place where generations will gather, traditions will be celebrated, stories will be shared, and our Italian heritage will continue to thrive. It is a home for those who grew up surrounded by Italian traditions and a welcoming place for anyone interested in discovering the richness of our culture.

None of this would have been possible without the generosity and determination of our donors, volunteers, board members, and countless supporters. To everyone who contributed time, talent, or financial support, thank you. You have helped create something that will serve our community for generations.

As we approach the holiday season, I hope you will take the opportunity to visit, participate in our programs, and introduce friends and family to all the Center has to offer. Our grand opening was not the finish line. It was the beginning of an exciting new chapter.

On behalf of our Board of Directors, I wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season filled with the warmth of family, friendship, and tradition.

Warm regards,

Jeff Lamberti, Board Chair
Italian-American Cultural Center of Iowa

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We're Finally Home!



After years of planning, construction, and anticipation, the Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa has officially opened its doors! Our grand opening celebrations on October 24–26 marked an incredible milestone as we welcomed friends, families, and supporters into our beautifully renovated home at the historic Butler Mansion.

What was once a vision is now a place for our community to gather, celebrate, learn, and share in the traditions that connect generations. From the museum and educational spaces to the gathering areas and beautiful architectural details, every corner offers something to discover. We look forward to sharing more information about public hours, programs, and opportunities to experience all the Center has to offer.

And stay tuned! We'll be sharing a special edition of our newsletter capturing the highlights, memorable moments, and people who made our three-day grand opening celebration so special.











A Taste of Italian-American History

By George Formaro, Chef and Food Historian

The Des Moines Sausage Sandwich: A Tradition All Its Own

As a chef and food historian, I want to talk a little about the history of the sausage sandwich here in Des Moines, Iowa.

The grinder is another sandwich altogether, one that belongs on the list of foods uniquely associated with Des Moines, in the same way Steak de Burgo and the fried flour taco with beans are Des Moines things.

We will save the grinder for another day, and I will do a grinder roundup in another post.

But let's talk about the sausage sandwich. What I really want to talk about is the sausage patty and the different ways it has been dressed over the years.

There are versions made with loose ground sausage and, in some cases, rope or link sausage. The loose ground sausage version is not necessarily mixed with sauce and topped with cheese, which would thrust it into grinder territory, in my opinion.

There are versions of this patty-style sausage sandwich throughout the Midwest. The cudighi in northern Michigan comes to mind, with similar toppings, but their sausage spice is rooted in a northern Italian tradition. Here in Des Moines, it was the southern Italian (Calabrese) influence that helped define our sausage tradition.

That combination of red chili pepper, paprika, and fennel has become a recognizable part of the Des Moines sausage tradition, thanks to places like Graziano Brothers, the Scavo family, and Italian Importing Co.

Also, I think it is important to talk about the more East Coast version of the sausage sandwich. I'm talking about the festival-style sausage sandwich, usually made with a milder rope or link sausage cooked on a griddle or grill. A different sandwich altogether, in my opinion. Still fantastic! (See Pizza Bar locations for this.)

Now, let's talk about how we dressed these patty-style sandwiches in Des Moines.

Over the years, a few different ways of dressing these sandwiches became part of the Des Moines tradition.

There is a version with cheese, usually mozzarella, ketchup, mustard, onions, pickles, and pickled peppers. The peppers are available mild, hot, or mixed. The Norwood Inn is definitely a place I would put on your list.

Another was from a place called the Antlers, which I swear made the sauce with ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, horseradish, and maybe chili sauce. Cheese as well. Sadly, this place has been gone for some time. No one I know does this style.

Then there is the version I think of as more traditionally Italian-American, with red sauce, mozzarella, and fried peppers, particularly Mancini peppers, or sometimes roasted red peppers. Mild, hot, or what those in the know call mixed peppers. Kelly's Little Nipper, Henry J's (don't sleep on HJ's sausage sandwich or their fried tacos).

This particular version of the sausage sandwich is very much a Des Moines thing. Legendary places like the Antlers, J&B Tap, Los Compadres, Noodles Pasta and Sandwich Co., and Papa Joe's hold a particular fondness in the hearts of many.

Graziano's was the sausage of choice at many of the most legendary places. Krispy Krust or Funaro's Italian Bakery were the bread choices in those days. These sandwiches were around long before many of the breads we have available today.

There are many places that have them today.

Who are your favorites? I'd love to complete my list of these iconic places to get this uniquely Des Moines sausage sandwich.

My working list of sausage patty sandwiches is:

- Norwood Inn
- Henry J's
- Fareway Franks
- Kelly's Little Nipper
- Park Ave Pub
- Club 2000
- Francie's
- Striking Sparrow

In Our Library



This month I'd like to tell you about a book that may bring back memories of your Italian grandmother. It is titled Grandmother Said it Best: A Treasury of Italian Proverbs. The proverbs in this book were collected by Angline Guzzetta-Jones and Antinorno Polizzi in their hope to keep the oral traditions of the Italian people alive.

Included in this book are proverbs about family, friendships, animals, food, and several other areas relating to life experiences. These sayings have been passed on, in most cases, by word of mouth.

For those who want to practice their Italian, I will relate some of the proverbs in both Italian and English. The Italian will be in bold print and is loosely translated in the underlined phrase. Following that you will find the proverb as we use it in English.

Here are some examples:

Al bisogno si conosce Famico: Only when the chips are down can you see who is truly your friend. – A friend in need is a friend indeed.

L'abito non fa il Monaco: The habit doesn't make the monk. – Appearances are deceiving.

Albero vechhio non si piega piu': You can't straighten an old tree. – You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Stende il piede per quanto e' lungo il lenzuolo: Stretch your foot only as far as the sheet will allow. – Live within your means.

I hope you have enjoyed these ancient sayings.

To preserve oral traditions, people need to share them by word of mouth. Please do your part and keep talking and sharing.

The Moka Pot - An Italian Staple in Coffee Brewing



The moka pot is a stove-top or electric coffee maker that brews coffee by passing hot water driven by vapor pressure and heat-driven gas expansion through ground coffee. Named after the Yemeni city of Mokha, it was popularized by Italian aluminum vendor Alfonso Bialetti and his son Renato starting from 1933. It quickly became one of the staples of Italian culture. Bialetti Industries continues to produce the original model under the trade name "Moka Express". Spreading from Italy, the moka pot is today most commonly used in Europe, Latin America, and Australia.

Alfonso Bialetti popularized the machine for home use, initially marketing the Moka Express starting in 1933, but relatively few were sold until his son Renato embarked on a major marketing campaign after the latter took over the family business in the 1940s, including the commissioning of the company's iconic mascot, in 1952. According to the company, the design of the original Moka Express has not changed since its debut. Bialetti Industries applied for a patent in 1946 describing an apparatus which uses the same brewing method but arranges the vessels side by side, rather than stacking them vertically.

Among the variations to the moka pot design that have been introduced since the 1930s are those that integrate an electric heating element in the boiler, expedite brew time, create milk froth, and allow microwave brewing. To expedite brewing, a weighted valve called *Cremavent* has been added as a pressure regulator on top of the nozzle that allows pressure to build up inside the water tank in a manner similar to a pressure cooker. As pressure builds up more quickly in this method compared to the standard moka pot, it reaches the level required for water to rise through the ground coffee in a shorter time. The result is coffee brewed at a higher pressure and temperature than the standard pot, making it more similar to espresso and therefore with more visible crema.

Event Recap

The Italian Community Joins the Celebration

The former site of the Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa, at 1961 Indianola Avenue, was the site of a community celebration titled "Picnic with Pat". With the mural in the background, visitors enjoyed freshly-baked bread from the 500 loaves baked in the brick oven at the site.

The oven, built in 2009 by Cal Concrete Construction Inc. (Tony Caligiuri and Sons), was commissioned by the Cultural Center with the help of a Federal Grant. Tony, Pat, and Charles Caligiuri, along with some of their employees, built the oven which has mostly gone unused since its construction.

Bakers George Formaro, Tony Lemmo, and Luigi Tumea had two goals in mind. One was to bring the community together and fire up the brick oven in honor of the Italian "Bread Whisperers" of their ancestors. The second was to honor long-time Cultural Center Director, Pat (Mrs. C) Civitate.

Civitate had been the Center director for nearly 40 years. She has also been a force in the community leading scout troops, being one-time president of the Pioneer Club, a member of the Sister City and Sister States committees, and active in numerous other endeavors. She has been an advocate for the Italian people and a source of education for those wanting to know more about Italian customs and traditions. Mayor Connie Boesen was present at the celebration. She presented Pat with a Key to the City for all of her contributions to the community and her far-reaching love and sharing of her heritage.

Italians from all over the area joined with the neighborhood to enjoy the bread and conversation as they "Picnicked with Pat."





Urbandale Recognizes Italian-American Heritage Month

On October 6, the City of Urbandale officially recognized October as Italian American Heritage Month, honoring the rich history, cultural traditions and lasting contributions of Italian Americans to our communities.

Loretta Tursi Sieman and Paolo Bartesaghi, President of the Italian-American Cultural Center of Iowa, accepted the proclamation on behalf of the organization, marking a meaningful moment as the Cultural Center prepared to celebrate the grand opening of its new home.

The proclamation recognizes the importance of preserving Italian heritage, honoring the generations who came before us and sharing the traditions that continue to connect families and communities.

The Cultural Center extends its sincere appreciation to the City of Urbandale for celebrating Italian American heritage and supporting its preservation for future generations.

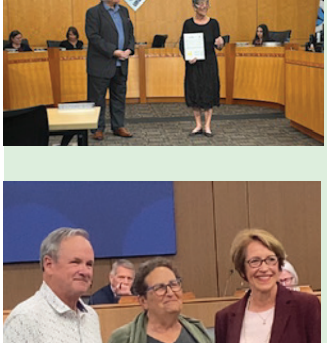




Des Moines Celebrates Italian-American Heritage Month

Following the City of Urbandale's proclamation earlier in the month, the City of Des Moines continued the celebration of Italian-American Heritage Month on October 19, with Mayor Connie Boesen officially recognizing the occasion during the City Council meeting. Jon Turner and Therese Riordan accepted the proclamation.

The timing couldn't have been better! Just days before the grand opening of the Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa, the proclamation added to the excitement of an already historic week. We extend our appreciation to Mayor Boesen and the City of Des Moines for helping make this milestone even more memorable.



Upcoming Events

Amore Amore Book Release & Signing

Thursday, November 5, 2026 | 5:00–7:00 p.m.
Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa
2633 Fleur Drive, Des Moines

Join Alessandra of Cooking with Alessandra as she celebrates the release of her new book, *Amore Amore!* Filled with food, memories, and personal stories, the book celebrates Italian cooking, family, and tradition.

Guests will have the opportunity to meet Alessandra, purchase a signed copy of her book, hear about the inspiration behind it, and tour the newly renovated Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa.

Come enjoy an evening of stories, Italian spirit, and, of course, *amore!*

Santa Lucia Celebration

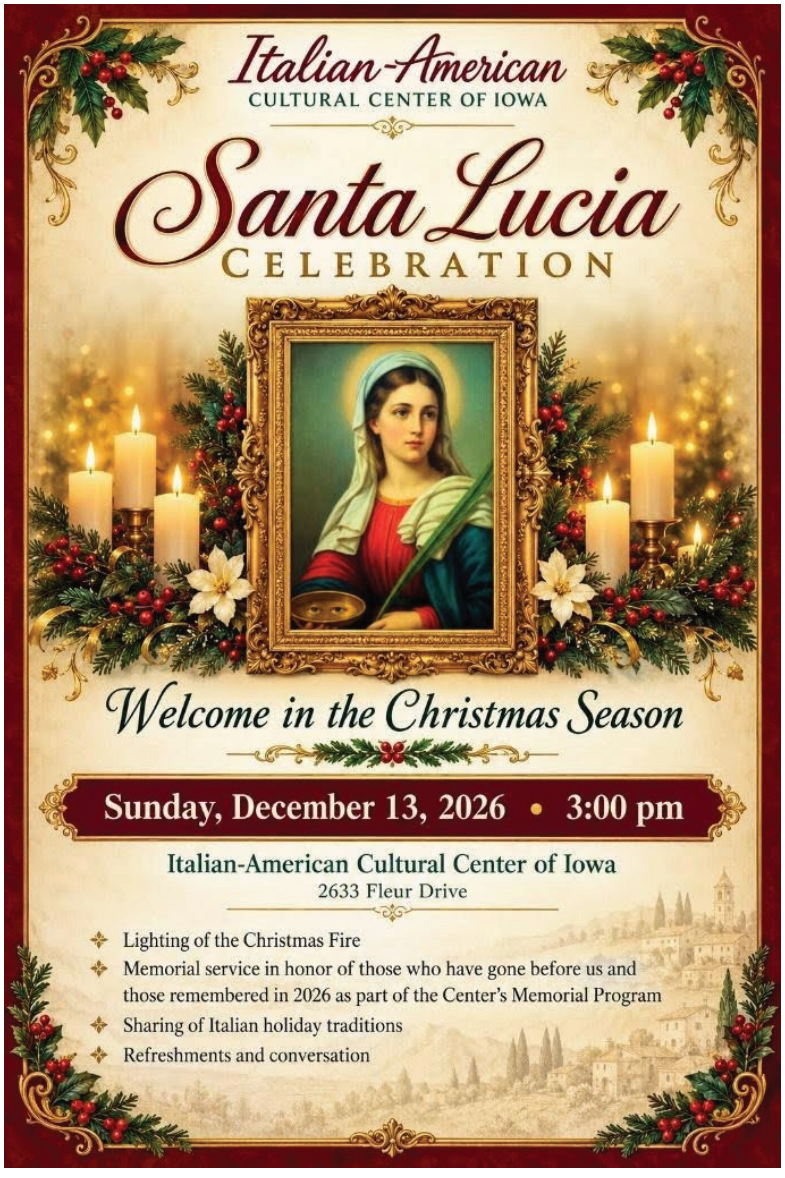
Sunday, December 13, 2026 | 3:00 p.m.
Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa
2633 Fleur Drive, Des Moines

Join us for a special Santa Lucia Celebration as we welcome the Christmas season and honor cherished Italian holiday traditions.

This meaningful afternoon will bring our community together for the lighting of the Christmas Fire, a memorial service honoring those who have gone before us and those remembered in 2026 through the Center's Memorial Program, and the sharing of Italian holiday traditions.

Refreshments and conversation will follow as we celebrate the season with family, friends, and community.





Event Recap



Sapori d'Autunno Celebrates the Flavors of Italy

The Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa celebrated the arrival of fall with *Sapori d'Autunno* — "Flavors of Autumn" — on Wednesday, September 30, at Lucca in Des Moines' East Village.

The evening brought together friends and supporters of the Cultural Center to celebrate Italy's rich culinary heritage through seasonal Italian dishes, thoughtfully paired wines and the traditions of the autumn harvest.

Organized by Andrea Barutta, the event was part of the Cultural Center's popular *Sapori* series, which celebrates the connection between Italian food, culture and community throughout the seasons.

More than an evening of food and wine, *Sapori d'Autunno* reflected a tradition at the heart of Italian culture: gathering around the table, sharing stories and celebrating heritage together.

Proceeds from the evening supported the Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa and its mission to preserve, promote and share Italian heritage with future generations.





We Reflect And Remember

Molly Malone Tursi

Clara Romano

Polly Rose Nolan

Linda Groves

Do you have an event you would like to share or a loved one you would like to have remembered? We would be happy to publish your news in the Italian-American Cultural Center of Iowa Newsletter.

Please send your tax-deductible donation in your desired amount to:

Italian-American Cultural Center of Iowa- Memories
2633 Fleur Drive
Des Moines, Iowa 50321

Please include your name and address as well as the name and address of the person you would like to have informed of your gift.



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Be Part Of Our Family Tree



Our Community In Action

The Cultural Center is not just a place—it is a home for the organizations and traditions that already bring this community together.

Italian American Women of Iowa (IAWI)

September/October Newsletter

Monthly Meetings are held on the 4th Tuesday of the month, and we would love to see you there. Meetings are being held from 6:30-7:30pm!

Thank you to everyone who continues to make our group such a wonderful place to connect, celebrate our heritage, and give back to others.

- ***A Spooktacular Success – IAWI Annual Trunk or Treat***

Our annual IAWI Trunk or Treat was a SUCCESS! Thank you to everyone who came out, participated, volunteered, and helped make this event so much fun. We loved seeing our community come together for a festive celebration filled with Halloween spirit, smiles, and memories!

- ***Upcoming – Guanti Class***

Members get ready to roll up your sleeves and join us for a special ***guanti-making class!*** *We're looking forward to gathering together to celebrate our Italian traditions and learn something delicious along the way. Keep an eye out for the official announcement!*

- ***Upcoming – IAWI Annual Holiday Party***

We're looking forward to celebrating with our IAWI sisters! We're in the early stages of planning our annual holiday gathering. Stay tuned for more information as plans come together!

As the holiday season approaches, IAWI is now **accepting donations to support the families we are adopting for Christmas.** Every contribution, big or small, can help make the holidays a little brighter for a family in need. Thank you for helping us carry on the spirit of giving and showing the love and generosity that make our IAWI community so special.

Reach out with any question via email: iawofiowa@gmail.com



Our Community In Action

The Cultural Center is not just a place—it is a home for the organizations and traditions that already bring this community together.

The Men And Women Of The Vittoria Lodge

November welcomes us with cooler weather. This is a gentle invitation to move our gatherings indoors and to find comfort in a slower pace and the warmth of togetherness. With that in mind, we hope to see all lodge members at our upcoming events and meetings.

Nov. 7th	Auxiliary HOLIDAY MARKET & PASTA LUNCH, 9:00-3:00
Nov. 15th	Lodge meeting at 2:00
Nov. 20th	GAME NIGHT at 6:00, food provided
Dec. 11th	PRESIDENT'S HOLIDAY PARTY at 6:00
Dec. 19th	Lodge meeting at 2:00
March 21st	CAVATELLI DINNER

Please be sure to note the above dates and upcoming activities on your calendar.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the lodge fall cleanup day. A delicious sausage and pepper lunch was served.

Remember in the festive months ahead: *Good Food + Good Company* = ***Great Memories***

Roger Fiori
President, Vittoria Lodge

Deb Fleishman
President, Vittoria Lodge Auxiliary

Società Vittoria Italiana



Dolci Festivi - Cookie Orders Are Open!



Dolci Festivi

Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa

Treat your family, friends, and co-workers this holiday season to some homemade Italian cookies.

Cookies will be sold by the dozen.

$20 per dozen

Orders must be received by
Sunday, December 6th.
Cookie pick up will be at the Cultural Center on
Sunday, December 20th, 1–3 PM.
2633 Fleur Dr, Des Moines, IA

Checks made out to IACCOFIA and mailed to:
Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa
PO Box 4994
Des Moines, IA 50305

Any questions please contact:
Michelle Murrow
515-868-7435 or murrow@iaccofia.org

Dozen Ordered


Cranberry Orange Biscotti _____


Cuccidati (Fig Cookies) _____


Snowball Cookies _____


Panettone Cookie _____

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Total Amount Due: $ _____

** Some cookies contain nuts.*

ITALIAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER OF IOWA

2633 Fleur Dr. Des Moines, IA 50321

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER!