

Congratulations to the Nominee Finalists!

*Please welcome these outstanding Italian Americans
to the Bravo! Class of 2024*

*Join us on March 8th as we celebrate all the nominees and award the 2024
Bravo! in each category at the Annual Bravo! Awards Ceremony*

*Please enjoy reading the nominations submitted by the community for
these outstanding Italian Americans.*

“ITALIAN AMERICAN” OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Rita DeFrango
Lisa Perito Lokken
Steve O’Dorisio



Rita DeFrango

Rita deserves to be recognized as the Italian American of the Year as she encompasses what it means to be an outstanding Italian American. Rita has been an active pillar in our community serving on the executive boards of both the Sons of Italy and The Italians of America for 10+ years. Rita identified the need for all of our Italian organizations to come together in solidarity and support for each other and began the yearly calendar meeting gathering of our organizations to share the dates of our events for each year so that we could all support each other's functions and also try to avoid overlapping events. Rita is always willing to share her resources and give advice on organizing events within our community. And she has definitely organized and orchestrated her fair share. Parades, bazaar/feast booths, dinners & dances, car shows - you name it, she's probably done it before! Not only is she great at organizing and facilitating these events but she's always right there in the trenches doing the work as well! Rita also encompasses the Faith, Family, Food aspect of being an Italian American.

She loves God and family, which to her definitely isn't just blood - when you become Rita's friend you also become a part of her family! Rita also prepares wonderful dishes for both the Rodder's Ball and Prima Domenica events and in typical Italian fashion she always prepares enough to feed an army! I am sure there are several things Rita does within our community that I haven't even touched based on because she truly is a work horse for us but isn't one to toot her own horn either.

*Rita is a pillar and backbone of the local Italian American community. She serves on the council for Italians of America as well as on the executive board for Sons & Daughters of Italy. Also, she has pioneered the all-clubs meeting to develop the all clubs calendar to avoid events duplication and overlapping. Rita is also a "workhorse" for any event that is put on. She embodies giving of herself and her time to make the local community great.

*Rita is employed full time and yet she manages to volunteer her time for great causes and events in the Italian community. Rita has stepped up to volunteer for numerous rolls for others who are not able to fulfill at this time due to health reasons. I have the pleasure of volunteering with Rita at many events and she is a hard working, organized person and a pleasure to be around.

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Lisa Perito Lokken

Lisa Lokken (Perito) is a proud Italian American whose heart beats in rhythm with the spirit of North Denver. She embodies the warmth, generosity, and deep-rooted traditions that make this community so special. Her home is more than just a house—it's a gathering place where family and friends are always welcome, where laughter fills the air, and where no one ever leaves hungry. Whether it's a holiday

feast or a simple Sunday dinner, Lisa's table is always abundant, not just with food, but with love.

Lisa's passion for cooking is the thread that weaves together so much of her life. Whether she's preparing meals for her loved ones or working magic in the kitchen of her catering business, Just Like Nonnie's, every dish she creates carries the essence of home and tradition. Her husband, Mike, and their two children never cease to be amazed by her culinary talents—though they've long accepted that she will never follow a written recipe. In true Italian fashion, Lisa cooks with instinct, memory, and heart. Some joke that she might be allergic to recipes! Time and time again, people tell her that her food transports them back to childhood, to the warmth of their own family kitchens, and to the joy of Sunday dinners that seemed to last forever.

When she's not cooking up a storm, Lisa devotes her time and energy to her other great loves—her family, her community, and her ever-growing pack of beloved dogs. Her home wouldn't be complete without her loyal pups, Fergus and Olaf, who are always by her side, along with her grand-dog, Finnegan, who brings even more joy and mischief to the mix. She also has a soft spot for her mom's dog, Lady, who is just as much a part of the family. Lisa has always had a special place in her heart for animals, and her furry companions are some of her most loyal and loving sidekicks. Beyond the kitchen, Lisa is a passionate advocate for preserving and strengthening her community. She currently serves as the Ladies President of Potenza Lodge, following in the footsteps of both her grandparents, who once held the same honor. Her dedication to revitalizing the Lodge has been unwavering—over the past four years, she has worked tirelessly to restore it to its former status as a cornerstone of North Denver. With two more years ahead in her leadership role, Lisa is committed to continuing the work of rebuilding and uniting a community that had begun to dwindle over the last decade. She shares this deep sense of service with her mother and daughter, making it a true family tradition. Despite all she gives to others, Lisa is far more comfortable in the background—always in the kitchen, always serving, and never seeking the spotlight. She pours so much of herself into the people and places she loves, and it's time she is recognized for the countless ways she enriches this corner of the world we all call home.

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Steve O'Dorisio

Please accept this nomination of Steve O'Dorisio for Bravo! Awards 2024 Italian American of the Year.

Steve is very grateful and proud of his Italian-American heritage. He comes from two large Italian-American families with deep Colorado roots: Zarlengos and O'Dorisios. This rich heritage drives Steve to contribute to the Italian-American community through his (1) support of the Italian-American community, (2) public service, (3) academic endeavors, and (4) leadership style.

1. SERVING ITALIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

In response to the inevitable removal of Columbus Day as a state holiday, Steve and author historian Alisa DiGiacomo engaged stakeholders from around the state to create Francis Xavier Cabrini Day. This new holiday celebrates the kindness, compassion, and commitment to the community of our Saint Mother Cabrini. It also ensures the rich history, contributions, and culture of Italian-Americans will continue to be officially celebrated in Colorado.

In addition to the above, Steve volunteers every year at Italian-American events including the Assumption Bazaar, Assumption Annual Spaghetti Dinner, Welby Days, and Cabrini Day.

Last year, Steve was excited and grateful to speak at the 2024 flag-raising ceremony at the Colorado State Capitol to recognize Italian heritage.

2. PUBLIC SERVICE

Currently, Steve is in his final term as Adams County Commissioner where he advocates for quality of life, economic opportunity, and standing up for his constituents. In this role, he has been elected as Chair of the Adams County Board of County Commissioners three times and served as President of all Colorado counties in the statewide professional association, Colorado Counties, Inc.

Before serving as county commissioner, Steve served in law enforcement as a Deputy District Attorney for the 17th Judicial District, where he prosecuted all types of crimes, from misdemeanors to felonies.

As a volunteer, Steve serves on many boards and commissions, including the Cabrini Day Holiday Commission, Lincoln Hills Cares Foundation, and more.

3. ACADEMIC ENDEAVORS

Steve's commitment to academics also contributes to the Italian-American community. As a member of the faculty in the Anderson College of Business and Computing at Regis University, Steve teaches Business Law and Ethics. He has facilitated special seminars on negotiations and ethics at both Regis and the University of Denver. Recently, Steve joined the nonprofit Leveraging Local Leaders, a nonpartisan effort to train and support local leaders from across Colorado on exercising reasonable and ethical leadership practices.

4. LEADERSHIP STYLE

Steve's leadership style showcases his work ethic and caring personality, just a few of the character traits he learned growing up in an Italian-American family. Steve has a reputation as an honest, moderate, reasonable leader who works with people across the aisle and across the state to solve problems. This is why Steve was asked to participate in the negotiations to establish the framework for distributing \$20M+ to fight opioid addiction. His unifying bipartisan approach is also why Steve was named Man of the Year in 2021 by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and the 2024 Business Advocate of the Year by the Thornton Area Chamber of Commerce.

In 2024, he also received the Community Builder Award by Servicios de la Raza for his advocacy for marginalized communities and his efforts to bring together the Italian-American, Latino, and Indigenous Communities to establish Cabrini Day to celebrate the kindness, compassion, and community commitment of Mother Cabrini.

This unifying approach has earned Steve broad support and endorsements from businesses, labor unions, police, firefighters, and various neighborhood and advocacy groups. In a time of political division, Steve is seen as a model for community members seeking trustworthy, respectful, and engaging leaders.

Steve O'Dorisio continues to this day to lead an exemplary life promoting Italian American culture. His achievements in his commitment to the Italian American lifestyle, as well as his professional career of service, has contributed to the Italian American community in a meaningful way and has benefited many Coloradans. Thank you for considering Steve O'Dorisio for the great honor of Italian American of the Year.

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ITALIAN AMERICAN “VOLUNTEER” OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

**Suzanne Schiro Fasing
Anissa Madrill
Linda Villano**



Suzanne Schiro Fasing

Because of her many contributions to the Dante Alighieri Society of Denver in 2024, and in the years prior, my husband Tom Mirabito and I, nominate Suzanne Fasing for the Bravo Volunteer of the Year Award. When Suzanne Schiro Fasing joined the Dante Alighieri Society thirteen years ago, she brought her experience growing up in a close-knit Italian community in Madison, Wisconsin; her Italian family heritage of coming to this country in 1900; an intense interest in Italian culture and in the immigrant experience and challenges; and a love of the Italian language and culture that she wanted to share with others. She spent her junior year in college attending the University of Bologna, enrolled with Italian students, and so, was immersed in the language and culture. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Italian and went on to earn her law degree. Shortly after joining the Dante Society, she was appointed Chair of the Education Committee, which meant she would become the volunteer coordinator for the Italian language classes offered through the society. With assistance from other board members, enrollment in the classes blossomed, and she helped grow the program to serve over 2,000 Italian language learners during her ten-year tenure. She enlisted highly credentialed instructors and improved the quality of the sessions while keeping tuition affordable. She believed the classes not only promoted the language and culture but built community among those who shared a common interest. The classes connected, not only the students, but teachers, some of whom were new to the area, with the community. In 2022, the Dante Society board nominated Mother Frances Cabrini to be inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame. The nomination was accepted with daunting requirements to provide digital photographs and an extensive biography. Suzanne accepted the challenge and interviewed experts at the Cabrini Shrine, History Colorado Museum and at Cabrini University (now Vanderbilt University) in Pennsylvania. She researched and read several books about the sister, gained access to photographs and developed a presentation with PowerPoint about Mother Cabrini. She serves on the Speakers Bureau for the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame, and in 2023 was interviewed by Channel 7 News and wrote articles for Andiamo! As in all her activities, she immersed herself in the project and developed a polished, professional, comprehensive record of Mother Cabrini's amazing life and accomplishments. Suzanne authored the biography of Mother Cabrini that is posted on the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame website: <https://www.cogreatwomen.org/project/frances-xavier-cabrini-mother-cabrini/> She wrote reviews on books -- My Brilliant Friend and A Bold and Dangerous Family--about Italian culture for Notizario, the Dante Alighieri Society of Denver newsletter. With a web designer, she helped design the Dante website and updated and maintained it. Because Suzanne is curious and participates in many cultural and educational offerings in the metro area, she meets and connects with a lot of people

and has enlisted them as speakers for our monthly meetings. In 2024, she recruited Denver University Art History Professor Scott Montgomery who spoke about the mosaics of Ravenna, and Betsy Schwarm, music historian, who spoke about the music of Giuseppe Verdi. She has arranged presentations about Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy by Dr. Seth Fabian. Suzanne also recruited Dottoressa Angelica Daneo, the Chief Curator at the Denver Art Museum, to provide a group tour for the Dante Society and guests of the Italian art in the Museum's collection. Suzanne chaired the By-laws Committee and drafted amendments and revisions for the members' approval. She has helped the society understand and resolve several legal issues that have surfaced over the years. She volunteered at the Prima Dominica Sunday brunch at Mt. Carmel, as she has done many times. She is always on the lookout for Italian events in which to collaborate with other community groups. She made arrangements for our group to participate in Italian musical programs at Denver University Newman Center with the Friends of Chamber Music. And in December 2024, she conducted the election of officers and installed them at our January 2025 meeting. And lastly, she recruited new members to the Society, including my husband Tom and me. While volunteering for Dante, Suzanne was practicing law for the City and County of Denver. She is semi-retired now and conducts hearings for the City and County on call. She lives with her husband, Attorney Greg Fasing, in Denver. They have two sons and two beautiful granddaughters.

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Anissa Madrill

Like many Italian Americans who belong to numerous IA organizations, Anissa Madrill belongs to four. The difference is that Anissa is an active participant in the organizations to which she belongs: The Dante Alighieri Society of Pueblo, the Dante Alighieri Society of Denver, Our Lady of Mount Carmel's Altar and Rosary Society, and the Sons and Daughters of Italy (Denver Lodge). Dante Alighieri Societies – Pueblo and Denver. The DAS Pueblo has maintained the teaching of the Italian language in the Pueblo Public Schools since the DAS's inception in 1977. Because of her heritage, Anissa took Italian lessons and at the age of sixteen became a member of the Dante Alighieri Society of Pueblo. Today, she is the Vice President of the Pueblo chapter, where she assists in planning events, edits the chapter's newsletter and posts it online. The Dante Alighieri Society has over 400 chapters internationally, only 9 in the United States with two in Colorado – Denver and Pueblo. Anissa is currently the global liaison for both the DAS of Pueblo and the DAS of Denver. In 2021 the DAS in Rome changed its visual branding and launched new Italian language classes online and in person as well as PLIDA certification programs. As the global liaison, Anissa has worked closely with Rome to obtain new logos for the organization and submit them to both Denver and Pueblo DAS. Additionally, she has regularly communicated with Rome to assist the two organizations in the Herculean task of translating, completing and implementing the Affiliation Agreement, the Utilization Agreement, the Minisito Manual, the Dante Ambassadors Program and the statistical data requirements.

Altar and Rosary Society- As a member of Our Lady of Mount Carmel's (OLMC) Altar and Rosary Society, Anissa was part of the Heritage Committee's effort that brought the movie "Cabrini" to the Harkness Theatre during Italian Heritage Month. At the theatre and at Prima Domenica breakfast, Anissa staffed the Cabrini table which sold merchandise to support the Society in its future endeavors. She was the auctioneer at the Society's annual Purse Auction, which raised money for the church. Our Lady of Mount Carmel (OLMC) To further promote the Italian culture, Anissa has been a lector at OLMC Prima Domenica Mass. As a result of her reading, Chris Parenti of Channel 2 approached her about the local Italian community. She promoted various Italian Heritage Month activities planned for October. Consequently, the OSDIA's Two-on-Two Bocce tournament, the DAS Denver Scopa event, and the Filitalia's Italian flag raising at the state capital received television coverage. As a lector, Anissa noted that the scripture translations were last done in 1980. She suggested a review of their accuracy, which resulted in the updating of the translations. Anissa has stepped up to

be the booth captain and take over the running of the Italian Bowls booth for the OLMC Festival in July of 2025.

Supporting Other IA Organizations- While not an attorney, Anissa is a paralegal and has assisted other organizations in amending and updating their bylaws. Additionally, she routinely posts other IA events and activities on her Facebook page.

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Linda Villano

Linda Villano is an outstanding candidate for the Italian American Volunteer of the Year 2024 Bravo! Award, and we encourage you to consider her. Linda was born in Colorado, youngest of three in her family and went to North High. She married Roland Ponzio and moved to California for 20 years where she had a career in a pencil factory that supplied all those Number 2 pencils we know. After her husband's passing in 2008, Linda moved back to Colorado to be close to family and has now focused her energies on community service. She has shown incredible devotion to service, taking on an active role in several organizations. These include the Mt. Carmel Altar and Rosary, Italians of America, and the Sons & Daughters of Italy. Her dedicated involvement is truly admirable. Linda's lively participation and exceptional commitment to these organizations should not be underestimated. She volunteers at ALL their events! At the SOI, she is our Service Coordinator. She directs all the volunteers in the kitchen, knowing what is involved in each job. She is always the first

one there and the last one to leave. She is my right hand person in all our catered events. At the Italians of America, she is one of the main volunteers for our 3 biggest events, the Rodders Ball in April, the Car Show in July and the Laradon Hall fundraiser in October. Her drive and hardworking spirit is unmatched! Despite some physical challenges, she never complains and does it all with a big smile and a CAN DO attitude! At Mount Carmel Church, she volunteers with a lot of the preparation during the week, including making meatballs and cutting peppers. And during the Mt Carmel Bazaar, she works in the Pizza Fritta Booth. She also volunteers in the Pizza Fritta Booth at the St Rocco's Feast at the Potenza Lodge! Linda Villano is the epitome of the word VOLUNTEER, and is more than worthy of this award! Keeping up with the fast-paced environment, Linda works hard in both the meatball and Pizza Fritta booths. Plus, she's been instrumental in increasing sausage sandwich sales at the Italians of America Car Show, all for the benefit of the charity "Food for Thought". But her service doesn't stop there. Linda also volunteers with the Sons & Daughters of Italy, partaking in a variety of activities, from assisting with funerals to baking cookies for spaghetti dinners. She's more than just a volunteer; she's a role model, inspiring others with her constant dedication to helping others. In conclusion, Linda helps to raise money for St. Elizabeth's lunch line that serves the homeless. There is no one more deserving of this award.

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ITALIAN AMERICAN "RISING STAR" OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Alessandra Desiderio

Jenna Peccia

Jamie Yantorno



Alessandra Desiderio

The eldest daughter of Antonio Desiderio of Naples and Lorraine Caputo of Saviano and Bari, Alessandra (Aley) represents Italian culture in various areas of her life. Alessandra was brought up translating the events happening around her to her father. This experience instilled in her a value of advocacy and outreach that extended throughout her life, including advocating for single mothers and affordable childcare. Her initial understanding of business came from the numerous jobs she held during her teenage years and the encouragement from her father to overcome challenges, leading her to become an influential figure in Colorado business. After moving to Colorado with two young sons, Alessandra adapted to her situation by joining Italian-American organizations such as the Order of the Sons and Daughters of Italy, the National Organization of Italian-American Women, and the National Italian-American Foundation. She also became involved in The Leadership Program of the Rockies and her Church's community. With support from these organizations, she put herself through college and earned a bachelor's degree in technical business management. She graduated from the Leadership Program of the Rockies in 2014, receiving the Torch of Freedom Award. Around the time she graduated college, her father was diagnosed with a rare lung cancer. Alessandra stayed with her father until his passing, which gave her a renewed sense of duty. After graduating, she focused on addressing the high cost of childcare for single mothers. While working full-time and supporting her children, she developed her first app, Daycare Connection Partners, to advocate for affordable childcare. Despite financial struggles, she persevered but initially faced disappointment when the app did not yield results. With support from her communities, she restructured the app into CREW, which eventually saw success. She became a semifinalist on Shark Tank and presented on Trout Tank in Colorado. Recognizing the limitations of CREW, Alessandra sold the app to a local Denver business and began working with Colorado Lending Source, helping small businesses grow. She later helped start Prairie Rose Development and became a

Financial Consultant. Alessandra's leadership portfolio includes accolades such as the Torch of Freedom - Stephen Wright Legacy Award, Community Trustee Award Winner from the Leadership Pikes Peak Women's Community Leadership Initiative, Colorado Agricultural Leadership Program, Colorado Water Congress Career Accelerator Award, Franzini Fellowship, GenXYZ Most Influential Young Professionals Finalist, Denver Business Journal Outstanding Woman in Business Finalist – Finance, OC365 Fellowship, and Hive International Leadership Development Program. Alessandra decided to connect with her Italian culture by starting a farm in rural Colorado. She emphasized sustainable agriculture and ethical practices, applying knowledge from her family about farming. She joined the Colorado Agricultural Leadership Program and received the Colorado Water Congress Career Accelerator award. Whether mentoring young professionals, creating business opportunities, or volunteering with local organizations, Alessandra's contributions are notable. Her ability to innovate and lead while staying connected to her cultural roots makes her a role model for Italian-Americans and women. Her achievements reflect her hard work and the significant contributions of "Rising Star" Italian-Americans to society.

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Jenna Peccia

Jenna Peccia is a proud young Italian-American from North Denver. Her father, Antonio, came from Cantalupo nel Sannio in Molise at the age of 16 and eventually married her mother, Crystal Iacovetta. Together, they founded A&M Steel, Inc. Thanks to her parents' hard work and sacrifices, Jenna was able to graduate with honors from

Regis University. She officially entered the family business at 18 and is now preparing to lead the company and honor her father's legacy. As a quiet champion of Italian culture in Colorado, Jenna is a member of Mt. Carmel Catholic Church's Marketing Committee; a writer for the Andiamo! newspaper under the dynamic leadership of the alpha senpai, Jenna Capra; capo of Little Italy of Denver; co-founder of the Società Maria SS. dei Sette Dolori; founder of the Mile High Paesani; and has represented Colorado as a delegate at the Italian American Future Leaders Conference. Jenna's vision for the future is to restore and revive Catholic-Italian traditions, empower the next generation of Italian-Americans, and promote the existence and history of Italian Colorado.

Jenna truly is a rising star within our community. She is the creator behind the Little Italy of Denver social media account which features great stories of Denver Italians and our history here along with current events happening in our community, she is a writer for Andiamo magazine, she organized and facilitates the online Mile High Paesani group and is also President of Denver's newest (and youngest) Italian American organization Filitalia Denver, growing it to over 30 members of young Italian American Denverites! This group hosted Denver's first Italian flag raising ceremony at the Colorado State Capital and received news coverage from both KUSA - channel 9 and KWGN - channel 2! Jenna works tirelessly within the community to both honor our past (she was the spear head in bringing back the historical style Saint Procession at Our Lady of Mount Carmel) and promote our future (she has attended the Italian American Future Leaders Conference in Florida for two years running) to learn and grow in how to best reach and involve the younger Italian American community. She organizes social media groups for young Italian Americans and runs an Instagram account that promotes Italian History in Denver. Lastly, she manages the social media accounts, @littleitalydenver and @milehighpaisani, which promotes Italian history and culture and the ability to bring like minded folks together.

Jenna has done so much to revitalize and bring attention to the Little Italy of Denver including getting the mayor and Governors office to recognize our Little Italy and having us on the news locally. She's a wonderful person and has done so much for the community. I can not think of another more deserving Rising Star to receive this award!

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Jamie Yantorno

Jamie Yantorno is a 4th generation Colorado Italian. She considers herself a Welby Italian as she was baptized and married at Assumption Church in Welby as were her mom and grandma before her. Jamie grew up spending every Sunday at her grandparents house for the traditional Italian Sunday dinner and family time together. Holidays too were always a big affair with traditional Italian food served at each holiday dinner. Every Summer growing up, Jamie's mom Mary ran the Large Country Store booth at the Assumption bazaar where Jamie and her sisters would help sell tickets for a chance to win Ham, bacon or olive oil! From childhood on, love of her Italian American culture only grew! Jamie even found her true love through her culture meeting her husband Brian (who's also Italian American) at the Assumption bazaar at 20 years old. Now married for 26 years and with 3 kids that she and Brian have raised to embrace our Italian roots as well, Jamie has become more and more active in the Italian American community and encourages everyone around her to embrace our heritage as well. She and Brian participate in several bocce leagues throughout the year as do their daughters Bella and Giada. Jamie also volunteers much of her free time within the Italian American community by serving several of the different clubs.

As a member of the Italians of America (IOA) North Denver Jamie:

- Serves as a trustee on the IOA council
- Manages the IOA website and social media pages
- Serves as the IOA photographer at all IOA events and meetings
- This year created online registration/ pay links for events
- Helps cook and set up/ clean up for the Rodder's Ball and Red Lion Run events
- Helped create center pieces, make baskets and prepare desserts for the Laradon

Dinner and wine tasting event

- Helped cook and serve at the all clubs Prima Domenica breakfast
- Stays after every IOA meeting to help clean up and waits to leave until Ms. Kay is done locking up Potenza Hall and gets to her car.
- Helps purchase and wrap gifts for the annual Christmas gift IOA adoption of families through SafeHouse .
- In December she was awarded the IOA member of the year award

As a member of the Sons of Italy Jamie:

- helps to sell 50/50 raffle tickets during both the Sons of Italy and IOA bocce seasons
- serves on the membership council to help create packets for new member initiation and get yearly member dues collected and processed
- Is currently serving as the interim secretary while the current secretary recovers from a medical condition

As a member of Filitalia Denver Jamie:

- serves as the 2nd Vice President
- Organized, facilitated and taught a Bocce for Beginners event
- Assisted in organizing the Flag raising event held in October for Italian Heritage month

Jamie is also a part of the Mile high Paesani group encouraging generation X, Millennials and Gen Z to become active in the Italian American community. She's also always happy to help run support in the community any way she can. Outside of what Jamie does to volunteer within the various Italian American organizations she also:

- Helped Rose Vecchiarelli on delivery day with the Mount Carmel peach fundraiser
- Helps in Rita's Frittas at the St. Rocco's feast making pizza Fritta
- Helps pack food bags at Food for Thought Denver often
- Actively promotes the Italian American culture and events happening within the community on her own Instagram and Facebook pages.
- Travels to learn more about how other states celebrate different Italian festivals and events to bring ideas back to our local ones! She's been twice to the St Joseph's day parade in New Orleans and plans on going again this year and also to San Genaro this year in September.

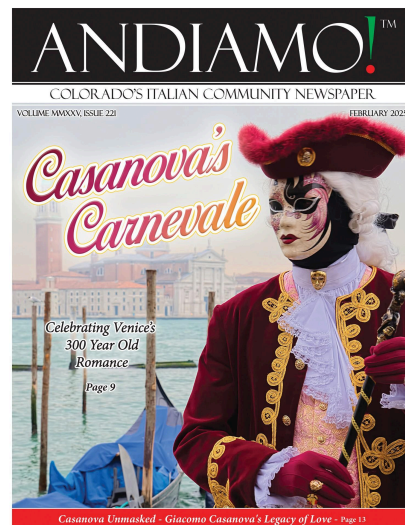
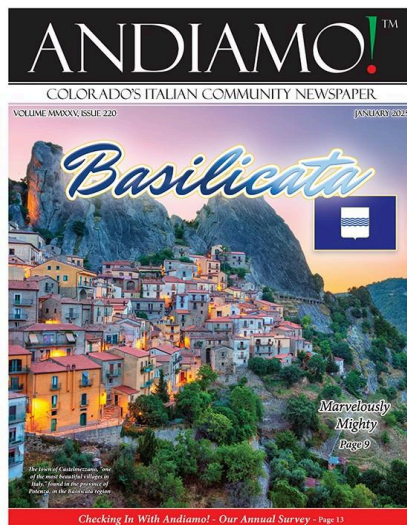
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ITALIAN AMERICAN “BUSINESS” OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

**Andiamo! Newspaper
Giambrocco & Sons Garden Center
Love Pop Experience & Evolve at MileHi**

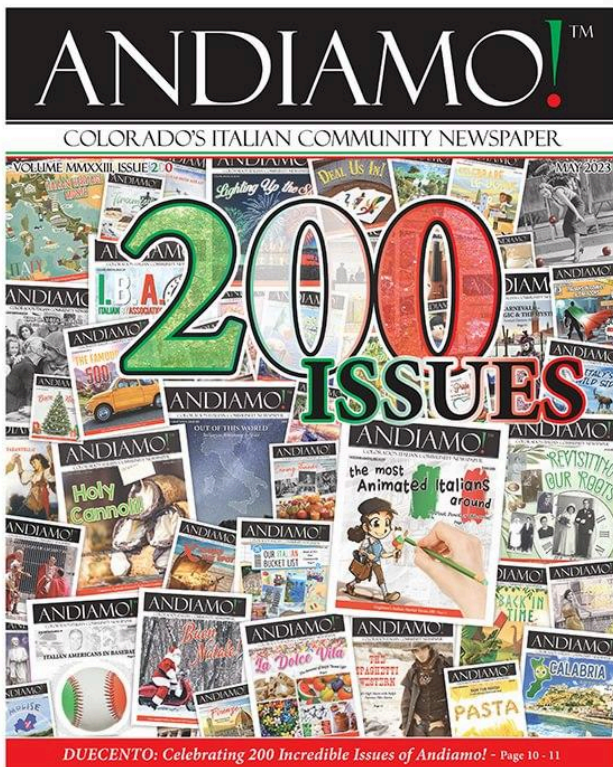
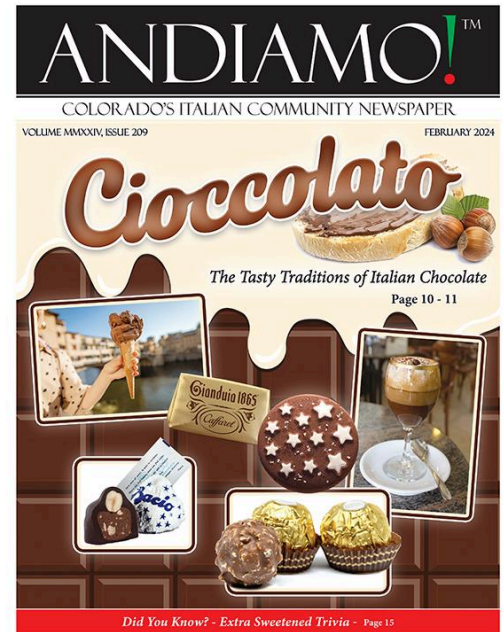


Andiamo! Newspaper - Owner Jenna Capra



To The Bravo Awards selection committee:

I would like to nominate Jenna Capra for recognition in your upcoming Bravo Awards. I am not actually sure which category to nominate her for, because in my opinion, she and her newspaper, Andiamo, could qualify for 3 of your 4 categories. So I would like to nominate her for all 3 and the committee can decide which category fits best. 1. Italian American of the Year 2. Italian American business of the Year 3. Italian American Rising Star of the Year 18 - 45

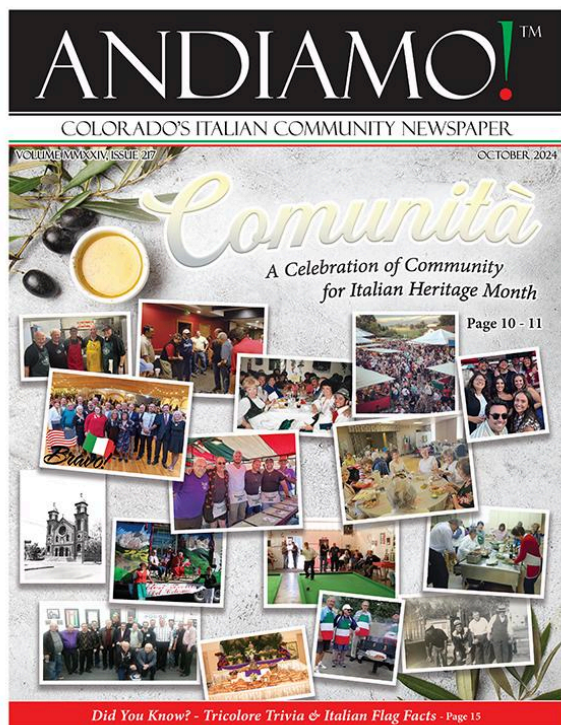


Since 2011, when Jenna rescued the Andiamo publication from extinction, she has given the Italian American community of Colorado a voice and a vision for all to read, see, share, promote and learn of historical, current and future contributions to Italian culture. Jenna has won 2 Primo awards for favorite newspaper reporter, in 2010 and 2011, while working as a reporter for Andiamo.

With over 200 issues and counting, *Andiamo!* truly represents the best of our culture and community because it is created BY our community - featuring proud Italian American writers, historians, and staff across Colorado who generously contribute their talents, passion, and hard work to its pages each month.

Since taking over the Andiamo publication she has also been featured in the We the Italians magazine, (available in America but published in Rome). She was recognized as an ambassador for the Italian American community of Colorado.

She was featured in the June 2021 issue and in the 2021 Yearbook.



In May of 2024, Jenna was awarded the Donne di Merito recipient, by the Dante Alighieri Society of Denver. I believe she should be strongly considered for one of the 3 categories above. She has been a strong advocate for the Italian Community and a strong promoter of Italian American culture.

In my opinion, although she has been doing this for 15 years, she is not doing this for the awards, but I think it's important for the community to acknowledge, show support and gratitude for the hard work, time and efforts she puts into producing a quality publication that so many of us enjoy. Grazie

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Mike and Hanne Giambrocco
Giambrocco & Sons Garden Center

Nomination for Italian American Business of the Year
Giambrocco & Son's Garden Center
Arvada, Boulder, and Littleton, Colorado

For over 40 years, our family has nurtured not just plants but a deep-rooted love for nature, hard work, and community. Spanning four generations, our garden center has grown from humble beginnings into a trusted destination where quality meets affordability. Today, as we celebrate this incredible journey, we are honored to be nominated for the Italian Business of the Year award, a recognition of our dedication, perseverance, and passion.

In 1961, Mike Giambrocco began gathering the materials he needed to build the greenhouses that would lay the foundation for Giambrocco & Son's Garden Center. With determination and skill, he constructed them with very little help from others,



completing the project in 1962. Shortly after, he and his wife Hanne welcomed their three sons Karl, Kris, and Kerry, who would grow up surrounded by the family's dedication to hard work and a love for growing.



What began as a small, family-run nursery almost four decades ago has blossomed into a well-respected garden center known for its outstanding products and service.

As the business passed from one generation to the next, it flourished. Each family member brought new ideas while preserving the core values that made our garden center unique. We expanded our greenhouses, diversified our plant selection, and improved our growing techniques.



Our vision is to provide fresh, high-quality plants at fair prices, and we have dedicated ourselves to growing over 90% of our products on-site, ensuring customers receive the best products straight from the source.

The early years were filled with challenges like long days, unpredictable weather, and the trials of building a business from the ground up. But through determination, love for the craft, and an unwavering commitment to customers, the foundation was laid for something truly special.



Despite market changes and industry challenges, our commitment remained the same: to offer exceptional plants at prices that make gardening accessible to everyone. Customers who once shopped with their parents now bring their own children, continuing the tradition of experiencing the beauty of nature through our garden center.

Our garden center has always been about our customers, our team, and the community we serve. We believe that a thriving garden brings joy, peace, and a

connection to nature, and we strive to make that experience available to all.



Beyond our plants, we have built relationships that span generations. Whether it's sharing gardening advice, or simply seeing familiar faces return year after year, our greatest reward is the trust and loyalty of our community.

Thank you to our customers, our family, and everyone who has been part of this journey. This nomination is not just ours; it belongs to all of you who have helped our garden center thrive.

Thank you very much for your consideration!

The Giambrocco Family & Our Incredible Staff

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Jeff and Jay Paul Santangelo

Love Pop Experience & Evolve at MileHi

Nomination for Italian American Business of the Year

Love Pop Experience and Evolve at MileHi

Jeff Santangelo and Jay Paul Santangelo

I am honored to nominate Love Pop and Evolve for the Italian American Business of the Year Bravo! Award. I've had the privilege of collaborating with Jeff and Jay on many events and they always provide stellar service and food quality. I love their story - and how this business has "evolved" in just a few short years is a testament to the Italian American spirit. The journey of Love Pop highlights creativity, perseverance, and an appreciation for cultural heritage. Jeff Santangelo is the creative force behind the Love Pop Experience and his twin brother Jay Santangelo is right there in supporting that experience with his creation of their venue, Evolve at MileHi.

Jeff and Jay were raised in Denver and Applewood with their siblings John, Jeralyn, and Jamey. Their parents, Ralph and Josephine, upheld the Italian tradition of hard work, family values, along with a rooted culinary appreciation stemming from their Santangelo/Ditallo and Lamirato/Dimartina heritage.

Innovative Business Model

A love of food, along with the desire to create something unique in the catering space, sparked Jeff to leave corporate America and start a new career doing what he loved... cooking. Love Pop has revolutionized the mobile food and beverage industry with a unique fleet of retro vehicles, each with its own story and purpose. The flagship vehicle, Ralphie, a carefully restored vintage ice cream truck, pays homage to Jay and Jeff's late father, Ralph, who insisted on an ice cream treat every night at the culmination of dinner.



This restoration project sparked a flood of creative ideas, leading to the acquisition and transformation of additional vehicles like Blaze, Harvie, Josie, and Trio, each serving a different culinary delight in Jeff's "Pop Up" mobile food experiences.



Each vehicle in the Love Pop crew, lovingly restored to its new glory, was as important as the food and beverages served in the Love Pop Experience.

Commitment to Family Heritage



One of the standout aspects of Love Pop is its deep-rooted connection to family heritage. Josie, their retro Divco milk truck, is named after Jeff and Jay's mother and serves Neapolitan pizza pies made from her decades-old pizza dough recipe. This dedication to honoring family traditions and recipes reflects the Italian American emphasis on family and culinary heritage that Jeff brings to the kitchen every day.

Community Engagement

Love Pop's new venue, Evolve at MileHi, is a testament to Jay and Jeff's commitment to community engagement, with Evolve being a part of the revitalization of Sun Valley, Denver's poorest neighborhood. A further commitment to the community is their consistent donation of at least 1000+ meals annually to residents in need of a meal. Sun Valley is now



transforming with over \$350 million of new investments located just 5 blocks from Empower Field (home to the Denver Broncos) - this 5,000 square foot former dilapidated brick factory, complete with a commercial commissary, high-end demo kitchen and a 2,500 square foot backyard, serves as an urban venue and oasis for various events. Evolve is a space where friends, family, couples, and clients can come together to experience the Love Pop journey firsthand. Jay and Jeff had the vision to take a dilapidated warehouse and renovate it into a unique gem in the heart of Denver complete with Jeff and Jay's handcrafted finishes and furnishings, highlighted by a

great collection of retro and antique décor. Jay's Italian car and motorcycle collection will occasionally be on display at Evolve for guests to enjoy.

Whimspirations

Jeff's concept of "Whimspirations"—a blend of whims and inspirations—has driven the success of Love Pop. This spirit of innovation and unwavering inspiration has transformed Love Pop from a simple idea into a thriving business that continues to evolve and inspire. Whatever Jeff curates for the menu is sure to please and the “Love Pop Grazing Table”, along with the always innovative Whimsical Treats have become trademarks of Jeff's inspirations.



Conclusion

Love Pop and Evolve embody the spirit of Italian American entrepreneurship through its innovative business model, commitment to family heritage, and active community engagement. Jay and Jeff Santangelo exemplify true craftsmanship in creating this business. It is with great enthusiasm that I nominate Love Pop and Evolve at MileHi for the Italian American Business of the Year Bravo! Award, recognizing their outstanding contributions as a small business and their inspiring journey that continues to unfold.

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