



## **Congratulations to the Nominee Finalists!**

*Please welcome these outstanding Italian Americans  
to the Bravo! Class of 2025*

*Join us on March 7th as we celebrate all the nominees and award the  
2025 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**

**Joe Arrigo**  
**Salvator Siraguse**  
**Paul Tamburello**



**JOE ARRIGO**

**Founding Director and President of the Leonardo Da Vinci Museum of North America**

**AFFILIATIONS:**

Charter member of the Dante Alighieri Society of Pueblo (current)

Sons and Daughters of Italy – Pueblo Chapter (current)

Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations (COPOMIAO) (current)

Colorado Italian Band Masters (25years – former)

Sangre de Cristo Arts & Conference Center (former) Pueblo Library Board (current)

Joe's fraternal grandfather emigrated from Italy in 1912. He made several trips to Italy to bring his wife and family members to America. The families settled in Pueblo. Joe is a Colorado native and grew up in Pueblo.

Joe received a BA in Music Education from the University of Colorado – Boulder (1963). After several years of public school and private teaching, he owned and operated Arrigo Music providing instruments, instrument repair and music supplies to all the school districts in Southern Colorado. Joe was instrumental in restarting the Pueblo Symphony, which had been dormant during the late 1950s & early 1960s. He continues to perform with the Pueblo Symphony today and stands as the longest performing member. For eleven years he guided the Arkansas Valley Jazz Festival where students were introduced to, instructed by and performed with world-class musicians. He also sponsored these world class musicians to perform in Pueblo, including Clark Terry, Maynard Ferguson, Woody Herman and Buddy Rich. For three years, Joe ran the "Drums Along the Rockies", which presented southern Coloradans with the opportunity to experience the world's most elite and exclusive marching ensembles ("Marching Music's Major League"), all focused on a common thread of Joe's life's mission... to ignite curiosity and expose people to new possibilities.

Following his career in music, Joe became an expert in the construction industry specializing in restoration and transformation. As the chair of the Building Science Committee for the National

Restoration Industry Association (RIA), Joe guided the writing of accredited standards for water damage and mold abatement. Joe's expertise in restoration and passion for people drove him to help salvage Pueblo's Holy Rosary Catholic Church after the local Catholic Diocese was planning to close it due to a major fire. This church has long served multiple generations in one of Pueblo's most underserved communities and Joe convinced the bishop that the church could be restored. The restoration of the Holy Rosary Church resulted in Joe being awarded the highest national award for the restoration industry, the Martin King Award for Innovative Restoration.

Years ago, on a trip to France, Joe visited Leonard da Vinci's home, where the King of France had invited Da Vinci to live. Joe made repeated visits to view da Vinci's drawings and various exhibits of machine reproductions. At the time, Joe thought "most American students will not get to see this exhibit". That planted the seed.... we need to bring da Vinci's creations to Colorado.

In 2022, the Art Center Board of Directors hosted the Artisans of Florence's traveling exhibit of da Vinci's models. When the display was being dismantled, Joe approached the owners. During their discussion, Joe learned of the Artisans of Florence challenge in storing and maintaining their exhibits as well as the desire to establish a permanent exhibit in North America. One of the members mentioned that they had been looking for the right location for six years. Leveraging Joe's expertise in restoration he knew well the tremendous benefits Pueblo climate had to offer and the Pueblo Plex igloos that had once been used to store ammunition during World War II were now available for storage. The Artisans of Florence made multiple trips to Pueblo to explore the possibility of utilizing the Pueblo Plex igloos to store the exhibits...it was, indeed, a perfect solution.

Then Joe's vision of bringing da Vinci's creations to Colorado set him on the path of what would be an intense two-year effort. Joe had local support but he would have to win the approval of the City of Pueblo, Pueblo Urban Renewal and the Office of Economic Development and International Trade, the Rural Tourist Act, as well the Riverwalk Development organization to secure a location where the exhibit could be housed and displayed. Despite competition from seasonal events vying for the same location, Joe pressed on undeterred. The criteria established by the various entities included:

- The occupant has to provide something unique to Colorado
- Involve an international trade relationship.

Joe canvassed schools, art centers and a number of other agencies and obtained letters of recommendation from them in support of creating The Leonardo da Vinci Museum of North America. Joe was successful! The Leonardo da Vinci Museum has signed a long-term lease with the City of Pueblo for museum space as well as entered into a long-term commitment with the Artisans of Florence for exhibits.

The Leonardo da Vinci Museum of North America & STEAM Center is slated to open in late Spring of 2026. The mission... "To ignite curiosity, encourage exploration, and inspire creativity." In addition to exhibiting numerous pieces of da Vinci's creations at one time, leveraging Pueblo Plex igloos, there is room to store additional pieces that will be rotated throughout the leasing period. The museum will

also have the entire collection (facsimiles) of da Vinci's works including drawings and notes. While some of the translations are in English, others are in Italian and Latin.

Joe has been busy preparing the museum for opening, which includes not only construction, but also hiring artists and staff. Joe is leveraging local talent and supporting local business throughout. He has hired an Education Director who is designing programs for the world's future inventors, our K-12 students. STEAM programs have been developed in coordination with Pueblo Community College, Colorado State University/Pueblo, private schools and home school administrators.

When the Leonardo da Vinci Museum of North America opens this year, it will be the only permanent exhibit dedicated to the polymathic genius of Leonardo da Vinci in the United States, all due to Joe's efforts. When I asked Joe where his dogged determination came from, he credited it to his Italian stubbornness. What else could it be?

As an educator, Joe not only taught music to students, he also introduced them to different genres as well as world-class musicians. Joe furthered the students' knowledge and experience by directing them in the Drums Along the Rockies program.

As a member of the community, Joe helped to restart the Pueblo Symphony after its dormancy for several years.

As a business owner, Joe contributed to the economy of Pueblo. He displayed his leadership and expertise in construction, restoration and transformation by guiding the writing of accredited standards for water damage and mold abatement. Joe preserved a local church by convincing the Catholic Diocese that it could be saved.

Joe is currently a member of three Italian American organizations and was a speaker at last year's rededication of the Columbus statue as well as being selected to be the Honorary Parade Marshall for the 2025 Pueblo Parade of Lights. But most important is Joe's bringing the Leonardo da Vinci Museum of North America dream to Colorado to fruition.

- National recognition for creating renovation standards Martin King Award for Innovative Restoration of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church
- Kenway Meade Award for Leadership & Service
- Honorary Parade Marshall for the 2025 Pueblo Parade of Lights
- Speaker at the rededication of the Pueblo Columbus statue in 2025

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## SALVATORE SIRAGUSE

**Retired/Philanthropist Restaurant Industry  
President of the Sons & Daughters of Italy**

### A Life Dedicated to Community and Heritage

#### **Early Life and Journey**

Salvatore Siraguse is a third-generation Italian who immigrated from Sicily, Italy, through Ellis Island to New York. Sal's Colorado story began in 1977 when he relocated from Buffalo, NY, to open the Old Country Restaurant at Villa Italia (now Belmar). This venture marked his entry into the local business community, laying the foundation for his future contributions.

#### **Professional Career and Business Impact**

Sal's professional journey progressed from managing the Morrison Inn for 17 years, where his influence is still commemorated, to a pivotal sales role at Robinson Dairy. During his time at Robinson Dairy, which was eventually acquired by Meadow Gold - Dairy Farmers of America, Sal became a trusted advisor to numerous pizzerias, Italian and American restaurants, and ice cream shops that thrive to this day. His work extended beyond sales, involving close collaboration with the Robinson family on impactful initiatives such as integrating milk into school lunch programs and developing educational materials about dairy production. Sal retired from Meadow Gold in 2022, but his legacy in the restaurant industry continues.

#### **Service to the Restaurant Industry**

Sal invested nearly 25 years in the Colorado Restaurant Association, tirelessly raising funds for out-of-work staff and providing training for restaurateurs. His dedication is widely recognized, especially at annual trade shows where his contributions are celebrated by industry veterans. Even in retirement, Sal remains a mentor, supporting newcomers in the roles he once held. He continues to

support events like "Drink Red, Wear Red" to raise money for workers needing help within the restaurant industry.

### **Community Involvement and Philanthropy**

Sal dedicates time to organizations such as Sons & Daughters of Italy, Italians of America, and Mt. Carmel Men's Club. He and his wife Rita operate the Pizza Fritta booth at both the Mt. Carmel Bazaar and St. Rocco's Feast. Every Friday morning, Sal packs food sacks for children who need meals on weekends through "Food for Thought." His commitment to service is unwavering, and he is known for never refusing an opportunity to help within both the Italian community and the broader Colorado community.

### **Leadership in Cultural Heritage**

As President of the Sons & Daughters of Italy, Sal has encouraged his team to create events that celebrate Italian heritage, values, and cuisine. In 2025, he sponsored the Italian Heritage Event to launch October, recognized as Italian Heritage Month. His leadership extends to organizing special veteran meetings and the celebration of the 7 Fishes, a traditional Christmas Eve event held at the December General Meeting. Sal's collaborative spirit influences both the Italian community and the Denver area at large.

### **Dedication to the Italian Community**

Sal's involvement in local organizations is extensive. He supports the Men's Club at Prima Domenica and the Mt. Carmel Bazaar, donates culinary expertise to the Italians of America Rodder's Ball and the Red Lion Run Car Show, and consistently volunteers for "Food for Thought." For over five years, Sal advocated for Italian heritage at the State Capitol, promoting conversations about Columbus Day and the Italian American experience in Colorado. He champions partnerships between organizations, ensuring collaborative efforts rather than isolated work.

### **Compassion Through Grief Counseling**

Following the tragic loss of his daughter Savannah in April 2017, Sal transformed his grief into a mission of service. After supporting over a dozen members of the Sons & Daughters of Italy in finding crisis resources, Sal pursued and attained his Grief Counseling Certification. He now serves as a support leader at a state-supported grief center in Aurora and works with local churches to guide individuals through difficult times. Sal is always available to lend an ear to those in need, especially within the Italian community.

### **Recognition and Legacy**

Salvatore Siraguse's enduring contributions have earned him the Bravo! Volunteer of the Year Award for 2022. Though he arrived in Colorado in 1977, his nearly fifty years of service make him a vital constituent of the state's business landscape, the Italian American community, and a source of support for those navigating grief. Sal's life demonstrates that consistent, heartfelt contributions—no matter how small—create a lasting, profound impact. He is a team player, leader, and devoted neighbor to the people of Colorado and a worthy recipient for the Bravo! Award of Italian American of the Year.

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## PAUL TAMBURELLO

**Owner & Broker, Generator Real Estate, LLC  
Founder & Owner of Little Man Ice Cream**

### **Champion of Italian American Values and Community Transformation**

#### **Embracing Heritage and Values**

Paul Tamburello was raised with a profound appreciation for his Italian American heritage, which instilled in him the importance of family, community, generosity, and service. These cultural roots have shaped his mission to create businesses centered around community, honor tradition, and give back through philanthropy. Paul consistently exemplifies these values through his leadership, entrepreneurial spirit, and charitable engagement.

#### **Little Man Ice Cream: A Community Landmark**

Paul founded Little Man Ice Cream in North Denver, designing it not just as a business, but as a cultural gathering place that celebrates community, connection, and joy. The spirit of the Italian tradition, centering life around meaningful shared experiences, lives on in Little Man Ice Cream. The business reflects hospitality, service, and dignity, and serves as a tribute to Paul's Italian American heritage. The shop is named after Paul's father, Peter Tamburello (nicknamed "Little Man"), whose legacy of kindness and making a difference inspired Paul. Although small in stature, his father was big in heart and making a difference in the world was his legacy. Little Man Ice Cream is Paul's way of keeping his Italian father's legacy resilient. The ice cream stand itself, inspired by vintage Coney Island hot dog-shaped stands, is a 28-foot tall, 14,000 lb. cream can, delivering a nostalgic

experience nestled in the 21st century. This playful, whimsical design pays homage to the golden era of American road trips and the roadside monuments that celebrated foods like donuts, hot dogs, and ice cream. Beyond the unique experience, Little Man Ice Cream upholds the tradition of the neighborhood ice cream store, offering homemade ice creams, hand-crafted novelties, and fresh waffle cones. The lively cobblestone plaza hosts a variety of events, engaging all of the customer's senses and creating a beloved local institution. Importantly, Little Man Ice Cream ties business success to humanitarian impact by donating essential food items for every scoop sold. The "Scoop for Scoop" initiative, launched in 2008, matches each scoop with a donation of rice, beans, or other essentials to communities in need around the world. Today, the program supports organizations focusing on education, childhood welfare, hunger relief, agriculture, sustainability, and STEAM. As community needs evolve, Little Man Ice Cream adapts its philanthropic efforts.

## Transformative Community Development

Paul Tamburello's name is synonymous with creative design and value-driven development throughout Denver's neighborhoods. His projects are thoughtfully integrated, pedestrian-friendly spaces that enhance communities by catering to the needs of residents and workers. Paul has developed and consulted on notable projects in Denver, especially the Highland neighborhood, including Highland Lofts, Root Down and Linger restaurants, LoHi Market Place (Olinger), and five adaptive reuse projects in Sunnyside. As owner of Little Man Ice Cream, he has earned the nickname "Godfather" of Highland.

With more than 20 years of expertise in Denver real estate, Paul's passion for service was recognized with the 1994 "Rookie of the Year" award. His knowledge and dedication have earned the respect of organizations such as the Archdiocese of Denver, United Methodist Church, Urban Ventures, Colorado Vincentian Volunteers, and Habitat for Humanity. Paul's mission is to develop buildings that endure for residents, visitors, and the wider community. He assembles talented teams, provides them with resources, and ensures clear communication and attention to detail throughout every project.

## Revitalizing Historic Neighborhoods

Paul has played a pivotal role in revitalizing Denver's historic neighborhoods and cultural spaces, enhancing community identity and promoting local pride. His work in adaptive reuse development demonstrates a long-term commitment to neighborhoods that value heritage and people.

## Philanthropic Leadership and Role Modeling

As co-founder and board chairman of The GrowHaus, Paul advances food access, nutrition education, and community wellness in underserved areas. His life's work shows how entrepreneurship and community service can coexist, inspiring others in the Italian American community to lead with purpose.

## Recognition and Impact

Paul Tamburello has received local recognition for his philanthropic efforts and community impact, particularly through Little Man Ice Cream's mission and his civic leadership. Thank you for considering Paule Tamburello for the Bravo! Award for Italian American of the Year for 2025.

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# **ITALIAN AMERICAN “VOLUNTEER” OF THE YEAR NOMINEES**

**Gina Francis  
Rose Vecchiarelli  
Jamie Yantorno**



**Gina Francis**  
**Nomination for Italian American Volunteer of the Year**

Gina Francis is a Colorado native (1/2 Italian American) whose leadership and service with the Capuchin Franciscans in Denver have significantly strengthened outreach, volunteer engagement, and fundraising for ministries serving the poor, marginalized, and vulnerable — continuing a legacy deeply rooted in compassion, community, and service that resonates with Italian American values of faith, family, and charity.

Gina has generously volunteered her leadership skills for more than a decade with the Capuchin Franciscans, organizing major fundraising and community engagement events that sustain vital ministries. Since 2008, she has served as Director of Special Events and Marketing, coordinating efforts that unify volunteers, donors, and community partners around service to those in need. Her work reflects Franciscan values — rooted in service, hospitality, and uplifting those most vulnerable — and embodies a spirit of compassionate volunteerism.

- **Leadership in Fundraising Events:** Gina has directed signature Capuchin events such as the Brown Robe Benefit, Road to Rome Raffle, and Evening in the Garden, creating opportunities for volunteers to give time and talent in support of ministries serving the **poor**.
- **Record-Breaking Volunteer Impact:** Under her stewardship, the Brown Robe Benefit achieved its first million-dollar gross year, thanks to strong volunteer engagement and community support. This success has directly strengthened the Capuchins' ability to provide services and form new friars.
- **Mentoring & Collaboration:** Gina brings decades of professional event and marketing experience to her volunteer leadership, mentoring volunteers and fostering strategic partnerships that amplify the reach and effectiveness of the Capuchins' mission.
- **Community Engagement:** Through her work, Gina has helped engage volunteers of all ages and backgrounds — creating welcoming opportunities for service that reflect the Capuchin charism of mercy and hospitality. Thank you for considering Gina Francis for Italian American Volunteer of the Year.

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**Rose Vecchiarelli**  
**The Peach Lady**

NOMINATION FOR BRAVO! VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR 2025

**Early Life and Family**

Rose Vecchiarelli, affectionately known as "The Peach Lady," was born in Raton, New Mexico in 1948 to Frank and Arinda Rea. Her father immigrated from Aprino, Italy to New Mexico to work in the coal mines. Rose was one of eight siblings, growing up in a close-knit family rooted in strong Italian traditions.

### Education and Marriage

At eighteen, Rose traveled to Kansas City to pursue a programming career. After graduating, she relocated to Boulder, Colorado, where she met her future husband, Jim Vecchiarelli. Their whirlwind romance began in May and culminated in marriage by September—a true "love at first sight" story that led to a union lasting fifty years.

### Family and Nickname

Rose is the proud mother of two children and a beloved grandmother to ten grandchildren, who affectionately call her "Schooby," a nickname bestowed by her eldest grandson.

### Career and Community Involvement

Jim's family owned a bar in Louisville, Colorado, where Rose discovered her passion for serving people and creating a welcoming atmosphere. When the business was sold, they moved to Westminster, and Rose began a thirty-year career at the Federal Reserve Bank in downtown Denver. Jim transitioned to working for the Fire Department. Rose continues to reside in the home she and Jim designed and built together, even after Jim's passing in 2020.

### Faith and Volunteerism

Throughout her life, Rose has been a devout Catholic, faithfully attending her favorite churches across Colorado, including Spirit of Christ, St. Peter and Paul, and currently Mt. Carmel in Denver. Her strong Christian values have guided her dedication to volunteering and supporting charitable causes. She and Jim contributed to numerous church events, fundraising for both the church and local charities.

### The Famous Peach Sale

To raise funds to benefit Mt. Carmel Church, Rose and Jim initiated the well-known Peach Sale, which continues to this day. Jim originally managed sales of up to 200 cases, but Rose took over six years ago, increasing the sales to an impressive 400 cases. Her goal for this year is to reach 500 cases.

### Italian Heritage and Community Service

Rose is a respected member of the Italians of America and the Sons and Daughters of Italy. She volunteers tirelessly for both clubs, always ready with her apron and a warm smile. Rose contributes her time to various events, including the Mt. Carmel Bazaar, St. Joseph's Table, The Rodders Ball, and all activities at the Sons and Daughters of Italy, such as Spaghetti Night and other club gatherings.

### Dedication to Community

Her community service extends to birthdays, funerals, dances, celebrations, local events, Italian Heritage Month festivities, and fundraisers. Rose's love for Bocce is well-known, and she is a constant presence at Italian community events—whether cooking, cleaning, serving, or dancing. To many, she is truly a "peach."

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**Jamie Yantorno**

**Nomination for Bravo! Award for  
Italian American Volunteer of the Year**

**Background and Heritage**

Jamie Yantorno is a fourth-generation Colorado Italian, proud to call herself a Welby Italian. She was baptized and married at Assumption Church in Welby, following the tradition of her mother and grandmother. Jamie grew up cherishing Sundays spent at her grandparents' home for traditional Italian dinners and family gatherings. Holidays were celebrated with classic Italian cuisine, and each summer, Jamie's mom Mary led the Large Country Store booth at the Assumption bazaar, where Jamie and her sisters helped sell tickets for prizes like ham, bacon, or olive oil. Her love for Italian American culture continued to grow throughout her life. Jamie met her husband Brian, also Italian American, at the Assumption bazaar when she was twenty. Married for twenty-six years, they have raised three children who are also proud of their Italian roots. Jamie is now a grandmother, with a second grandchild on the way.

Together, Jamie and her family actively participate in several bocce leagues. Jamie has become increasingly involved in the Italian American community, encouraging others to embrace their heritage. She volunteers her time in support of various Italian American clubs.

**Community Involvement**

**Italians of America (IOA) North Denver**

- Serves as a trustee on the IOA council
- Manages the IOA website and social media pages
- Acts as IOA photographer at all events and meetings
- Developed online registration and payment links for events
- Assists with cooking, setup, and cleanup for Rodder's Ball and Red Lion Run events
- Helped create centerpieces, assemble baskets, and prepare desserts for the Laradon Dinner and wine tasting event

- Volunteers to cook and serve at the All-Clubs Prima Domenica breakfast
- Stays after every IOA meeting to help clean up and ensures Ms. Kay safely locks up Potenza Hall
- Helps purchase and wrap gifts for the annual Christmas gift IOA adoption of families through SafeHouse
- Recently received IOA Member of the Year Award

### **Sons of Italy**

- Sells 50/50 raffle tickets for Sons of Italy and IOA bocce seasons
- Serves on the membership council, assisting with new member packets and processing annual dues
- Has served as interim secretary while the current secretary recovered from a medical condition

### **Filitalia Denver**

- Serves as the 2nd Vice President
- Organized, facilitated, and taught a Bocce for Beginners event
- Helped organize the Flag Raising event for Italian Heritage Month in October

### **Mile High Paesani Group**

Jamie encourages Generation X, Millennials, and Gen Z to become more active in the Italian American community and is always willing to support the community in any way she can.

### **Additional Volunteer Activities**

- Assisted Rose Vecchiarelli with the Mount Carmel peach fundraiser delivery day
- Helps make pizza frittatas at St. Rocco's feast with Rita's Frittats
- Packs food bags at Food for Thought Denver
- Promotes Italian American culture and events on her personal Instagram and Facebook pages
- Travels to attend Italian festivals in other states, such as the St. Joseph's Day parade in New Orleans and San Genaro, bringing back ideas for local celebrations

### **Thank you for considering Jamie Yantorno**

Jamie is always ready to help, embodying the true spirit of volunteerism with a humble heart. She is highly deserving of recognition for her dedication and service to the Italian American community.

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**ITALIAN AMERICAN "RISING STAR"  
OF THE YEAR NOMINEES**

**Stephanie Detton**

**Salvatore Pellitteri**  
**Philip Stafford**  
**Dominic Ursetta**  
**Jean Wood**



**Stephanie Detton**

## **Nomination for Bravo! Award for Italian American Rising Star**

Stephanie Detton is a proud Italian American with deep familial roots that reflect the tapestry of Italian immigration and culture in the United States. She is part of the extended Smaldone family of Colorado, with roots in Potenza. Stephanie’s connection to her heritage was strengthened by growing up hearing family stories, especially those shared with her grandpa Smaldone (“Papa”), and through community traditions that celebrated their Italian ancestry. Though raised outside of a traditional Italian enclave, she embraced her cultural identity and later turned that passion into purposeful work through storytelling that honors Italian American experiences. As creator and co-host of the Italian American Stories Podcast, Stephanie has carried forward her family’s legacy by preserving and amplifying the voices of Italian Americans from across history and across the country.

Stephanie has made remarkable contributions to celebrating and preserving Italian American culture through her Italian American Stories Podcast, which she co-hosts with her mother. This show is dedicated to rediscovering and bringing to life the forgotten stories of Italian Americans found in historical newspapers from well-known heroes to forgotten individuals whose lives reflect courage, resilience, and community. By meticulously researching archival sources, Stephanie sheds light on the diverse experiences of Italian Americans across generations, helping listeners connect with their

ancestry, understand the complexity of immigrant life, and embrace the traditions and values that define Italian-American identity. Her work not only preserves cultural memory but also fosters pride and continuity within the community, inspiring others to explore and celebrate their roots.

Stephanie Detton exhibits leadership in both her personal and professional life. She is an elementary school teacher by day and podcaster in her free time. Her love for history and all things Italian coupled with her drive to make a positive impact on the world has brought her podcast recognition not only from Colorado, but across the entire country! Stephanie has been featured on several prominent podcasts including Fill To Capacity with Pat Benincasa.

Stephanie also co-hosts the podcast with her mother, Sandra (her Smaldone connection), personifying the importance of family among Italians.

Her positive influence lies in her work with the podcast, which has uncovered and immortalized forgotten stories of Italians all over the United States. In doing so, Stephanie inspires us to do the same with our own family histories. This Rising Star is contributing substantially to the Italian American community through her innovative efforts.

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## **Salvatore Pellitteri**

### **Nominee for Italian American Rising Star**

Salvatore Pellitteri is a first-generation Italian-American and Colorado native. His father emigrated to the United States from Sicily, and Sal considers himself a proud Sicilian. His cultural identity is not symbolic or performative, but foundational to who he is. Raised in a household where Italian values, language, faith, and traditions were lived daily, Sal has carried that into adulthood with a strong sense of responsibility to honor and preserve his heritage. His connection to Italian culture is both personal and deeply ingrained, shaping how he lives, works, and engages with the Italian-American community in Denver.

Salvatore promotes Italian American culture through a deeply authentic and values-driven approach to everyday life. His commitment to Italian heritage is not limited to public events or formal roles; rather, it is reflected in how he lives, the choices he makes, and the standards he upholds. Sal values faith, language, tradition, and community as essential pillars of Italian identity and actively supports efforts that preserve these elements within Denver's Italian-American community.

Rather than seeking visibility or recognition, Sal leads by example, demonstrating that cultural preservation begins with personal responsibility and consistency. His presence within Italian American spaces (both formal and informal) reinforces the importance of authenticity, participation, and continuity. By living Italian culture openly and sincerely, Sal helps sustain its relevance and encourages others, particularly younger generations, to engage with their heritage in meaningful and lasting ways.

He makes a conscious effort to support Italian-owned businesses, participate in Italian cultural and religious life, and engage with organizations that strengthen Italian identity in Denver. A devout Catholic, Sal is actively involved at his home parish, St. Gianna Beretta Molla, where faith and Italian tradition intersect in meaningful ways.

Sal recently joined Filitalia Denver as the Language and Culture Committee Chair, where he is committed to promoting the Italian language as a living connection to heritage. He has furthered his own cultural knowledge by taking Italian language courses through the Dante Alighieri Society of Denver. Even while balancing a demanding professional and personal schedule, Sal makes a point to attend and support lesser-known Italian events, including participating in the Italian Flag Raising while proudly draped in the Sicilian flag.

He is an active member of the Mile High Paesani, where he regularly participates in discussions and supports group initiatives, fostering connection and shared identity among members.

Though outspoken by nature, his approach to leadership is quiet and dependable: if Sal says he will do something, he follows through. He does not seek recognition or praise and would likely prefer not to be nominated at all; however, his steadfast dedication, authenticity, and behind-the-scenes contributions have made a meaningful and lasting impact on Denver's Italian-American community, even if the community itself doesn't know it. Through both private practice and public presence, Salvatore Pillitteri lives Italian culture fully and authentically, making him a true rising star and trusted steward of Italian heritage.

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**Phil Stafford**  
**Territory Account Executive at Autodesk**

Please consider Phil Stafford for the Bravo! Award for Italian American Rising Star. Phil is a Colorado native with deep Italian American roots in North Denver, particularly through his maternal Rondinelli family, whose ties to Our Lady of Mount Carmel span multiple generations. Phil is a parishioner at Mt. Carmel Church and a member of the Mt. Carmel Men's Club and Mile High Paesani. His Italian heritage is closely connected to the church, neighborhood, and faith traditions that have long anchored Denver's Italian-American community. Raised within this environment, Phil developed a strong sense of responsibility to family, parish, and community—values that continue to guide his involvement today as he works to carry these traditions forward for future generations.

Phil promotes Italian-American culture by actively supporting the institutions and traditions that sustain community life. His approach emphasizes stewardship, accessibility, and continuity, with a focus on ensuring that long-standing Italian-American traditions remain meaningful and viable in a changing world. Grounded in faith and family, Phil views cultural preservation as a shared responsibility that requires both respect for tradition and thoughtful adaptation. Through consistent involvement and service, he helps reinforce the values of commitment, generosity, and intergenerational connection that define Italian-American identity.

Phil's leadership is characterized by reliability, initiative, and a willingness to improve systems that support Italian-American community life. He has taken on key responsibilities at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, including serving as Treasurer of the church bazaar committee and as secretary of the parish Finance Council, helping guide decisions that affect the church's long-term sustainability. He has played an instrumental role in modernizing fundraising efforts, including introducing credit card payments and online raffle ticket sales, making participation easier for younger generations and those outside the immediate parish community.

Beyond formal roles, Phil consistently steps in where help is needed and is currently developing an additional fundraising initiative for the church. He also contributes through hands-on service, including assisting with the physical labor required to prepare for major events, such as helping set up booths for the church bazaar. You'll also find him at the church's monthly Mass in Italian, usually serving at the breakfast or taking care of his son, Luca, with his fiancée, Andrea Caruso. Now a father, Phil brings a future-focused perspective to his service, guided by the belief that Italian-American traditions must be

lived, supported, and passed on, not simply remembered. His quiet leadership and long-term commitment have made a meaningful and lasting impact on Denver's Italian-American community.

Phil's father passed away in December of 2021, sparking a passion in him to keep the legacy of his family alive. His grandfather, father, and uncle were all members of the Mt. Carmel Men's Club, and after getting more involved in the men's club he noticed a big issue. If the younger generation doesn't get more involved in the Italian American groups in Denver the legacy of the Italian American community will die. Which is why over the last several years he has thrown himself into leadership roles at Mt. Carmel Catholic Church to ensure the church as a whole and its ancillary events and groups continue for years to come.

As a new dad, he has had to manage his time wisely, but has managed to take the lead role in planning the annual Mt. Carmel church bazaar, which is a huge undertaking. In addition, he serves on the finance committee and with the Men's Club.

You can find Phil volunteering his time at all Mt. Carmel events, as well as supporting other organizations in his community such as Habitat for Humanity, Kenzi's Causes, and Wish for Wheels, while also playing a big role in his in-laws' foundation, Caruso Family Charities.

Phil hasn't received any awards in the Italian Community yet, but has received numerous awards in his professional career, including, but not limited to, 2021 Autodesk Top Inside Sales Development Rep in all of America, 2023 Autodesk Diamond Club Qualifier affording him a trip to London amongst the other top selling Autodesk employees.

Phil is a Rising Star in all aspects of his life and is worthy of recognition as the Bravo! Awards Italian American Rising Star of the Year.

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**Dominic Ursetta**  
Manager, Rallyhouse

Dominic is a respected North Denver Italian American with Ursetta and Carelli roots, dedicated to preserving heritage and connecting the church community at Our Lady of Mt Carmel with Italian American organizations. He collaborates with Jenna Peccia and younger members to share traditions through groups like Potenza Lodge, Our Lady of Mt Carmel, and Mother Cabrini Shrine. Dominic serves as Community Relations Director at Potenza Lodge, sits on the Italian North Denver Committee board, and was appointed by Basil Russo as Denver's representative for the Italian American Future Leaders of America, championing cultural preservation in Colorado. Though Dominic hasn't received formal awards, both IAFL and Potenza Lodge have recognized his efforts to inspire new generations. Please consider Dominic Ursetta for the Bravo! Award for Italian American Rising Star.

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**Jean Wood**  
**Italian American Community Steward**

Affiliations: Servite Secular Order, Mile High Paesani

### **Heritage and Community Engagement**

Jean Wood is a Colorado native whose Italian American ancestry originates from her great-grandparents, immigrants from Calabria. Raised with a strong appreciation for her heritage, Jean has maintained close ties to the Denver Italian American community, actively taking part in cultural, religious, and social traditions. Even as she balances a full-time career as a nanny and enjoys traveling, Jean continues to honor her Italian roots through service and active participation in lesser-known Italian organizations as well as parish life.

### **Promotion of Culture and Values**

Jean Wood advances Italian American culture and values through a deep commitment to service, faith, and community involvement. She consistently supports the traditions and institutions that form the foundation of Italian American life in Denver. Jean believes that preserving cultural and religious traditions does not depend on recognition or leadership

titles, but rather on actively participating, offering help where needed, and fostering continuity across generations. Her involvement exemplifies core Italian American values such as generosity, humility, loyalty, and respect for tradition. By supporting parish life, participating in cultural organizations, and contributing behind the scenes, Jean ensures that Italian American customs and community spaces remain vibrant and meaningful. Her quiet dedication and sincere commitment strengthen the Italian American community and provide a positive model of cultural stewardship, particularly for younger Italian Americans.

### **Leadership Through Service**

Jean Wood's leadership within the Italian American community is characterized by her consistent presence, reliability, and genuine desire to sustain Italian traditions for future generations. Although she does not hold formal employment or leadership roles within Italian American organizations, Jean regularly offers her time and energy wherever it is needed. She volunteers at the Italian church as her schedule allows, helping with early-morning sack lunch programs for the needy, assisting with the annual church feast, and supporting parish initiatives without expecting recognition. As one of the youngest members of the Servite Secular Order at Mount Carmel, Jean exemplifies faith, service, and tradition, acting as a quiet role model for younger generations. Her involvement with Mile High Paesani includes supporting church fundraising efforts, such as organizing collective Grand Raffle ticket purchases to donate winnings back to the church. Jean's participation in Italian American events, celebrations, and volunteer opportunities is driven by her belief in the importance of these traditions. She does not seek praise or visibility; instead, she leads by example, demonstrating dependability and genuine care for the community. Her steadfast, behind-the-scenes support strengthens the organizations she serves and reflects enduring Italian American values, making her a meaningful influence within the community.

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## **ITALIAN AMERICAN "BUSINESS" OF THE YEAR NOMINEES**

**Balistreri Vineyards  
John, Birdie & Julie Balistreri**

**Chad + Co.  
Chad Cantu**

**Flipside Music  
Anthony (Ike) Iacovangelo Jr.**



## **John, Birdie and Julie Balistreri Owners, Balistreri Vineyards**

I am pleased to nominate Balistreri Vineyards, led by John, Birdie, and Julie Balistreri, for the Bravo! Award for Italian American Business of the Year for 2025. The Balistreri family has demonstrated exceptional dedication to Italian heritage, entrepreneurship, and community building in Colorado and beyond. Their journey began when John Balistreri's family immigrated from Sicily in the early 1900s, carrying with them the traditions of winemaking and family values. John spent years cultivating carnations and making wine for loved ones, but in 1998, with the help of his wife Birdie and daughter Julie, Balistreri Vineyards became a thriving commercial operation. Their commitment to authentic, natural winemaking is showcased at their beautiful tasting room and expanded Winery & Event Center, built in 2012 on the very land where the family once grew carnations.

Balistreri Vineyards is renowned for its award-winning natural wines, crafted from hand-picked grapes grown on Colorado's Western Slopes. The family uses traditional methods, including natural yeast fermentation and aging in American Oak barrels, ensuring the highest quality and preserving the character of the fruit. Through their involvement with the Italian American Business Association and support for many local Italian American organizations, the Balistreri's continue to foster a passionate community centered around food, wine, and the Italian lifestyle. The Balistreri Event Center hosts beloved events such as Cherry Pie Week, Movie and Wine Night, Harvest Party, and KUVO Jazz Live at the Vineyards creating a welcoming space for all to celebrate their Italian culture with them. They also host many private events creating memorable experiences.

The Balistreri family's ongoing leadership, dedication to tradition, and commitment to excellence make Balistreri Vineyards a shining example of Italian American entrepreneurship. As the next generation of the Balistreri family joins the business with Julie's son Ray Domenico now on board, the family's legacy lives on. Their story, spirit, and many accolades for natural winemaking truly embody the values of the Italian American Business of the Year award.

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## **Chad Cantu**

### **Owner, Chad + Co. Hair Salon**

It is with great pride that I submit Chad Cantu and Chad + Co Hair Salon for the Bravo! Award for Italian American Business of the Year.

Under the leadership of Chad and Marietta Cantu, Chad + Co has grown into far more than a salon — it is a forward-thinking, community-centered company redefining what a modern service business can be.

Chad is a fifth-generation Italian American with roots in Abruzzo, Calabria, and Bari. Marietta is first-generation Italian from Calabria and Bari. Their business is deeply shaped by Chad's great-grandfather, Marion Persichetti, a coal miner near the Flatirons of Colorado who embodied the Italian immigrant spirit — resilience, faith, sacrifice, and devotion to family. His lessons were simple but powerful: honor Faith, Family, and Community.

With over 25 years in the beauty industry, Chad built a thriving salon brand in Centennial, Colorado, complete with a proprietary professional haircare line, advanced education systems, and scholarship initiatives that have helped aspiring stylists earn licenses and launch meaningful careers.

Today, that legacy continues into the next generation. Their daughter Anabel serves as Manager of Chad + Co, and their daughter Sofia is a student at the Rita B Institute, founded by Rita Bellino, continuing their family's Italian tradition of craftsmanship and entrepreneurship.

Chad's leadership extends globally through his board service with Intercoiffure America/Canada and Intercoiffure Mondial. He was honored in Paris as a Knight of the Order and serves as Visionary Chair of the Flourish Advisory Board, collaborating with high-level executives to drive innovation and strategic growth.

What truly distinguishes Chad + Co is its bold integration of artificial intelligence to enhance education, leadership, operations, and client experience — building a future-ready company while preserving authentic human connection.

Grounded in faith, integrity, and generational stewardship, Chad + Co represents the evolution of the Italian American dream. For these reasons, Chad + Co Hair Salon is exceptionally deserving of the Bravo! Award for Italian American Business of the Year.

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## **Anthony (Ike) Iacovangelo Jr Owner, Flipside Music**

### **Family, Culture, Community, Entrepreneurship** Nomination for Italian American Business of the Year 2025

#### **Early Life and Italian Roots**

Anthony Iacovangelo Jr, affectionately known as Ike, was born in Rochester, New York, and raised in a tight-knit Italian family. His beloved Nonna lived just above his family, and together they cultivated a rich environment steeped in heritage and tradition. Ike is a full-blooded Italian, with ancestral ties to both Rome and Foggia, Italy.

Sundays were a cherished time for Ike, marked by large family dinners and frequent gatherings with relatives—a true reflection of the Italian way of life. His neighborhood further reinforced these traditions, featuring an Italian grocery store, local church, and annual Italian festivals all easily accessible by foot. This nurturing environment instilled in Ike a deep appreciation for family values, Italian culture, and the spirit of helping others. The lessons he absorbed from his upbringing—honoring family, celebrating Italian customs, and supporting his community—continue to shape his character today.

## Maintaining Traditions and Connections

As a young man, whenever Ike returned to visit extended family on the east coast, he enjoyed the Italian traditions such as the annual procession of the Madonna. He continues to make these trips every summer, ensuring that his connections to family back home remain strong. Ike's deep love for family compelled him to relocate back to Rochester from 2008 to 2013 to support his sister after her husband's passing. Through his enduring passion for Italian culture, Ike expresses himself in many ways, especially through his love of food and cooking. He is always on the lookout for the best deli or market to find his favorite Italian specialties that remind him of home. Ike actively seeks out and supports Italian-owned businesses, discovering many local gems that allow him to stay connected to his roots and support other Italians.

## Community Service and Leadership

Ike's commitment to helping others extends beyond family and tradition, as seen in his extensive volunteer work and leadership in charitable organizations. He has supported numerous charities, such as Blue Star Connection, which provides the gift of music to children facing life-threatening illnesses. Known for his "get it done" attitude, Ike assists non-profits like Youth on Record by repairing or sourcing musical instruments at discounted rates and donating instruments to halfway houses in Denver, helping residents experience the healing power of music. He also aspires to further expand access to music education by getting instruments into schools and into the hands of young people. Demonstrating his resourcefulness, Ike proposed forming a band comprised of Blue Star volunteers to be the opening band at one of their fundraisers, saving costs and giving musically inclined volunteers a chance to have fun for the charity they support. This idea led to the creation of "The Connections," who performed a one-time show at the Soiled Dove in Denver during the Blue Star fundraiser in 2022, where Ike played guitar as one of those volunteers.

## Entrepreneurship and Musical Passion

As a teenager, Ike discovered his passion for music and began learning to play the guitar, unaware of the multifaceted career path ahead that would combine work experience and entrepreneurship. While in high school, he gained practical business knowledge by working alongside his father, Anthony, in the construction industry, observing the day-to-day operations of a small business. His interest in food led him to a 22-year tenure in hospitality and catering, where he developed strong customer service skills before ultimately finding his true calling in the music industry.

Motivated by an entrepreneurial spirit, Ike initiated a side business focused on buying and selling musical items online. This endeavor eventually culminated in the realization of his dream: opening Flipside Music, a brick-and-mortar store established twelve years ago. In 2023, after outgrowing its original location, Flipside Music relocated to a renovated space designed to better accommodate both growth and community engagement. The store now serves as a hub for seasoned musicians seeking the latest equipment and newcomers eager to explore musical instruments.

To promote a hands-on learning environment, Ike incorporated practice coves throughout the shop, enabling visitors to trial various instruments and gear. He also added a studio space to facilitate ensemble sessions for bands. Demonstrating a commitment to community support, Ike provided his studio to national touring artist and fellow Italian, Mike Zito, for an exclusive VIP band event in June of 2025.

Flipside Music distinguishes itself with its extensive selection of guitars and boasts the largest collection of pedal effects between Chicago and Los Angeles, creating an atmosphere reminiscent of a musical museum. Decorated with traditional Italian lucky horns, the shop reflects Ike's heritage and belief in their positive influence on the business.

Looking ahead, Ike is organizing the Denver Music Gear Expo, scheduled for June 13, 2026, at the Sons of Italy Lodge in Wheat Ridge. The event will feature diverse vendors, opportunities to test new equipment, and guest speakers addressing current industry topics within a trade show format.

Through this initiative, Ike aims to further support the local music community along with an Italian organization (SOI) once again tying his Italian heritage to his business endeavors. While Ike once aspired to become a touring rock musician, his dedication and work ethic have led him to excel as a small business owner, where he now shares his passion for music with the community every day.

### Connection to Nominee:

I've known Ike for over a decade through our work on the Blue Star Connection committee. He was essential in sourcing, repairing, and shipping instruments for beneficiaries and schools, quietly supporting the charity's mission. I watched as he grew his business through hard work and dedication creating a unique small business to serve Colorado's music scene. As fellow Italians, we bonded over shared experiences. Ike is generous with his time and expertise—whenever I need anything music-related, he's always willing to help. Ike is a stellar example of an Italian American who has woven his Italian heritage and values into how he runs his business and how he supports the community and local non-profits through that business. I proudly nominate Anthony (Ike) Iacovangelo Jr and Flipside Music for the Italian American Business of the Year Bravo! Award for the year 2025.

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