



## ***Meet the Bravo! Awards Nominees for the 2023 Year***

***Congratulations to all of the Bravo! Nominees!***

***Listed are the nominations that have been submitted. The winners in each category will be announced live at the March 9, 2024 Bravo! Awards Gala. Join us to cheer on the outstanding accomplishments of these fine Italian Americans!***

### **ITALIAN AMERICAN OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #1**



**Gerald D. (Jay) Cimino**

Please accept a nomination for Jay Cimino for **Italian American of the Year**. Jay's philanthropic nature has fostered hundreds upon hundreds of community partnerships, sponsorships, and campaigns; to include the first community partnership Mr. Long developed in 1947 with the Pikes Peak United Way. This partnership has helped generate millions of dollars in donations to help citizens in need throughout Colorado. In addition to the United Way, Jay was instrumental in the campaign to renovate and build a new addition on to the Marian House. This campaign helped the Marian House transition from just a soup kitchen to a self-sufficiency center. Tying into the knowledge that so many in our community continue to suffer from hunger, Jay leads the way for an annual company-wide food drive for Care and Share Food Bank in Colorado Springs, and the Food Bank of the Rockies in

Denver. He also was the inspiration to the 15 Fantasy Playgrounds built through-out Colorado Springs and Denver!

His personal experiences with friends and family who have suffered from a variety of different cancers led him to support causes and organizations that fund research for cancer eradication such as the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, the Lung Cancer Center, and the American Cancer Society to name a few. But most importantly it led to a greater sense of need for under-served populations and the development of the Mt. Carmel Health, Wellness, and Community Center in Trinidad, Colorado.

Jay's love for his hometown inspired growth and change in the city of Trinidad. In 2010, Jay opened Phil Long Toyota of Trinidad and Phil Long Ford in neighboring Raton, NM. In addition to bringing new business into both communities, he established the Trinidad Community Foundation, created the Jay Cimino Champion Scholarship Fund for Holy Trinity Academy students, and granted the land and building to establish a new visitor center and retail shopping space in Trinidad. The citizens thanked Jay for his numerous contributions by building a community park and playground in his honor. Mr. Jay Cimino was born and raised in Trinidad, Colorado. After graduating from Holy Trinity Parochial School, he joined the Marine Corps and proudly completed his tour of duty. Jay then attended Trinidad State Junior College and transferred to the University of Denver, where he graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration.

Jay is best known for parlaying Phil Long Ford in the Phil Long Family of Dealerships, encompassing 19 dealerships spanning the Front Range from Raton, NM to Glenwood Springs, CO. He is also known for his philanthropy, which includes a broad spectrum of charitable organizations, needs, people and causes. Jay is the founder of the Trinidad Community Foundation, La Puerta de Colorado project and Mt. Carmel of Colorado's two non-profits: Mt. Carmel Wellness & Community Center in Trinidad and Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in Colorado Springs.

The La Puerta project will breathe new life into Trinidad, and all of southern Colorado -- all of these projects are labors of love, but one of his greatest accomplishments is the Mt. Carmel Health, Wellness and Community Center. Mt. Carmel HWC center features a fully staffed clinic with MD's, Nurses, PA's, MA's, and Therapists and provides non-emergency high quality, patient centered integrated healthcare seven days a week to Las Animas County and rural southern Colorado. The Mt. Carmel HWC center also serves by providing a community garden, theater and gathering space, and includes a fully staffed bistro and bakery! Jay's life exemplifies the spirit of an Italian American success story and he is very deserving of this recognition.

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## ITALIAN AMERICAN OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #2



**Elisa (Sicuranza) Heitman**

It is my pleasure to nominate Elisa (Sicuranza) Heitman, owner of Cafe Jordano, for **Italian American of the Year**. Elisa Heitman grew up in the restaurant business. It was her second job when she came to America. Elisa came to the United States in August 1979 at the age of 17, the bride of her childhood sweetheart. Four months later, her husband decided he didn't want to be married anymore. Her in-laws took her in.

Her first job was painting houses, earning \$3.75 an hour because she didn't speak English. She learned quickly enough and soon traded in the painter's whites for an apron and began waiting tables. Elisa's first restaurant job was at Mr. Steak located at 72nd and Federal. While she was learning English, she also learned the restaurant business. One waitress job led to another and finally led to her owning her own business. She saw the storefront she wanted to lease as a restaurant at 11068 W. Jewell Ave. It had a hood and a grease trap - the expensive stuff. She went in partners with her second husband. She put up \$19,000 to open the restaurant, which is now twice the size of the original. Her son Jordan was 4 at the time. So she named it Cafe Jordano in his honor.

At night for the dinner crowd, while her husband cooked, she waited tables. During the day, Elisa was the only one on duty. She'd be in the back and hear the bell ring over the door and come out to greet the customer, take the order and go back in the kitchen and cook. She held on for a year, seeing business increase in small steps. Then Bill St. John, the former *Rocky* food critic, did a review on the place and business took off. Elisa's friend, Rich Italiano, said people used to wait in line outside until they could get a table. Maybe it was the gnocchi in cream sauce - real cream sauce - that brought in the dieters tired of rabbit food. Italiano ordered a salad then he sent it back when Elisa served chicken parmesan, penne with sausage and the gnocchi, all which disappeared down his gullet like trout gobbled by a heron. Yearly, they spent \$25,000+ on whipping cream alone.

Her given name is Elisabeta - Elizabeth in Italian. She was born in Napoli. She has eyes the color of espresso and is about as tall as a demitasse. But she rises in stature when she walks from table to table, chatting with regulars and welcoming newcomers. It makes her feel good when people enjoy what they eat - when

people are happy. Elisa has endless energy always greeting her patrons with a huge smile and her crazy Italian accent that people love to hear and if you're lucky enough to know the Italian language, she loves to converse with you. It's always a loud conversation and everyone stops and listens in amazement! Elisa likes the excitement and being busy all the time. About the only time she goes mellow is on her morning walks around a lake in her neighborhood. She calls it her social club where she can stop and say hi to people and just get away from everything. Elisa also has another son, Alexander and both her children speak Italian.

On Feb. 21st, she will mark her 33rd year as owner of Cafe Jordano and she continues to serve the community offering amazing Italian cuisine. She has used her success to help others in the community, specifically Caruso Family Charities.

Every year Elisa hosts a dinner on a Sunday in October, opening up her restaurant on her only day off and donating all the food and staffing for 3 separate seating's to raise as much as they can in one day! The 2023 Café Jordano event raised \$86,000 for Caruso Family Charities which will help many Colorado families in need. To date, Elisa has done this event for 8 years and has raised nearly \$450,000 for Caruso Family Charities, proving how a young Italian girl chasing the American dream can work hard and accomplish success in life, helping not just her family but many other families along the way. Elisa's dedication to preserving her Italian heritage and serving the community is unwavering, with a tenacious spirit of perseverance. She is very deserving of a Bravo! Award. Thank you for considering Elisa (Sicuranza) Heitman for Italian American of the Year.

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### **ITALIAN AMERICAN OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #3**



**Alice Jean (Gaccetta) Nichol**

I proudly nominate Alice Jean (Gaccetta) Nichol for **Italian American of the Year**. Alice was born in February 1939 to second generation Italian parents, John and Rose Gaccetta. From her humble beginnings working on the family's truck farm in Welby, CO, Alice later made her mark in State and County politics.

At 17, Alice met Ronald “Ron” Nichol, the love of her life. After a long-distance courtship during his service in the Navy, they were married on July 11, 1959. They built a home on the family property in Welby where they raised four daughters, and later welcomed six grandchildren. A milestone of 61 years of marriage was celebrated in 2020, just two weeks prior to Ron passing away.

Having been a stay-at-home mom until the early 70s, Alice was hired and began her career with Adams County District 1 in administrative support positions at John Dewey Jr. High and Mapleton High School. After 18 years, she retired and filled much of her time volunteering in local politics. She played many roles supporting the Party and winning campaigns, including her husband’s election to Adams County Commissioner in the 80s.

In her early 50s, with encouragement from friends and family, she stepped up as a candidate. Winning her first election, she subsequently served Adams County for 20 years in the offices of State Representative (1992-1997), State Senator (1998-2004) and County Commissioner (2005-2012).

Alice was recognized (with Ron) as the first couple to hold the office of Commissioner, and followed in the footsteps of her first cousin, Elaine (Gaccetta) Valente, to be the second Italian American female on the Board of Commissioners. Alice found her purpose in serving, and listened to her constituents with an open heart and open mind to authentically make decisions that were best for the majority of those she represented.

Alice has a strong foundation in community, family, and faith. Having moved to Arvada in 2020, she left Welby as a lifetime member of Assumption Parish and joined St. Joan of Arc Church where she attends mass and volunteers weekly. A past member of many committees and groups, years ago she worked with fellow Italians trying to keep Columbus Day recognized in Colorado, and is currently a member of the Sons & Daughters of Italy, and often attends IABA events as a guest. She is an amazingly talented piano player and often takes to the keys at gatherings and events!

Anyone who has met Alice knows she is a compassionate, kind “people person” who is fun to be around. She carries on the Italian tradition of Sunday spaghetti dinners monthly with her immediate family who are all in Colorado. Alice travelled extensively in earlier years and recently made wonderful memories with her oldest granddaughter, and fellow Italians, on a Caribbean cruise in October 2023.

Thank you for considering Alice Jean (Gaccetta) Nichol for this award. It would be such an honor to her to be recognized by the Italian American community that she loves, respects and is grateful and proud to be part of!

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## **ITALIAN AMERICAN BUSINESS OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #1**



**Jim Leprino**

**(pictured with Mike Leprino, Sr)**

### **Leprino Foods**

With humble beginnings, Leprino Foods’ journey to success started with the hard work and dreams of Mike Leprino Sr. Born in Potenza, Italy in 1898, Mike arrived in Denver in 1914 with little knowledge of the English language and just 7 cents in his pocket. Initially doing farm work, he soon went to work for the Denver Sewer Pipe and Clay Company. In 1920, he married his wife Susie Pergola, and they had five children.

After 22 years at Denver Pipe, Mike went to work for Swift Packing Company. During this time, he also began part-time farming with his family. In 1938, he decided to leave Swift and went into full-time farming. While Mike decided to retire in 1950 – retirement only lasted about six months. He opened a small grocery store on the corner of 38<sup>th</sup> and Shoshone, where he began making ricotta and scamorze (a form of mozzarella). Mike would cook a small batch in the morning and deliver it fresh in the afternoon to local grocery stores under the brand name of Gina Marie. Gina is the contraction of Regina, which means “queen” in Italian. In 1956, Mike Leprino’s son Jim, the youngest of the five children, entered the family business and helped with the growth and expansion.

Today, Leprino Foods Company is a global dairy leader. Employing approximately 5,500+ people worldwide, with about 1,500 employees in Colorado alone. It has the distinction of being the world’s largest mozzarella cheese maker and a top producer of whey protein, lactose and dairy ingredients. In addition to its company headquarters in Denver, located on the same block as the original grocery store, the company has nine production facilities across the U.S., including two plants in Colorado (Greeley and Fort Morgan). It will soon have a 10<sup>th</sup> location opening in early 2025 in Lubbock, Texas. The company also has cheese manufacturing facilities in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Tapejara, Brazil, as well as a sales and culinary innovation hub in Singapore and representative offices South Korea, China and Japan. Leprino Foods ships a wide variety of products internationally including several forms of mozzarella as well as dairy ingredients that include sweet whey, whey protein concentrates and lactose.

Its Colorado presence is important to the state’s dairy industry. It relies on local dairy farmers to supply milk that is turned into cheese and dairy food ingredients that nourish the world. In fact, Leprino Foods is the largest user of Colorado’s milk production. The company’s presence in Colorado helps the local communities where it operates in the form of jobs and direct and indirect economic benefits – approximately \$10.1 billion statewide over a 20-year period. It also is committed to making a positive impact on the communities where it operates through philanthropic support and volunteerism. Since 2015, the Leprino Foods Company Foundation has contributed about \$4.3 million to non-profit organizations across its manufacturing footprint. It also is very involved in helping to promote the Colorado dairy and agriculture industries through partnerships with higher education agricultural programs, such as Colorado State University.

Despite its growth and success, Leprino Foods is still a family-owned company and remains committed to the same core values and entrepreneurial spirit that earned it a reputation as a dairy industry pioneer and trusted partner to top food and nutrition brands worldwide. Its corporate vision is to be the World’s Best Dairy Food and Ingredient Company, and its mission is to “make every customer feel like our only customer through our core values of Quality, Service, Competitive Price and Ethics.” Its higher purpose is to “sustainably feed and nourish families around the world.”

Please consider Leprino Foods for the Bravo! **Italian American Business of the Year** Award.

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## **ITALIAN AMERICAN BUSINESS OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #2**



**Melodie Polidori and Steve Polidori**

### **Polidori Sausage**

Please accept a nomination for Polidori Sausage for the Bravo! Award for **Italian American Business of the Year**. Polidori is the oldest sausage manufacturer in Colorado that is still family-owned and operated. Steve and Melodie are fourth-generation Polidori’s who have carried on the legacy of their Great-grandmother Anna’s delicious recipes. Anna (Cerrone) and Rocco Polidori opened their first small grocery store in 1925 and over the

years the Polidori family has grown the business and Polidori brand to one of the most well-known sausage companies in Colorado.

Now approaching 100 years in business and selling many varieties including Anna's famous Italian sausage that started it all, each of the Polidori family involved in building the business added their expertise and talent to make Polidori a household name for sausage. Whether shopping at a local grocery store or attending a Rockies Game at Coors Field or Avalanche game at Ball Arena, you will find Polidori Sausage.

The Polidori family is generous in supporting the Italian American community through partnerships and sponsorships, which shows the personal dedication of a family run business with Italian roots. Their extended team are just as dedicated to spreading the good word about Polidori sausage as if it were their own family heirloom recipe.

For the Polidori's, the culture within the plant walls is equally as important as the sausage they produce. From quarterly Link Bucks, their internal recognition program, to Production Appreciation Week, Polidori employees are shown how valued they are. The Polidori production team is the heartbeat of the operation because, without them, it's simply pork, salt, and spices. They are dedicated to their craft of making the Polidori heirloom recipes that everyone gets to enjoy. The Polidori family honors their employees with Production Appreciation Week - an entire week dedicated to them and their dedication to Polidori. From freshly cooked breakfasts or lunches to chair massages and company swag, it's their way of showing their employees how much they are appreciated.

Christmas is another exciting time of year for Polidori employees. Melodie and Steve, donning their Santa hats, kick off the 12 days of Christmas with a white elephant round table. Standard White Elephant rules apply, and winners can walk away with iPads, a TV, gift cards, tickets to sporting events, golf days, coffee machines, and cold hard cash. It's truly the best way to get into the holiday spirit and show Polidori employees that they are truly an extension of the family. All Polidori employees receive full benefits, with great health coverage, 100% paid vision and dental insurance, 401(k) matching and profit sharing.

In 2023, Polidori Sausage was honored as Manufacturer of the Year by Company Week. From Logistics to Production to Sales and Marketing, each member of the Polidori team is imperative to the success of the company. This Italian American business has come a long way from its humble beginnings and continues to enhance Italian culture by making amazing Italian sausage! Please consider Polidori Sausage for the Bravo! Award for Italian American Business of the Year.

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## **ITALIAN AMERICAN BUSINESS OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #3**



**Joe Bomareto**

### **Rocky Mountain Truck Centers**

It is with great pride and a profound sense of admiration that I nominate Joe Bomareto for the Bravo! Award for **Italian American Business of Year**. This nomination is not just a recognition of a successful entrepreneur but a tribute to a man whose life epitomizes the enduring spirit of our Italian-American heritage, resilience, and the pursuit of excellence. He is a native Coloradoan with a strong rooted connection to his Italian roots of the Bomareto and Persichette Family heritage.

From a young age, Joe displayed an unparalleled dedication and a yearning to craft a legacy as enduring as the values instilled in him by his father. Born in 1975, Joe's earliest aspirations were not of grandeur but of meaningful work—of toil and triumph alongside his father, learning the virtues of hard work and integrity. These virtues became the cornerstone of his journey, a journey that took root in the soil of his beloved Colorado and stretched across the heart of America.

Joe's formative years were marked by an insatiable drive to excel. His prowess in automotive repair, honed at the Bollman Occupational Center, was not just a skill but a passion that propelled him to the pinnacle of tri-state competitions. Despite the allure of a full ride to Wyoming Tech, Joe chose a path less traveled—a testament to his belief in the value of hands-on experience and the pursuit of a dream that was uniquely his own.

The inception of Rocky Mountain Mobile Truck Service in 1995 marked a pivotal moment in Joe's life. Transitioning from automotive to heavy duty truck and equipment, Joe ventured into an industry that demanded not only technical skill but the courage to face the uncertainties of entrepreneurship. From a solitary truck—a 1990 Ford Super Duty—emerged a vision that would redefine the industry. Operating out of his father's shop, Joe embarked on a journey that was as much about honoring his roots as it was about seizing the future.

Joe's first partnership with Burlington Northern Railroad was not merely a business transaction; it was a validation of his unwavering commitment and a harbinger of the success that would follow. By 1996, his dream had grown beyond the confines of a single service truck, welcoming his first employee, and expanding his fleet. The leap from leasing his first shop in Henderson, CO, to establishing a flagship in Brighton, CO, was a testament to Joe's relentless drive and visionary leadership.

Under Joe's stewardship, Rocky Mountain Truck Centers evolved from a fledgling service to a beacon of excellence in the heavy truck and equipment repair industry. His expansion across six states, from Colorado to beyond, is not just a story of business growth but a narrative of a man who not only dared to dream, **but to do**, and to lead with the heart of a true Italian-American.

Joe's essence—his spirit of entrepreneurship, his dedication to his staff, his community, and his commitment to family—resonates deeply within the Italian-American narrative. His ventures, including Rocky Mountain Towing and Recovery, are not merely businesses; they are embodiments of Joe's ethos, serving as pillars of safety and reliability in the communities they operate. His collaboration with Adams County Fire Department and his role in providing real-world training exercises underscore a legacy of service and his commitment to safety for people. Joe is the person who stays in front of the curve, recognizes a need, and finds and accelerates the solution.

He has built both personal and business relationships with corporate leaders in the industry, he sees opportunity to create growth in partnership with organizations such as Fleetnet, Enterprise and Ambest, became an Ambest dealer at all locations in 2014, sat on the board of directors for 8 years and was elected chairman of the board in 2023.

As a father, Joe instills in his children faith in the power of prayer and the miracles that follow, and the very lessons of perseverance, integrity, and hard work that he learned from his own. His leadership extends beyond the boardroom; it is felt in the hearts of those he mentors, in the lives he enriches, and in the community he serves.

Joe Bomareto is not just a businessman; he is a beacon of hope, a mentor, a leader, and above all, a proud Italian-American whose life is a testament to the power of dreams, hard work, and heritage.

I hope that you will consider bestowing upon Joe Bomareto the Bravo! Award for Italian American Business of the Year, celebrating not just his notable achievements but also his relentless spirit and deep-seated dedication to the growth and wellness of his company and his staff. Joe is a man whose life, work ethic and contributions magnificently capture the essence of our Italian-American heritage and the infinite promise of the American dream.

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## **ITALIAN AMERICAN VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #1**



**Dr. John Giardino**

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Dr. John Giardino for the Bravo! Award for **Italian American Volunteer of the Year**. John has served the Italian American community of Denver for the last 30+ years. He became a member of the Dante Alighieri Society of Denver in 1992 and joined the Board of Directors in 2006 as Chairman of the Scholarship Committee, where he oversaw the judging and awarding of scholarships to university students wishing to study in Italy. This is one of the most important activities of the Society, and John successfully increased the number of scholarships awarded and the money available through many fund-raising efforts.

He became President of the Dante Alighieri Society of Denver in 2019 and is currently serving his third term in that position. As President, he actively serves on all committees of the Society. Under his leadership, the Society has sponsored many activities, including the proclamation of October as Italian Heritage Month beginning in 2019. He has worked to establish a working relationship with the Italian Consulate of Chicago, the Italian Cultural Institute of Chicago, and the Denver office of the Honorary Vice-Consul of Italy. He is an active member of the Italian American Business Association and has promoted cooperation between the Dante Alighieri Society, the IABA, the Sons and Daughters of Italy and other Italian organizations.

Dr. John Giardino has lived in Colorado all of his life, with the exception of four years in Omaha where he attended Creighton University. Following his graduation from Regis Jesuit High School in 1967, he attended Colorado State University from 1967-1972, where he earned Bachelor Degrees in Bioscience and Physical Science, both related to his pre-dentistry curriculum. John graduated from Creighton University Dental School with his DDS degree in 1976 and subsequently moved to Leadville, CO. In addition to building a successful dental practice, he became a leader in the community, serving on a number of boards, including eight years on the Board of Trustees of Colorado Mountain College. During his tenure on the CMC Board, he also served five years on the Board of Directors of the Association of Community College Trustees in Washington, DC.

After Practicing dentistry for 30+ years in Leadville, he retired and he and his wife Erin moved to the Denver area to be with family. A second career found John serving as an Independent Government Relations Professional, focusing on all levels of education. He served as the Legislative Liaison for Colorado Mountain College from 2003-2015 and Public Policy Director for the Colorado PTA from 2008-2012. His professional skills include Community Outreach, Non-Profits, Editing, and Grassroots Organizing. He enjoys long-distance running, is a master woodcrafter, and a tireless champion of keeping the cultural heritage of Italy alive and thriving in Colorado.

John and all of his family members have made the promotion of the Italian Culture in Colorado the centerpiece in their lives. John Giardino is most deserving of the Bravo! Award – Italian American Volunteer of the Year.

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## **ITALIAN AMERICAN VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #2**



**Linda Villano**

Linda Villano is an outstanding candidate for the **Italian American Volunteer of the Year 2023 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 should not be underestimated. Despite her age, she remains an active and essential member of the community. She's an integral part of several community events, such as the Mt. Carmel Bazaar. 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 esteemed award than Linda Villano.

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### **ITALIAN AMERICAN VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #3**



**Hayley Lokken**

I would like to nominate Hayley Lokken for the Bravo! Award for **Italian American Volunteer of the Year**. Hayley is 26 years old and was born and raised in Westminster, Colorado. Coming from the Perito family with a quintessential Italian upbringing, Hayley attributes a lot of who she is to that Italian connection. She was raised to always lend a helping hand or feed an empty stomach no matter who the person was because it's just the right thing to do.

Hayley has been around The Potenza Lodge and the Denver Italian Community since she was born and officially became a member of Potenza when she turned 18 years old. Hayley has been a writer for the Andiamo! newspaper for the last 3 years and enjoys that connection to the Italian community also. She has served as a booth chair at St. Rocco's Feast for the last 10 years and it's still one of her favorite weekends of the year!

When not helping her mom with her catering or working an event at Potenza she is probably working her day job! Hayley is the Safety Coordinator for RK Industries, a job she found by accident but loves it knowing that her job actually helps keep people safe and healthy. When not volunteering and helping others, you can find Hayley hanging out with her new puppy Finnegan in her free time. Finding young people who enjoy helping

others and volunteering at this level is rare and to be admired and recognized. Please consider Hayley for the Italian American Volunteer of the Year Bravo! Award.

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## **ITALIAN AMERICAN RISING STAR OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #1**



### **Chad (Persichette-Younger) Cantu**

It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I nominate Chad Cantu for the **Italian American Rising Star Bravo! Award**. Chad is the grandson of the Younger and Persichette family that has been so deeply involved in the Adams County, Welby and North Denver community for many generations. Chad is the father of 4 daughters and co-owner of Chad+Co Hair Salon with his wife Marietta in Centennial Co. He has 25 years' experience in the beauty business and has developed his own product line and training program which has provided several students with scholarships to obtain licensing for a career in cosmetology.

Chad has demonstrated exceptional talent, dedication, and leadership within his family, industry and community, making significant contributions that deserve recognition and celebration. He is a partner to the Rita B Institute and Beauty Changes Lives organization which is dedicated to empowering the future generations of hairstylists and provides additional scholarships, mentorships and inspiration to those seeking a career in the beauty industry.

Chad sits on the board of the Intercoiffure America Canada which is one of 40 sections (countries) within a global organization called Intercoiffure Mondial. It is made up of elite hairdressers from across the world which are united together by this organization. Intercoiffure Mondial presented Chad with the Knight award for his outstanding service to the Beauty Industry at L'ordre De La Chevalerie Award Ceremony at the House of Nations in Paris, France in September of 2022.

As of January 2024, Chad has been named the visionary chair on the Flourish Advisory Board. Flourish Advisory Boards are engineered to create the diversity of thinking, experience and expertise transformational business leaders require to respond to their rapidly changing industries. From his earliest involvement, Chad has

exhibited a passion for uplifting and uniting the community. Whether through his involvement in cultural events, charitable initiatives, or educational programs, he consistently goes above and beyond to promote his Italian heritage through his strong values passed down from generations past.

One of Chad's most admirable qualities is his commitment to his family and his faith. He is gifted at fostering connections and collaboration within the community and out in the world. He possesses a natural ability to bring people together, creating networks that empower individuals and organizations to work towards common goals. His inclusive approach ensures that everyone feels valued and heard, enriching the fabric of the community he lives and works in, the boards he serves on, and the world that is impacted by his dedication to making a difference in the lives of others.

In addition to his leadership skills, Chad is also recognized for his outstanding talents and accomplishments. Whether it be his artistic pursuits, personal achievements, or professional endeavors, he consistently excels and serves as an inspiration to others.

Moreover, Chad embodies the spirit of giving back, actively volunteering his time with the youth through church and resources to support various causes and initiatives that benefit the community. His selflessness and generosity set a shining example for his children and others to follow, demonstrating the importance of using one's talents, blessings and connections to make a positive impact on the world.

In conclusion, Chad is undeniably a rising star in the community, embodying the values of passion, dedication, and service. His unwavering commitment to uplifting others and preserving our rich cultural heritage makes him truly deserving of this recognition. I wholeheartedly endorse his nomination for the Rising Star Award and am confident that Chad will continue to shine brightly as a beacon of inspiration for years to come.

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## **ITALIAN AMERICAN RISING STAR OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #2**



**John Naccarato**

John Naccarato's name is synonymous with rich Italian heritage, tradition, and respect within his community. His deep-rooted Italian origins have led to his nomination for the **Rising Star of the Year Bravo!** Award, honoring his devotion to his heritage. His love for his heritage shines through in all that he does. He's like a walking, talking Italian tradition, spreading the spirit of Italy wherever he goes.

His Italian roots are not just a part of his identity, they define his existence. For John, being Italian is a full time job that includes church at Mt. Carmel followed by Sunday sauce with grandma and grandpa and the extended family. John is a beacon of tradition, community, and heritage, carrying the essence of Italy wherever he goes, from his Naccarato and DeBella family origins in Grimaldi, the "Calabrian Jewel", to Colorado and Italy. John's commitment to his loved ones is exemplary; he is a loving husband to Amy and proud father to three daughters. His dedication extends beyond his family; he volunteers and is a respected figure in our Italian community. John is an active participant in various organizations including the Mt. Carmel Men's Club, Sons and Daughters of Italy, the Italian American Business Association, Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations, and the newly formed Mile High Paesani. Be it moving furniture, cooking at events or offering to help find donations to offset costs for the Mt. Carmel Bazaar and St. Rocco's Feast Pizza Fritta booths, John is always there to lend a hand.

John's list of accomplishments is equally impressive, starting with a college football scholarship and culminating in being honored as the 2018 Business Person of the Year by the Italian American Business Association in Colorado. In addition to his professional achievements, John has also made a mark as a coach, mentoring collegiate and NFL athletes, nurturing their talents. After graduating from college, John took an exciting turn when he ventured to Italy, where he worked in various roles including a unique job as a "wine man" working at a winery near Brescia that sold to restaurants, deepening his appreciation for his heritage and adding a rich layer of cultural experience.

His return to the USA brought him to UTC/Collins Aerospace, where he excelled in business development. His analytical skills and leadership played a crucial role in achieving elevated levels of accuracy in budget and inventory forecasting. He then expanded the footprint of Grandma's Frozen Noodles to multiple states and transformed the company's presence, and set up the CORE branch at Shamrock Foods, contributing to inventory and sales management.

Today, John is the Mountain Regional Manager for Orlando Foods where he brings the best Italy has to offer to Colorado, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, and Minnesota. Orlando Foods specializes in Caputo flour, Olitalia olive oil, Ciao tomatoes, and mozzarella di bufala. As the importer, John serves as an essential liaison between the fields in Italy and American distributors.



In addition to his love for Italian culture, John finds immense joy in spending time with family and friends, cherishing those moments that truly matter. He is a role model, leading with positivity and dedication. His unyielding commitment to his heritage makes him a true "Rising Star" in our Italian community. His nomination for the Italian American Rising Star Bravo! Award is well deserved.

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### **ITALIAN AMERICAN RISING STAR OF THE YEAR NOMINEE #3**



**Jenna Peccia**

Please accept a nomination for the Bravo! Award **Italian American Rising Star** for Jenna Peccia, a proud Italian-American woman from North Denver, who is a great symbol of hard work and commitment. Her father Antonio came from Cantalupo nel Sannio in Molise at the age of 16 and married Crystal Iacovetta.

Together, her parents founded A&M Steel, Inc., setting up a solid foundation for Jenna's future. This helped her to graduate with top marks from the well-known Regis University. Jenna officially entered the family business at 18 and is now preparing to lead the company and honor her father's legacy.

But she's not just a businesswoman, she calls herself a quiet champion of the Italian culture in Colorado. She supports the Mt. Carmel Catholic Church's Marketing Committee with her active involvement. She also shares her thoughts and ideas through her writing for the Andiamo! Newspaper under the dynamic leadership of the alpha senpai, Jenna Capra.

In addition, she proudly represents Denver's Little Italy and has co-founded the Società Maria SS. dei Sette Dolori and most recently founded the Mile High Paesani. She was acknowledged as a delegate at the Italian American Future Leaders Conference.

Jenna is dedicated to keeping Catholic-Italian traditions alive and fresh. She encourages the future generation of Italian-Americans and invites everyone to join her in preserving the Italian heritage with pride and honor. Thank you for the consideration of Jenna Peccia, a true rising star in the Italian community.

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