

Ciminnesi to honor **ANTONINO NAPOLI**

Società SS. Crocifisso & San Giovanni Bosco di Ciminna (Chicago) will honor Antonino Napoli as Man of the Year at its dinner dance on March 3 at Alta Villa Banquets in Addison. A longtime luminary of the Chicago-area Italian-American community, Napoli has been a driving force among local Ciminnesi for decades.

“Tony has been a pillar of our community for nearly 60 years,” says society President Frank Faraci. “We’re so proud to be able to shine the spotlight on him.”

Napoli accepted the honor with trademark humility. “There are so many people who are worthier than me but they insisted, so here I am!” he says with a laugh.

The son of Carmelo and Giuseppina (Miceli) Napoli, Tony was born in Ciminna, Sicily, in 1941 and came to America with his family in 1955, living briefly in New York before moving to Chicago in 1956. He grew up on the North Side of the city and attended Waller High School, after which he studied music with the goal of becoming a singer while working as a pizza maker at Roman Village. And then true love came along.

He met Rosaria DiVita in 1956 and married her at St. Philip Benizi Church in 1962. They have been married for 57 years and are blessed with four children — Carmelo (Melissa), Giuseppina, Salvatore (Cathy), and Rosa (Jeff) — and seven grandchildren — Sarah, Tony, Keely, Brayden, Elizabeth, Emma and Aviana.

In between when the couple met and wed, Napoli decided to settle down, going to work for Hart, Schaffner & Marx in 1958. Starting out as a suit cutter, he rose through the ranks during a 50-year career, serving as steward, chairman and president of Amalgamated Local 61.

Though he left the vagabond life of the professional singer behind, music was always in his heart. And so when local Italian radio and TV personality Nicola Franccone invited him to become his assistant, Tony leapt at the chance.

In 1974, Napoli struck out on his own, launching “The Tony Napoli Radio Show,” which he still hosts today, broadcasting every Sunday from 10 a.m. to noon on WEEF (1430 AM and 99.1 FM) as well as live on Facebook

and www.TonyNapoliRadio.com. His popular show earned him Man of the Year honors from Radio Fiore in 1986 and the Award of Excellence for Ethnic Media from the State of Illinois in 2004.

Napoli has played a pivotal role in the preservation of our cherished festa band tradition through his involvement in the Sicilian Band of Chicago. He joined the ensemble in 1962 as a drummer and became its president in 1984, a position that he still holds today. A mainstay of the local patron saint festival calendar, the band has performed across the United States and even travelled to Italy twice. In 1986, Napoli led the band to Sicily and Rome, where they performed for Pope John Paul II and on Vatican Radio. The group returned to Sicily in 1990.

In 1959, Napoli, Filippo Di Nicola and a group of other young Ciminnesi formed a society to unite their paesani, provide assistance to members, and promote social events for the entire family throughout the year. Named the San Giovanni Bosco Club in honor of the patron saint and protector of Napoli’s uncle, Salvatore Miceli, the society elected Vito Cali as its first president, with Napoli serving as the chairman, emcee and singer at the society’s first dinner dance in 1962. He became president of the club in 1980, and five years later realized his dream of holding the first feast in honor of San Giovanni Bosco at the Sacred Heart Seminary, now Casa Italia, in Stone Park.

Franco Cassata was elected president in 2000 and Napoli returned as president in 2006 while finishing his term as president of ARSA (Associazione Regionale Siciliana in America), a position he held from 2001 to 2007. In January of 2018, Napoli’s group merged with Società SS. Crocifisso di Ciminna to form Società SS. Crocifisso & San Giovanni Bosco di Ciminna (Chicago), uniting Ciminnesi across the metropolitan area.

“I’m grateful to Tony for embracing the unification of our two societies and for having the confidence in me to lead this new organization,” Faraci says. “The entire Ciminnesi community owes him a debt of gratitude for keeping our traditions alive so that future generations can enjoy a piece of history.”

