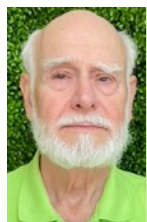




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DANTE'S INFERNO



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Pat Orelli

New president takes the reins

It is an honor and a humble pleasure to be selected by our board to lead the Dante Club as president for the next two years.

I joined the Dante Club in January 2013 and have been on the board since January 2015. I have greatly enjoyed the new friends and fellowship that membership has brought me. I had to look to my grandfather, who was full Italian, for my Italian heritage. He had married an Irish woman, and my father further diluted the Italian line by marrying a Scottish/English woman. At least I came through the male line and retained the Italian surname Orelli.

I'm a certified public accountant who's semiretired. My clients will not let me fully walk out the door, and I find that continuing to work

See PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Page 7

OUR FEARLESS LEADERS, 2024-2025



Newly elected officers for the Dante Club are, from left, John Caselli, Tom Novi, Bill Maffei, Tom Mezzanares, George Procida, Rich Battistessa, Ron Pane, Pat Orelli, Ron Fiorica, Dan Calcagno, Steve DiCristofaro and Matt Longo. Not pictured are Dennis Noble and Mark Pedroncelli.

ENHANCING OUR CULTURE

Bacchus in the Central Valley: Grape growers' wine ritual dates back to antiquity

By Susan Pricco

These are some of the memories of my friend, Vincent Fausone Jr., from a published issue of the Boletín of Piemontesi Nel Mondo of Northern California, spring 2009 and summer 2023.

I am a third-generation Piedmontese American. I grew up in the San Joaquin Valley, where my father raised tomatoes and almonds and various row crops. My mother was secretary of the high school that I attended in

the town of LeGrand, about halfway between Merced and Madera.

This was a rural area. Everything in our family revolved around the crops. We monitored the temperature in February, March and April, and when it appeared that temperatures would freeze, we left the house from 1 to 4 a.m. to light the smudge pots in an effort to save the tomato and almond crops.

With this agrarian background,

See BACCHUS, Page 9



NEWS, NOTES AND OTHERWISE

General manager's report

December was great here at the Dante Event Center, with 35 events completed, general manager Jennifer Peretti reported.

"We saw many return clients, such as Bosely Electric and Sacramento Bike Hikers, and we added some new groups, including Asbury Park Care Center and Enriching Lives," she said. "We're happy with what we have done in 2023 and look forward to 2024 and beyond."

Because of an increase in labor and food costs, she said, the Sunday Family Dinner price for adults will increase from \$15 to \$18, starting this month. Children's meals will remain at \$8.

Also starting in January, member dinner reservations, including the Women's Auxiliary, Sunday and members dinners, will be due on Fridays by midnight rather than Saturdays at midnight to ensure that the food and products can be ordered without delay or issue.

The Dante Event Center is booking events throughout this year and into 2025. Reservations for 2026 will be accepted starting in March.

Members should mark their calendars for the Dante Crab Feed on Jan. 27.

Advisory and finance

Dante Club dues of \$100 for 2024 were payable at the end of December. Although no penalty is imposed for payments received by Jan. 31, it is expected and appreciated if they are paid sooner. A \$25 late charge will be added after that date. Members who don't pay their dues by March 31 will be dropped from the club and must apply for readmission.

It's now possible for members to pay for club meeting dinners for the entire year when they make their January reservations. Some members may want to give this serious consideration as many do miss the reservation deadlines. Those who are paid up for the whole year don't have to make reservations during the year. If they can't attend a particular dinner, they can give their seat to another member if they notify the event center by noon on the day of the meeting. It is also a small contribution.

See NEWS, NOTES AND OTHERWISE, Page 3



UPCOMING EVENTS

Call 916-925-8230 or reserve and pay online at:
danteclub.com/members-event-calendar/

January 7

Sunday Family Dinner

Times: 4 p.m. cocktails, 5 p.m. dinner

Menu: Tomato basil soup, chicken cordon bleu with Parmesan cream sauce, seasonal vegetables, rolls with butter, chef's choice dessert

Cost: \$18 adults, \$8 children ages 12 and younger

Reservations are now closed.

January 8

Women's Auxiliary Dinner and Meeting

Times: 5 p.m. cocktails, 6 p.m. dinner, followed by meeting

Menu: Spinach salad with pears, pomegranate, candied pecans and feta; pan-seared chicken with mushroom marsala sauce; pasta primavera; seasonal vegetables; focaccia breadsticks; chef's choice dessert

Cost: \$22

Reservations are now closed.

January 15

Dante Club Members Dinner and Meeting

Times: 6 p.m. cocktails, 7 p.m. dinner, followed by meeting

Menu: Spinach salad with pears, pomegranate, candied pecans and feta; pan-seared chicken with mushroom marsala sauce; pasta primavera; seasonal vegetables; focaccia breadsticks; chef's choice dessert

Cost: \$22

Reserve by midnight Friday, Jan. 5.

January 27

Dante Club Crab Feed Buffet

Times: 4 p.m. cocktails, 5 p.m. dinner

Menu: All-you-can-eat crab with cocktail sauce, clarified butter and lemons; Caesar salad; rigatoni with marinara; seasonal vegetables; rolls with butter; chef's choice dessert bar

Cost: \$75 per person

Reserve by midnight Saturday, Jan. 13.

February 4

Sunday Family Dinner

Times: 4 p.m. cocktails, 5 p.m. dinner

Menu: Minestrone soup, baked ziti with meat sauce, seasonal vegetables, rolls with butter, chef's choice dessert

Cost: \$18 adults, \$8 children ages 12 and younger

Reserve by midnight Friday, Jan. 26. Reservations limited to 220 people.

**News, Notes and Otherwise**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Save pull tabs

The Dante Club has always prided itself on providing ways for members to give back to our community.

For the past five years, Ron Cristoni has worked with the Ronald McDonald House pull-tab program, which helps offset the cost of overnight stays for parents with a hospitalized child.

Cristoni reports that our total donations to date are 1,625 pounds, valued at more than \$1,625.

Members are asked to collect pull tabs from their canned pet foods, sodas and, of course, beer.

Dante Club and Ladies Auxiliary members can bring their donations to their meetings.

For more information, contact Ron Cristoni. Members also can review the Ronald McDonald House Center of Northern California at www.rmhcnc.org. Go to "Getting Involved" and scroll to box 5, "Pull Tab Program."

Membership committee

Ten new members were inducted into the Dante Club during 2023. To date, these three applicants have been voted in and await a January induction: Paul Turner, Vince Nocito and Dan Michelotti.

Members are encouraged to introduce themselves to these three and make them feel part of the club.

Our waiting list now stands at four. Lucio Bricchetti; Matthew Bruce, sponsored by Anthony Kafouros; Vince Mastracco,

sponsored by John Caselli; and Paul Ciccarelli, sponsored by Al Manfredi. These applicants should be scheduled for interviews in January or February, pending their availability.

This month celebrating an anniversary of 25 years or more in the club is Jon Anthony Martino, who joined on Jan. 18, 1999.

The membership committee suspects that some of its information is likely dated. The committee's New Year's resolution is to reach out to everyone—first, via email—to confirm that we have things right.

As always, applications are available on the website, in the office or from the committee.

Newsletter advertising

Newsletter coordinator John Caselli, along with the entire Dante Club board, wishes to thank our advertisers. Their support helps defray the costs of publishing the club's monthly *Dante's Inferno*. Prospective advertisers should email Caselli at jac6652@aol.com.

Buildings and grounds

In late November, a small group got together and did some minor touch-up painting in the Dante Event Center's Venetian and Sicilian rooms. Thanks go to Don Agostinelli, Tom Strobel and Steve Lavezzo.

The Tuscan Room and the bar area still need touch-ups. A date will be set for mid-January for this work. Anyone interested in helping should email George Procida at gprocida@gplandscape.com.

Don Agostinelli spent time in early December cleaning all the

aluminum poles that support the outdoor tent. The poles get dirty and scuffed up when tape and wire are put on them during events. The poles now look sharp and ready to go for spring.

In mid-December, Ron Pane and George Procida repaired the plumbing in the kitchen sinks. Over time, pipes had corroded and seals had cracked, causing the pipes to leak. Ron and George disassembled and cleaned all the drain pipes and installed new seals.

The event center has many similar small projects that need addressing. Any member with handyman skills should consider helping. It's a great opportunity to get involved and to meet fellow members.

Bocce league

Partners are being picked, power teams are being formed, and contracts are being signed for an upcoming two-man bocce tournament.

The tournament will be held Tuesday, March 5, and—depending on the number of teams formed—Wednesday, March 6. Starting time will be 9 a.m.

The bocce committee will provide more information soon.

Annual dinner payments

This month, members will once again be able to pay annually for monthly meeting night dinners.

When paying in advance, members cannot receive a refund or a credit for any individual dinner they don't attend, but they don't need to tell the event center if they will or won't attend as they have

See NEWS, NOTES AND OTHERWISE, Page 6



2024 Committees and Assignments

COMMITTEES

ADVISORY AND FINANCE

Pat Orelli, chairman; Dan Calcagno, vice chairman

Members: Tom Mezzanares, Richard Battistessa, George Procida, Tom Novi, Ron Pane

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

George Procida, chairman; Don Agostinelli, vice chairman

Members: Matt Longo, Tom Mezzanares, Joe Porata, Ron Pane, Bill Maffei

BYLAWS

Ron Fiorica, chairman; Tom Novi, vice chairman

Member: Steve DeCristofaro

MEMBERSHIP AND INVESTIGATIONS

Dan Calcagno, chairman

Members: George Procida, Don Agostinelli, Dennis Noble

PUBLICITY AND MARKETING

John Caselli, chairman; Tom Mezzanares, vice chairman

SCHOLARSHIP

Rich Battistessa, chairman; Jim Dimino, vice chairman

Member: Mark Pedroncelli

SOCIAL

TBD, chairman; Rich Battistessa, vice chairman

Members: John Caselli, Matt Longo, Pat Orelli, Ron Pane, Mark Pedroncelli

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

BOCCE

Rich Battistessa, chairman; Jim Dimino, vice chairman

Members: Dick Zarzana, John Rizzardo

GOLF TOURNAMENT

Frank Buccola, chairman

Members: Bill Maffei, Rich Battistessa

DINNER PROGRAM

Rich Battistessa, chairman; Jim Dimino, vice chairman

Member: Don Agostinelli

ENHANCING OUR ITALIAN CULTURE

Ralph DiLibero, chairman

Member: Rich Battistessa

SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS

- Women's Auxiliary liaison: Tom Novi
- Check-in desk for club events and raffle: John Caselli, chairman; Matt Longo, vice chairman; and new members
- Club apparel: Mark Pedroncelli
- Sergeant-at-arms: John Rizzardo

2024-2025 DANTE CLUB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

- Patrick Orelli, president: pat@apcpagroup.com, 916-369-2327
- Dan Calcagno, first vice president: dcalextra@aol.com, 916-481-8368
- Ron Pane, second vice president: repane@icloud.com, 916-798-0111
- Vacant, secretary:
- Tom Mezzanares, treasurer: tjmezzan@gmail.com, 916-467-7483

DIRECTORS

- Richard Battistessa: drbattistessa@comcast.net, 916-961-4854
- John Caselli: jac6652@aol.com, 916-456-1253
- Steve DeCristofaro: stefanodad@gmail.com, 916-752-3247
- Ron Fiorica: rbfiorica@frontiernet.net, 916-687-6406
- Matt Longo: longomb@sbcglobal.net, 916-397-5869
- Bill Maffei: mrmaffei@sbcglobal.net, 916-488-6837
- Dennis Noble: denjonoble@sbcglobal.net, 916-889-6677
- Tom Novi: tomnovi@aol.com, 916-961-6197
- Mark Pedroncelli: pdddc@surewest.net, 916-812-6729
- George Procida: gprocida@gplandscape.com, 916-455-4738
- Vacant



Generosity the order of the day at December dinner

Our December meeting was incredible, with the banquet room looking festive and magical. I'd like to send big thanks to Anna Tenderella's decorating team, which festooned 21 tables to accommodate the large crowd of 190 attendees, including 50 guests.

Thanks to these members who assisted Anna: Linda Franzoia-Fiel, for donating wine bottles from her bar Stingers; Cathy Maffei, for removing labels from the 21 bottles; Linda Raridan, for installing lights in the bottles; Daina Dionosio, for donating mirrors used for the reflections; Donna Dighero O'Neil, for providing cedar branches and bows for the bottles; and Judy Kaminski, for donating a large poinsettia.

With the Dante Event Center's beautiful folded tree napkins, the room looked amazing. The dinner was one of the largest we've had.



WOMEN'S AUXILIARY NEWS

Debra Cattuzzo

Before dinner, we heard from Paulette Wyllie, executive director of the Bishop Gallegos Maternity Home. Thanks to Phyllis Keiholtz's suggestion, this was our designated charity for December.

Auxiliary members, of course, showed just how generous they are. They brought in tables full of donations and raised a whopping \$1,468 in cash for the maternity home. Love these women!

In December, we welcomed these new members: Gloria Galvez, Patricia Galvez, Paula Fendick and Bainca Ferri, all sponsored by Del Mugnaio; as well as Barbara Mecchi, Amanada Shaffer and Janene Zucca.

As we handed the new members their flag pins, I



Members donated many needed supplies for moms and babies at the Bishop Gallegos Maternity Home.

recounted a story that member Barbara Ferro had just told that evening. Last month we lost Barbara's sister, longtime member Elsie DiBenedetto. Elsie loved the auxiliary, and her family buried her wearing her auxiliary flag pin.

Raffle prize winners at the December meeting were Karol Buccola, Italian truffles with poinsettia and Christmas candles; a guest of Sue Price, \$25 Leatherby's gift card; Diana Dionosio, basket of hair and bath products and a small poinsettia; Elli Stockwell, \$25 See's candy gift card; Carletta Puppo, chocolates and light-up snowman table-top arrangement;

See WOMEN'S AUXILIARY, Page 6

2024 WOMEN'S AUXILIARY BOARD

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| • Debra Cattuzzo, president:
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**News, Notes and Otherwise**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

already paid.

For reservation substitutions, members must call 916-925-8230 by noon the day of the event and give the substitute's name. Substitutions not confirmed by noon can't be honored.

Club apparel

The Dante Club works with Julie Brown at Premier Graph-x

to brand clothing with the club logo, including hats, T-shirts, jackets and aprons.

Members can order clothing items at danteclub.shopgraphx.com or they can contact coordinator Mark Pedroncelli at peddc@surewest.net or 916-812-6729.

For special orders, contact Julie Brown at 916-787-0603 or julie@premieregraphx.net.

High school seniors:

Applications for next year's Dante Club college scholarships are now available.

Eligible students must submit their applications to the Dante Club's scholarship committee no later than March 31.

Women's Auxiliary

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Summer DeFazio, \$25 Paesano's gift card; Judy Skillicorn, multilevel serving set with poinsettia and Sicilian pistachio cookies; guest of Julia Noto, large poinsettia with lantern and wooden angels; Darlene Ryan, Nativity set and large poinsettia; Lori Dangbert, wine and electric corkscrew; Cathy Maffei, \$25 cash; and Christina Lima, free dinner.

We finished our evening entertained by the St. Francis High School Italian Club. The girls sang Christmas carols in Italian as some of us sang along. They sounded so much better than the rest of us!

Also at our meeting, jars of honey were for sale on the bar. The Dante Event Center's banquet captain, Jay

Bucknell, produces the honey. Check it out—it is really good!

A few days after our dinner, we received the sad news that longtime member Marie Galina Leonard had died.

Marie joined the Women's Auxiliary in 1993 and has been a fixture ever since. She was usually the first one to arrive at the dinners to save seats at the table for her friends.

Marie lost her husband in the early 1970s. She raised four children, Jim, Linda, Sharon and Kathleen. Jim is a member of the Dante Club. She also leaves behind seven grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren.

I've been told that Marie was called the Cannoli Queen, as she, along with her sister, Connie Galina, taught many others how to make cannoli. We will miss her at our dinners and send condolences to her family.



Auxiliary member Laura Scarrone, all decked out as the notoriously grumpy Grinch, belies her Grinchiness by offering smiles and distributing goodies from a wagon to attendees at the December dinner.



Members of the St. Francis High School Italian Club sing Christmas carols in Italian during the Women's Auxiliary's annual Christmas dinner. The evening also featured a raffle and festive table decorations created by members. Some 190 members and their guests attended.



Unassuming Italian takes Giants football by storm

By Tom Novi

There are millions of Italian heroes of greater or lesser fame, but the latest is an unassuming kid out of New Jersey: "Tommy Cutlets," aka Tommy DaVito, quarterback for the downtrodden New York football Giants.

The son of full-blooded Italians whose

grandparents emigrated from Italy, DaVito was an undrafted quarterback at the University of Illinois who was signed as a free agent, then released by a number of NFL teams.

After catching on as the third-string quarterback for the Giants, he was thrown

into the fire in early December against the Green Bay Packers after the highly drafted Daniel Jones suffered a season-ending injury. DaVito pulled out a victory, then led the Giants to two more in subsequent weeks. From undrafted scrub to the toast of the Big Apple,

Tommy Cutlets hasn't changed at all. He still lives with his mom and dad, and she still does his laundry and cooks his favorite meal, chicken cutlets. You have to love the story of the underdog that no one wanted until they did: the Giants version of Brock Purdy!

President's Corner

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

keeps my mind alert.

I will be ably assisted with club duties by Dan Calcagno as first vice president and Ron Pane as second vice president. It will be a challenge following in the footsteps of Ron Pane and Tom Novi. Both have successfully brought our club to greater heights. I am grateful that both men will continue to serve on the board.

Also returning to the board are Rich Battistessa, John Caselli, Jim Dimino, Ron Fiorica, Matt Longo, Bill Maffei, Mark Pedroncelli, George Procida and our eternal treasurer, Tom Mezzanares.

We welcome two new members, Steven DiCristofaro and Dennis Noble. After doing a yeoman's job for more years than I have been a member, Ron Fiorica has stepped down from the secretary's position to become a regular board member. It's disappointing that no member was willing to be nominated for secretary or to fill the other open

position on the board. If anyone wants to volunteer for one of these vacancies, please let me know so the board can fill the openings.

The Dante Event Center has flourished under our general manager, Jennifer Peretti, and I look forward to working with her and her great staff. There is, however, a limit on the financial support we can expect from the event center operations. As club members, we need to have fundraising activities of our own. It is my hope that we can add one or two new events this year.

The cioppino feed always brings out member participation, but it's a low-profit activity considering the many hours involved. Income from the golf tournament is directed to the scholarship fund, and I do not believe we would attract outside participation if the event raised funds for the building fund.

There has been a suggestion to have a member-run sausage feed, which, with planning, is one possibility.

If anyone has an idea for an event that would inspire members to participate and bring in funds, please let me or any board member know. Member participation is the key to keeping the Dante Club going strong.

As a final note, I wish to comment on the December dinners. From remarks I have heard, both the Women's Auxiliary and club members' prime rib dinners were marvelous.

Chef Jonathan Diaz and his staff are to be complimented on the outstanding Christmas dinner. Four different entrees were offered to more than 230 members and guests at the dinner. This maxed out our kitchen facility, which really needs updating and expansion.

Unfortunately, this is not in the cards for the foreseeable future unless some benevolent person makes a very, very large donation.

Our current solution is to limit reservations for plated dinners to 220 people. With this in mind, members should be sure to reserve early to avoid disappointment.



Cozy up to some squash soup on a cold, wintry day

This recipe is not too time-consuming to make, and the soup tastes wonderful on cold winter days. Serve it with your favorite garlic bread and a green salad. You will have a great meal.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

Ingredients:

- 1/2 butternut squash (or buy it already in chunks at Whole Foods or Nugget Market)

JUST LIKE MOM USED TO MAKE

Richard Battistessa

- Carrots
- Sweet potatoes
- Rosemary
- Red onion
- Sage
- Sour cream
- Oil, salt and pepper

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large baking dish, place half a

butternut squash cut in half and deseeded (or the cubes).

Add some carrots, sweet potatoes, red onion, rosemary and sage. Roast in the oven for 50 minutes.

Then scoop the flesh of the squash and other vegetables into a blender. Add some water and beat on high for a minute or so.

Finish the soup with sour cream, oil, salt, pepper and rosemary. Serve it with crunchy French bread or garlic toast. Buon appetito!

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**Bacchus**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

let me explain something that I learned only after I left the farm. My maternal grandfather, Delfino Piano, made wine every fall from grapes he bought from others. As was popular among Italian immigrants in the early years of the 20th century, this was a strong, robust wine with lots of tannin. I



Tomatoes were among crops grown by the author's father in the Central Valley town of LaGrand.

remember that we used to tease Nonno and tell him that he made better vinegar than wine. The wine made in the fall was presented

for its first drinking at Easter.

What I never understood was why everyone—kids included—had to take a sip of the wine, then pour a tidy bit of it onto the table. Nonna would then frantically run around throwing salt on the spots of wine that were staining the white tablecloth.

My grandfather was born in Grand Tanze, a frazione of Mattie, a community outside the city of Turin in the Piedmont region, just a stone's throw from Susa, a Roman settlement with a forum and an arch of triumph honoring Caesar Augustus.

The Susa pass is the route that Hannibal, the noted military leader of antiquity, took when he entered Italy. There is a strong classical Roman legacy in this remote northwestern area of Piemonte.

Not until I became an undergraduate at the University of California, Berkeley, and took an anthropology class in primitive religion did I learn what we were really doing around that Easter table in the Central Valley. It was nothing less than the old ritual libation to Bacchus, the Roman god of wine and revelry. By the time I became aware of the meaning of this tradition, Nonno was gone, and I never had the chance to talk to him about it.

We kept one other tradition at Easter. Every male in the family, no matter how young he was, had to eat a soft-boiled egg on Easter morning. When I was old enough, my father explained to me that this was meant to ensure male fertility and thus ensure that the family name would survive. It worked!

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CHRISTMAS DINNER 2023



Dante Club treasurer Tom Mezzanares, right, and his friends enjoy the club's annual Christmas party dinner at the Dante Event Center on Dec. 17. The event, attended by 238 people, featured musical entertainment, cocktails and a menu that received rave reviews. Diners were offered a choice of four entrees: herb-marinated Angus flank steak with a creamy mushroom sauce and garlic mashed potatoes, roasted Cornish game hen with herb butter and saffron risotto, pan-seared Atlantic cod with tomato caper relish and linguine with Parmesan reggiono cream sauce, and a vegetarian entree of butternut squash ravioli with citrus beurre blanc. Rounding out the meal were a honey crisp salad, roasted Brussels sprouts, rolls with butter, and chocolate-dipped cannoli with pistachio crumble.

DANTE'S REMINDERS



Member volunteers

To volunteer, contact George Procida for anything related to buildings and grounds and Joe Porata for anything related to social events. Reach Procida at 916-455-4738 or gprocida@gplandscape.com and Porata at 530-887-1583 or jporata@sbcglobal.net.

Donations

Donate to our scholarship or building funds in memory of a loved one or a friend to keep their legacy going. And buy raffle tickets! Donations can be made online at <https://danteclub.com/donations/>.

Dante Club apparel

To purchase club shirts and other clothing items, contact Mark Pedroncelli at 916-812-6729 or peddc@surewest.net or speak to him at a members meeting. Cash or checks are needed to place orders. Members also can order through the Dante Club website at danteclub.shopgraphx.com.

Newsletter photos and news

Submit photos and news items for *Dante's Inferno* to John Caselli at jac6652@aol.com. Items must be received by the 20th of each month to be considered for the following month's newsletter. Publication depends on available space and is not guaranteed. Members also can post news and photos on the Dante Club's Facebook page.

Contact information

Recently changed an address or phone number? Please alert Tom Mezzanares at 916-467-7483 or tjmezzan@gmail.com.