

Italian town of Guardiaregia has Syracuse connection

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At first, the serendipity seemed startling: A Syracuse man of Italian descent returns to the old country and bumps into an Italian mayor who used to live in Syracuse.

Wow.

But then the coincidences - involving Syracuse and the tiny southern Italian town of Guardiaregia - started to accumulate.

First, we found a Web site dedicated to Guardioli, or the Guardiaregia diaspora. Then we were surprised to learn a former Syracuse University student launched the Web site, (www.Guardiaregia.com), spurred by curiosity about the place where his great-great-grandparents were born.

"I want to get people of my generation interested in their roots," says Pete Farina, 21, of Amsterdam, N.Y.

Farina became so engrossed in the Web site and helping others trace their genealogy, in fact, that he left SU. He ordered all of Guardiaregia's public records on microfilm and traced his family tree back to the early 18th century. Now he's finishing his degree online through Empire State College, pursuing his Italian citizenship and hoping to open a Guardiaregia museum.

According to Farina, when the Guardiaregia emigration began in the mid-1800s, Syracuse became one of the four most popular American destinations for transplants. The other Guardioli hubs in the United States were Palisades Park, N.J., Washington, D.C., and Amsterdam.

State Sen. John DeFrancisco's paternal grandparents were among those early immigrants. And the senator says Eastwood resident Nick Mastrogiovanni, the brother of Guardiaregia mayor Giovanni Mastrogiovanni, worked for his late father as a painting contractor when he first moved to Syracuse from Italy.

News anchor Christie Casciano's 80-year-old mother, Maria Palladino Casciano, also was born in Guardiaregia. She still regales the family with "some very fascinating stories" about life in the little village, Casciano says.

"The world seems just a little smaller when you have roots in Guardiaregia," Farina says.

Today, many Guardioli are settled in Buenos Aires and Toronto, host to the annual Festa di Guardiaregia. In fact, Farina says there are now more Guardioli living in Toronto than in Guardiaregia.

Guardiaregia Mayor Giovanni Mastrogiovanni, who lived in Syracuse from 1958 to 1971, is among those who plan to attend the annual festival. Afterward, he'll visit friends and family in - can you guess?

Syracuse, of course.

This is only the side article that accompanied a main article covering a Syracuse man's visit to Guardiaregia. If you would like to see the entire article, but are not a subscriber to the Post Standard, you can order your own personal copy of Sunday's paper by calling (315) 470-3272, the service is called "Extras!"