

From an Italian Dictionary to a Web Site on Italy *Young man has ongoing interest in family's town*

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Peter Farina is not someone who merely tinkers in his spare time with genealogy or studying his family heritage. [In fact,] he became so taken with the history of his family's hometown in Italy that he is now working at making it his full-time job.

It started with taking an Italian language class at Syracuse University and [it] eventually led him to leaving school [to pursue his degree online, in business, at Empire State College,] traveling to Italy, and [starting] a Web site and newsletter connecting descendants from Guardiaregia, a small village of about 750 people in the mountains of the southern [Italian] province of Campobasso.

"I've always been interesting my Italian culture. My grandmother gave me my first Italian-American dictionary when I was 10," Farina, 21, said.



Farina, speaking at a recent event in Toronto



The Italian village of Guardiaregia in the province of Campobasso was the point of origin for many Italian immigrants who settled in Amsterdam.

After graduating from Fonda-Fultonville High School in 2002, Farina attended Syracuse University, where he took an Italian language class after cleaning out his grandmother's attic in 2003. In the attic, Farina said he uncovered dozens of old photographs and letters from relatives in the town of Guardiaregia.

"That's when I discovered this whole world," Farina said. *"It turns out Amsterdam was one of the first and major destinations [for immigrants from Guardiaregia.]"*

Names like **Samppone** [orig. Sampogna,] **Bottisti** [orig. Giambattista,] **Galeazza**, **Albanese**, **Pallotta**, and **Meola**, common to Montgomery County and the surrounding areas, are typically traced back to the village of Guardiaregia, Farina said.

“If you went to Guardiaregia in the early 1900s and mention Amsterdam, people would know about it like Washington, D.C., or any other major city,” Farina said.

In 2004, Farina decided to travel to Italy to see Guardiaregia, from where his great-great grandparents came. In the spring of this year, Farina decided to start a Web site --- www.Guardiaregia.com --- about the small village and he sent out a [his first] text newsletter to about 20 family members.

“In the beginning it was almost just [about] the status of the site,” Farina said of the simple newsletter messages. *“[But,] all of a sudden, my [site] traffic started to just boom.”*

Farina said he started getting e-mails from around the world from people that moved away from Guardiaregia and were hungry for news or information about the close-knit community. His second newsletter improved, with more [information,] history, and facts, was sent out to about 60 people. Farina said he now has a mailing list of 250 [in seven counties] and is now devoting his time and looking toward a career in history [and preserving the Italian culture.]

“This whole thing has been a learning experience, to be honest,” Farina said. *“I want to make this international community, that isn’t connected, [and] bring them together into one family.”*

Second Ward Alderman Anthony “Babe” Pallotta said his parents both immigrated to the area from Guardiaregia, and he now receives Farina’s newsletter.

“There’s a few other people in town that have roots there, too,” Pallotta said. *“My mother and father and two sisters came [from Guardiaregia] in the early 1920’s.”*

Pallotta said industry in the area and the promise that hard work would determine one’s destiny helped bring many to the city.

“At that time, in the ‘20s, Amsterdam was prospering. There were a lot of jobs and so forth,” Pallotta said. *“There was more opportunity here at that time.”*

Farina is hoping that his roots are his opportunity. He plans to return to Italy soon, where he wants to take pictures and add history of other towns [and create another] Web site --- making it a teaching tool for students [and other’s with Italian roots.]

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