

TENNESSEE

In his store, Len Rossi keeps a copy of the sign of the highway named in memory of his son.

Today he offers advice on natural healing and massage therapy in his health food store, near Nashville, but in another life, **Len Rossi**, of the **Giuseppe Verdi Lodge #2818** in Brentwood, was a champion pro wrestler for over 25 years, who helped defeat segregation.

Rossi's life story reveals a man who refused to be pinned down—on the mat or by misfortune. Born in Utica, NY of immigrant parents, as a boy Rossi fashioned weights out of scrap iron bars and cement-filled coffee cans. By 1958, at age 29, he was one of the biggest wrestling stars in the South, having shortened his name from Rositano.

Inducted into the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame in 2004, Rossi will be best remembered for his stand against racism. In the

1960s, along with his tag-team partner, the African American, Bearcat Brown, Len helped integrate professional wrestling in the segregated Deep South.

In 1974, however, an automobile accident nearly ended his career, but natural healing helped him to return to wrestling with his son, Joe as the only father/son wrestling team in the US. Tragically, Joe died of cancer in 2004. By then, Rossi had earned advanced degrees in nutrition and massage therapy.

Now 79, he comes to his store every day to help people regain their health.

"It's the greatest feeling in the world when you know you've been able to help someone. I know, because I've been there myself," he says.

VIRGINIA

Taking advantage of the Sons of Italy Book Club and its talented authors, in January, the **George Washington Lodge #2038** in Annandale invited **Maria Petringa** to speak about her biography of Pierre de Brazzà, a Sons of Italy Book Club selection in the spring of 2007. [*Brazzà: A Life for Africa* by Maria Petringa; \$19.99; paperback; 276 pages; Authorhouse publishers]

As colonial governor of French Equatorial Africa, this late 19th century Italian nobleman bought and freed slaves; collected African tribal art; documented African plants and animals; and recorded the daily life of many African tribes. In gratitude, the Republic of the Congo named the city he founded in his honor. Today the capital, Brazzaville, remains the only African city named for a European.

For a list of speakers in your area, see www.osia.org at "Studies in Culture" *Speakers Bureau*.



Author Maria Petringa signs a copy of her book for George Washington Lodge President Richard Petta. [Photo: Stephen Provencal]

GOT A GOOD STORY? Has your lodge or a member done something remarkable that makes a difference? Send details with your lodge's name and number (photo optional) to: ITALIAN AMERICA Magazine, 219 E Street NE, Washington, DC 20002 or E-mail ddeasantis@osia.org. Include daytime telephone no. Entries not acknowledged and photos not returned unless requested.



WASHINGTON STATE

It all began in the early 90's when Italian-born Jerry Mascio of the Seattle Fedele Lodge # 1390, founded San Gennaro Foods to introduce Americans to that northern Italian staple, polenta, better known here as grits or cornmeal mush. Now, one of his biggest customers is the health food supermarket chain, Trader Joe's.

In Italy, polenta requires constant stirring for an hour, but Jerry's is pre-cooked and ready to serve with tomato sauce, cheese, meat or vegetables. "Our polenta is fat-free and all natural," says Jerry. Buon Appetito! See www.polenta.net for more information and recipes.



Jerry Mascio with his children Tony & Angela in his polenta factory.

NEW YORK

More than 150 students at a Brooklyn parochial school are studying Italian thanks to a coalition of the New York Grand Lodge Foundation, Inc., the New York Commission for Social Justice (CSJ) and the Garibaldi Meucci Museum (GMM), owned by the Sons of Italy Foundation.

In December 2007, coalition of officers presented a check for \$2,000 to St. Finbar Elementary School in Brooklyn. The funds will be used to buy texts and workbooks for the 152 students taking Italian who from Pre-K to 8th grade. This is the first time that each child at St. Finbar has his or her own Italian study book.

At the grant presentation ceremony, the school principal, Rosina Katsoulis and three Italian teachers along with Grand Lodge President



Some of St. Finbar's students of Italian.

Nancy DiFiore Quinn, NYS CSJ Chair Stella Grillo, GMM President & CEO John Dabbene and State Historian Sylvia Summa were entertained by some of the students, who sang in Italian.

"Our members had requested that the grand lodge become actively involved in promoting Italian in our schools," says GL President Quinn, "This is just the beginning."

OHIO

Italy's long history is confusing and complex because the peninsula has been invaded and dominated by so many different nations since the fall of Rome in 476 A.D. Undaunted, however, Frank Fregiato, a county court judge in Martins Ferry, has written a streamlined outline of Italian history from pre-Roman times to today.



Judge & historian Frank Fregiato

"A Brief History of Italy" is only 34 pages long. He graciously is sharing it with OSIA so download it for free at www.osia.org at "Studies in Culture" under Reports and Research. Frank belongs to the Ugualianza Lodge #754 in Bellaire.

SIF Supports Effort to Cure Deafness



The SIF has donated \$25,000 to the Rienzi Foundation, founded by businessman and former NELA honoree Michael Rienzi to cure deafness through cochlear implants, bringing SIF contributions to \$75,000.

Seen here at the Rienzi Foundation's annual Gala in New York City March 9 are (L. to R. : Mr. Rienzi, an unidentified guest, Francesco Talò, Italy's Consul General in NYC, and SIF CEO/Executive Director Philip Piccigallo.