

# Holy Rosary's 20th annual Italian Street Festival is June 6-7

By Brandon A. Evans

People come from all sorts of places to get a taste of Italy each June in Indianapolis.

Holy Rosary Parish's annual Italian Street Festival has gained notoriety beyond the parish community, and even beyond the city, in its 20-year history.

"We get people from all over," said Bernie Green, business manager at Holy Rosary Parish.

This year's festival will take place from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. on June 6 and June 7 at 520 Stevens St.

The near-south-side parish is easy to get to from all over the city, said Msgr. Joseph F. Schaedel, vicar general and pastor of Holy Rosary Parish. "It has become not only a parish festival, but also an event for the entire city. Everybody knows about it."

People who have moved from the parish also come back for the festival. "It's just like a big reunion," Green said.

Msgr. Schaedel called the street festival an opportunity to see "so many, many old friends."

It's also an opportunity to enjoy authentic Italian cuisine from more than 25 food stands in a festive ethnic setting decorated with strands of lights.

Italian music, an Old World-style procession with a statue of the Blessed Virgin and an Italian Heritage Society display add to the ambiance.

On both days, the wine flows freely. Last year, between 150 and 175 cases of wine were consumed.

And that's just for starters. The more than 20,000 people that attended last year's street festival ate 1,200 pounds of Italian sausage, the same amount of pasta, 600 gallons of sauce, and about 400 cakes and other desserts.

But all that is thoroughly Italian about the festival is inseparably connected to all that is Catholic—just as in Rome the heart of Christianity meets the heart of Italy.

The procession with the Blessed Virgin, along with the priests, servers and other special participants, moves right through the middle of the food booths.

People follow the procession into the church for the second of two Masses on Saturday night. Masses are celebrated at 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. The Catholic Choir of Indianapolis sings during both liturgies.

The event is far and away the big social gathering of the year for the parish—which is the only Italian parish in

the state—and the ethnic tradition unites the faith community, which offers both the English Mass and the Tridentine Mass, said Msgr. Schaedel.

This year, there is even more reason to celebrate because it is the 20th anniversary of the first street festival.

Although the festival was celebrated decades ago, it was discontinued until its revival in 1983 with David Page and Matthew Iaria at the helm.

The two parishioners have co-chaired the massive festival and fundraiser ever since, and are devoted to planning the event each year.

Along with volunteers cooks—many of them in their 80s and 90s—Page and Iaria spend a week preparing the food in the basement kitchen of Holy Rosary Parish.



There is a core crew of older Italian women that Iaria said wear him out.

"I have a good time with those ladies down there," he said. "They work all day long [and] never complain."

Restaurant vendors have asked to sell their food at the event, but have been denied. All of the food comes from the hands of members of the local Italian community.

Page said that it's the authentic ethnic food that makes the difference and draws people to the event year after year. There is simply "no doubt about it," he said. The food is the magic in the festival's recipe for success.

Last year, the event grossed a whopping \$200,000 and cleared \$160,000 after expenses. That puts the festival income of this 300-family parish on par with the festivals of larger parishes in Indiana.

"We are a small parish with aging buildings,"

Msgr. Schaedel said. "The money is used to fund ongoing capital needs and the maintenance of our buildings, especially our beautiful church."

"This year, we want to begin an endowment to provide young people of the parish with scholarship money," he said. "We want them to be proud of their Italian heritage."

Msgr. Schaedel said that the festival committee tries to involve the younger families and younger members of the parish as volunteers each year because the festival's future depends on it.

For now, the system works well.

"It takes lots and lots of work," Msgr. Schaedel said. "But each booth is staffed by a family, and they somehow automatically know what to do. It all falls into place. They've been doing it for years."

He said Page and Iaria have turned the event into "a well-tuned machine."

Page's wife, Rosemary, said that part of the festival's uniqueness is that the same people have always been involved as volunteers.

But Page said he is getting too old for his volunteer role and doesn't know how much longer he'll stay in the position.

Just as much as Page and Iaria are tied to the festival, they are tied to each other. "We get along like brothers," Page said. "I would never try it without him."

Likewise, Iaria said that without Page the festival would not happen. When Page retires, so will he.

Two years ago, the duo gave their two-year notice of "retirement" to the parish. This probably won't be their last festival, but their pending retirement looms over the event.

"There's not too many young people in our parish that are taking our spot," Iaria said. "I don't know what's going to happen."

But risk has always been a part of the festival.

The event has been rained out before, and the Italians in the community came and bought the food because, Page said, that's the kind of people they are.

It was Italians that built the church, saved it from debt, bring life to the street festival, and hopefully will find a way to keep the festival going well into the future.

That's the kind of people they are.

And that's what they celebrate. †

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