

# Tontitown Storia



*The Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical Museum*

*Fall 2015, Vol. 11, No. 2*

## Saluti from the Board

Our hearts were full of well wishes yet sad as Curator Charlotte Piazza announced her retirement from the Tontitown Historical Museum. She has devoted 30 years of tireless dedication to preserving the rich history and heritage of Tontitown. She and husband Henry are the first people we have to thank for all their hard work and time in establishing the museum in the 1980s.

Charlotte and Henry got the idea for a Tontitown museum after traveling to and from McPherson, Kansas where she grew up. She said there were small museums in many of the little Kansas towns, and they thought why not a museum like that in Tontitown. They knew that much of our unique history would be lost if something wasn't done to preserve it soon. Charlotte, Henry, and many volunteers worked diligently to gather artifacts, immigration and land deed documents, photographs, and stories. The city obtained the historic Mary and Zelinda Bastianelli house from St. Joseph's Catholic Church to house the museum and it opened on August 10, 1986.

Charlotte received a wealth of professional guidance and friendship from the staff at the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, and they continue to be our right hand helpers. She attended workshops from the Arkansas Museums Association and the University of Arkansas. Robert Serio, whose family also settled in Lake Village, provided exhibit expertise, preservation guidelines, and helped build displays. The Tontitown City Council sponsored the museum, providing financial support for preservation materials and supplies.



### Curator Charlotte Piazza Retiring

Pictured here, enjoying a Tontitown Heritage Day May event, are: (L-R) museum volunteer Cathy Mantegani, museum board members Michael Hartman and Becky Howard, Curator Charlotte Piazza, visitor Carla Neil Gourley, and city alderman and museum co-founder Henry Piazza (Charlotte's husband).

*Photo by Brenda Pianalto*

There are more people to name and thank than space allows in this *Tontitown Storia*, but know how grateful we are for all who have contributed to our current success from the early days until now. We'll have a special celebration for Charlotte's retirement during the **14th Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear** on Sunday, November 8th from 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. at St. Joseph's Parish Hall. Please come share your appreciation for all Charlotte has done and visit with us! We look forward to seeing you!

### In This Issue

Curator's Choice, Mayor Visit in Valli del Pasubio, 2  
Grazie Mille to Amici Members, 3  
Family Focus - Eugenio & Luigia Taldo Brunetti, 4-5  
Polenta Smear Invitation and Loretta Brunetti award, insert  
Out of the Darkroom, 2015 Museum Board, Donations, 6  
Mark Your Calendar, Amici Membership Form, 7



## Curator's Choice

by Bev Cortiana-McEuen

We give Charlotte a well-deserved rest from the Curator's Choice column this issue. Instead, we use this space to share our deepest appreciation for all she had done for the Tontitown Historical Museum.

When Charlotte told the Board about her retirement plan for the end of 2015, she said, "It is time, and the museum is in good hands." Thank you for the vote of confidence and for all you have done to ensure that Tontitown history is preserved for Tontitown grandchildren, great grandchildren, and beyond! We love you!



### Tontitown Historical Museum Dedication September 21, 1986

L-R: Curator Charlotte Piazza, Claudine Pianalto, Mayor Freddie Taldo, Alderman Henry Piazza, Representative Jerry Hinshaw, Pauline Franco

## Mayor Cunegato Visit in Valli del Pasubio

The Tontitown City Council and Tontitown Historical Museum Board worked together last year to pursue a Sister City relationship with Valli del Pasubio, Italy, the original home of many of our Tontitown settler families. Our goal was to share experiences of our culture, education, economic development, and tourism. We sent a letter to Mayor Armando Cunegato of Valli del Pasubio in June, 2014. We did not receive any response.

While on a trip to Europe last month, Museum Board member Riley Tessaro and his son, Mike, and grandson, Russell Della Rosa, stopped by Mayor Cunegato's office. They were warmly welcomed by the mayor and his staff. They discussed the Sister City letter. Mayor Cunegato shared a copy of the letter that they sent back to us in October 2014, but we never received. Mayor Cunegato and the Valli del Pasubio leaders are very interested in developing a closer relationship with Tontitown. The dire economic crisis in Italy prevents them from entering a partnership that includes any financial commitment, but we believe we can strengthen our ties without expense on either side. We are excited to receive this positive response from our comrades, and look forward to our closer partnership in the future. Thanks, Riley and family ... for hand delivering their letter!



Left: Mike Tessaro, Riley Tessaro, and the Honorable Mayor of Valli del Pasubio, Armando Cunegato  
Right: Riley Tessaro and grandson Russell Della Rosa visit the Emigrant statue in Valli del Pasubio







## ***Grazie Mille to Amici (Friends) Members***



Thank you to all our current Amici members listed below. Your donations are accumulating in the Museum Building Fund for future expansion. To join or renew, complete an Amici form on page 7. ***Grazie Mille, Amici!***

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# Family Focus ... Eugenio & Luigia Taldo Brunetti

by granddaughter Marlene Franco Piazza, Brenda Pianalto, and Bev Cortiana-McEuen  
with excerpts from youngest son Lenor's oral interview in *Memories I Can't Let Go Of*, edited by Susan Young

The Brunetti history in Tontitown begins with Eugenio Jim Brunetti and his wife Luigia Louise Taldo Brunetti. Eugenio Jim Brunetti was born in Lizzano in Belvedere, Bologna, Italy on April 30, 1872. He came to America in 1899, at the age of 27. Luigia Louise Taldo was born in Vicenza, Italy on September 26, 1878. She came to America in 1898 with her parents, Giovanni John and Maria, and her seven siblings: Amalia Emily, Margaret, Pietro Peter, Benedetta, Domenico Richard, Joseph Teofilo, and Anna.

In 1899, Jim sought work opportunities and traveled to Wilburton, Oklahoma. Many Italian immigrants worked the Wilburton coal mines to support their loved ones left behind in Tontitown. Their struggles were tremendous. Women cared for their children and farms in Tontitown while their husbands worked tirelessly to be able to return to the ones they loved.

Jim and Louise were married on December 27, 1900. Seven children were born to the loving couple: Mary, Ida, Inez, Clara, Rose, Isadore (Buck), and Lenor. Jim permanently returned to Tontitown from Wilburton in 1909 and proudly purchased 16 ½ acres of land on now-named north Sabatini Road near Maestri Road for \$330.00. He farmed the rest of his life. Jim died on December 23, 1956 at the age of 84.



**The Brunetti's, ca 1920s**

Luigia Louise and Eugenio Jim

*Photo courtesy Marlene Franco Piazza, 2003-2-101*



**Nonno Brunetti with grandchildren and cousin, ca 1954**

Front, l-r: Jim Brunetti, Marlene Franco Piazza on lap, Albert Zulpo  
Back, l-r: Raymond Franco, Carmelita Franco Newquist,  
Eleanor Zulpo Pianalto, Duane Mankin

*Photo courtesy Marlene Franco Piazza*

Their youngest son Lenor, now 97, lives in Russellville, Arkansas with his wife Betty. At one time, Lenor bought and lived in what is now the Tontitown Winery, which was built by his Taldo grandparents. Lenor still owns the land north of the winery.

In 2003 at age 84, Lenor participated in the oral interview project to help preserve Tontitown history, which was included in the book, *Memories I Can't Let Go Of: Life Stories from Tontitown, Arkansas*. Some excerpts of his interview follow and give a snapshot of the Brunetti family home life. [Note: Lenor's interview is on pages 24-29 in the book.]

We had a two-bedroom home. One of the bedrooms also served as the living room. We doubled up in the bedrooms. My brother and I slept in one bed and my mom and dad in another in one room, and my sisters slept in the other room.

We used wood for our cooking stove and for the heater. The bedrooms were not heated, and they were cold in the wintertime. We didn't bathe a lot in the wintertime when it was cold.

I was 12 years old when my mom passed away [on August 10, 1930 at the age of 52]. By that time, my dad had quit working in the mines. The only children at home at that time were my sister, Rose, and my brother, Isadore, better known as Buck. Rose became like a mother to us. She took care of us, and did a real good job of it.



**Eugenio Jim Brunetti with his seven children, ca 1940s**

Front, l-r: Mary Brunetti Taldo, Jim, Rose Brunetti Franco  
Back, l-r: Inez Brunetti Zulpo, Lenor Brunetti, Ida Brunetti Zulpo,  
Isadore "Buck" Brunetti, and Clara Brunetti Pianalto

*Photo courtesy Marlene Franco Piazza, S-2007-110-1*

I remember my mom, and then my sister Rosie doing lots of canning. We canned all our vegetables and fruit. Seems like we always had enough to eat.

A typical breakfast back then was what we called *caffè latte*, which was milk and coffee and sugar, and bread or crackers. Mostly homemade bread.

We had a vineyard, and we made wine all the time. We made it in the cellar. We had a good cellar that kept the wine cool. We always had wine at home.

My dad never did own a vehicle. Horse and buggy and wagon were the only things he owned in the line of transportation. When we went to Springdale, we always went in the wagon.

We walked to school, a mile and a quarter. A pretty good walk, especially in the wintertime when it was real cold. First through third grades were in one room, fourth and fifth in another, and sixth, seventh, and eighth in another, if I remember right. We attended Mass in the morning and prayers in the afternoon. After school we would go to the church and say prayers there.

We did not have a lot of free time living on the farm. Seems like we always had some kind of chores to do. We would get together on weekends and play baseball. In the summer our entertainment was swimming in Brush Creek. It was real cold water, but we didn't seem to mind.

In the evenings in the summertime, we would get together with our cousins, the Sabatinis, and play games at their house. The Francos lived close by, and we would also play games at their house.

The first Grape Festival I recall was held where the old [Smith] school was, on the northwest corner of the Highway 412 and Barrington Road intersection. Vendors came in and had different kinds of games, and our people served ice cream. Best I remember, they had hamburgers too. I don't recall them having spaghetti dinners then. It wasn't a very big festival, but people seemed to enjoy anything at that time. It was enjoyable for the kids.

At Christmastime, we went to Midnight Mass and sometimes, Morning Mass. We looked forward to Christmas because it was the time we would get candy and small gifts of some kind. Santa Claus came on Christmas morning at our house.

For Easter, we would make fugassa, or Easter bread. Easter bread is sweet bread made with a lot of eggs and raisins. I remember my mom making me a small loaf of Easter bread and then putting a boiled egg in the center of it. I really enjoyed that.





Tontitown native Mary Frances Maestri Vaughan stands beside a photo taken in 1964 included in the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History exhibit, *Out of the Darkroom*. Photographer Don House selected the images on display, which continue through January 9, 2016. Don't miss this captivating exhibit of photos and their stories behind them.

## ***Tontitown Historical Museum 2015 Board of Directors***

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*Tontitown Storia* is published by the Tontitown Historical Museum Board, usually in the Spring and Fall. Please submit story ideas or other comments to Bev Cortiana-McEuen at 479-361-2609, or email [bcortiana@cox.net](mailto:bcortiana@cox.net).

## ***~ Donations in Memory and in Honor ~***

*It is with gratitude and pride that we display Memorial and Honorarium (H) donations in the Tontitown Historical Museum.*

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## ✓ **Mark Your Calendar ...**

## **2015-2016 Museum Events**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
Ongoing	<b>Tontitown Historical Museum, Regular Hours</b> Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 1 – 4 pm or by special appointment, call 479-361-9800 or email tontitownhistoricalmuseum@gmail.com
November 8, 2015	<b>14<sup>th</sup> Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear</b> St. Joseph's Parish Hall 1:30 – 4 pm - Honoring Curator Charlotte Piazza's Retirement - Entertainment by Loretta Brunetti and July Syko
May 2015 Date to be announced	<b>2016 Tontitown Heritage Day, an Arkansas Heritage Month Event</b> <i>Arkansas Arts: Celebrating Our Creative Culture</i>
August 9-13, 2016	<b>118<sup>th</sup> Tontitown Grape Festival, It's About Tradition</b> Tontitown Historical Museum, Special Hours Thursday, August 11      1 – 4 pm Friday, August 12        1 – 7 pm Saturday, August 13      10 am – 7 pm



*"So Big,  
This Little  
Museum"*

### **Benefits**

- Satisfaction in supporting the growth of the Tontitown Historical Museum to preserve and protect the heritage of Tontitown.
- 10% discount on Museum purchases
- Amici window cling

### **Mail your tax-deductible check to:**

Tontitown Historical Museum  
P.O. Box 144  
Tontitown, AR 72770

(or give to any Museum Board member)

## **Annual Amici Membership Levels**

- ☐ Individual – \$15
- ☐ Family – \$20
- ☐ Senior Individual – \$10
- ☐ Senior Family – \$15
- ☐ Amici – \$50 to \$249
- ☐ Concordia – \$250 to \$499
- ☐ Heritage – \$500+

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**Volunteers are the backbone of Tontitown Historical Museum. May we call on you to volunteer? ☐ Yes!**



257 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard  
P.O. Box 144  
Tontitown, Arkansas 72770

***14th Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear  
Sunday ~ November 8, 2015 ~ 1:30-4:00 p.m.***



The Tontitown Historical Museum Board cordially invites you to the **14th Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear**.

It will be a fun afternoon of friendship, music, and history! Come join us for polenta, umedo, and desserts. You can join or renew your Amici membership, and honor Curator Charlotte Piazza for her 30 years of volunteer service to the museum. Loretta Brunetti and July Syko, on her ukulele, will serenade us with Loretta's traditional Tontitown *That's Amore* and more. We hope to see you there!





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insert follows

*You're Invited to the*  
**14<sup>th</sup> Annual Tontitown Reunion &  
Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear**

*AND SHARE OUR 30-YEAR RETIREMENT CELEBRATION  
FOR CURATOR CHARLOTTE PIAZZA!*

**SUNDAY – NOVEMBER 8, 2015 – 1:30 TO 4:00 P.M.**  
ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH PARISH HALL

- 1:30 – 4:00** Copy photos, Enjoy photo displays, Visit & Laugh! ☺  
Enjoy Loretta Brunetti & July Syko entertainment!  
Win great door prizes and have FUN!!
- 2:00 – 3:15** Polenta & Umedo, Dessert served – No Charge

As we celebrate Charlotte's retirement, do you have photos of your family's accomplishments, birthdays, or holidays to help preserve our Tontitown history? To save time at the photo donation table, record the **Who, What, When, Where** information ahead of time ... then you'll have more time to visit. ☺

Also, you can join or renew your membership to Tontitown Historical Museum Amici (Friends) during the event, and save time and postage. Many thanks to all our members!



*July Syko & Loretta Brunetti*



*Sponsored by Tontitown Historical Museum*

# *CTCA Volunteer of the Year Spreads Joy*

## *Loretta Brunetti Inspires with Energy, Love and Enthusiasm*

*by Melinda Cubbage, Guest Writer*

The saying goes, “We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.” That saying embodies the words and actions of Loretta Brunetti.

In 2013, while her younger sister was battling cancer, Brunetti had a call on her heart to volunteer at Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA). She started with making appointment reminder calls, and before long she was leading a group walk and participating in sing-a-longs. She currently visits the hospital two times per week, dons her purple volunteer jacket and gets to work, averaging 10-plus hours each week.

Early on, it became clear that this spunky lady was up for just about any activity, but it was her love of dance and enthusiastic nature that quickly drew her into the liveliest of CTCA festivities: flash mobs. Every Thursday, CTCA plans a themed dance for anyone who wants to participate. From superheroes to biker babes to Elvis, participants turn out in their craziest home-grown costumes.

These much-anticipated lunchtime dance-a-thons lift the energy of everyone in the hospital and generate a lot of laughs. They are a favorite activity for Brunetti, who, at 74-years-young, nimbly dances and truly inspires.

“Loretta is a true definition of a volunteer,” says Megan McLeod, CTCA talent acquisition partner. “She gives her life to serve other people. She is really special. I have never met anyone like her before.”

Where did her well-spring of energy and love come, you might ask. Maybe it is the deeply rooted spiritual and giving nature of the Italian-American community in which she was raised, in Tontitown, Arkansas. Settled by immigrants in the late 1800s, Tontitown is known for families and friendships forged during hard times and good, drawing from their faith, pooling resources and helping their neighbors.

Brunetti could have retired from a 21-year career at General Electric and 27 years of tenure at Fadler Foods to take life easy and pursue her love of writing poetry. But idle is not a speed in Brunetti’s gearbox.



**Deserving Award:** Loretta Brunetti received the CTCA Volunteer of the Year Award at the hospital's holiday party in 2014. With Brunetti is CTCA Talent Coordinator Lauren Bartlett.

*Photo courtesy CTCA*

She says, “Volunteering at CTCA makes my heart get bigger. Love, courage, strength and hope surround me each day I volunteer. God sent me here.”

April is National Volunteer Month. Because of her copious hours spent at the hospital dancing, assisting with administrative duties, talking with individual patients, participating in Karaoke Night and giving of her purely infectious spirit, Brunetti was named the CTCA Volunteer of the Year at the end of 2014.

“If she can bring a little laughter and a little fun and joy, it helps our patients forget what is going on at that moment,” explains Susan Magill, CTCA director of guest services.

Tulsa is fortunate to have Brunetti. CTCA patients are blessed by her gifts of talents. The staff is rejuvenated by her energy. And she is a shining example of the rewards of sharing the time and talents we each have through lending a hand or, in her case, tapping our toes. She is a great example of the poetry of life.

*Reprinted with permission, Greater Tulsa Reporter Newspapers, May 2015, Page 12; and at <http://gtrnews.com/greater-tulsa-reporter/13461/ctca-volunteer-of-the-year-spreads-joy>*