

# Carmel Pine Cone Article about Buster Crivello 09-01-2022

28A The Carmel Pine Cone September 2, 2022

## For those ‘that go down to the sea in ships,’ some annual respect

IF YOU had to name the longest-running local mega-event, what would you say? No, it's not the Concours d'Elegance, a relative youngster with its birthday in 1950. The Crosby Pro-Am moved to Pebble Beach three years earlier, while the Carmel Bach Festival was launched in 1935.

However, for the oldest big to-do on

agreeable.

Eventually, he went to work for a seafood processing business called Sea Products. Crivello stuck with the company for 43 years, in a wide variety of jobs. He went out on fishing boats and traveled to Alaska to catch sockeye salmon. Promotions led to greater responsibilities, and Crivello managed plants in Crescent City, San Francisco, Oakland, Tomales Bay, San Pedro, Oxnard, Moss Landing, Seaside and Monterey until he retired in 2004.

From 1995 to 2000, he served as a commissioner

on the California Fishery Advisory Board, part of the Fish and Wildlife Department. He provided industry with advice about the length of seasons and how much seafood should be harvested.

In 1969, at age 26, he married Antoinette Spadaro — the daughter of fisherman Joe Spadaro — at St. Angela's church in Pacific Grove. According to a newspaper account, more than 600 people attended the reception. The couple has two children, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

### Blessing the fleet

Festa Italia has gone by many names, but it began as a religious rite in 1933. Fishermen and their families met at San Carlos Cathedral in Monterey for a reception, then proceeded to the wharf, where the bishop blessed their boats. Santa Rosalia, the patron saint of Palermo, Sicily, was invoked to watch over the fleet as fishermen worked in the open sea. According to the Catholic calendar, her feast day is Sept. 4, so the festival is celebrated in early September each year.

The event's website says that by the late 1940s and 1950s, it drew 40,000 to 50,000 people annually. Crivello got involved in 1972 at his mother-in-law's request (she was already on the board) and for many

years, he said, responsibility for the event “bounced around” among organizations including the local parish and the Sons of Italy.

By 1979, a smaller festival continued the tradition of the religious ceremony and procession — including a float with an image of Santa Rosalia — to the wharf, followed by sales of Italian food in the Custom House Plaza and a spaghetti dinner in Monterey's Memory Gardens. That same year, a permanent statue of the saint was erected at the entrance to the wharf by the city's Italian Heritage Society.

Crivello noted that ocean water is hard on metal, and he realized that the statue would require regular maintenance. To that end, he and some friends started a fund to raise money to keep it in good repair. Spaces on plaques on the pedestal were sold to sponsors, raising \$36,000 for the statue's ongoing upkeep.

The festival, meanwhile, became a more stable separate entity when it was reorganized as the nonprofit Festa Italia in 1997, by Crivello,

Tom Fama and Carmelo Tringali, with the goals of promoting “the heritage, traditions and culture of the Italian American community of the Monterey Peninsula, through planning cultural events and ... the annual Fishermen's Festival to honor the fishermen past and present,” as well as educating the public about Italian Americans' contributions to the area.

### Bocce ball

Crivello became the group's first president and held the office until this year, when Joe Cardinale took over. Meanwhile, the festival has grown to a three-day party. The procession from San Carlos is still the centerpiece, but there's also lots of live music, boatloads of calamari, platefuls of arancini (deep-fried, cheese-filled balls of risotto), cannoli and other Italian specialties, and a bocce ball tournament.

The festival queen's coronation banquet takes place about a month ahead of time. The queen is chosen at random from a group of nominees who become her court,



PHOTO/COURTESY FESTA ITALIA FOUNDATION

Buster Crivello's respect for his Sicilian roots and religious faith inspired him to work with Festa Italia for 50 years.

and all of them receive scholarships from the event. The Festa itself is scheduled for the weekend of Sept. 10, 11 and 12, and the procession takes place on Saturday morning.

In 2011, Crivello was recognized as the Italian Heritage Society of the Monterey Peninsula's Annual Honoree for his contributions, an accolade that has been bestowed upon other local luminaries including Rich Pepe, Leon Panetta and Nick Lombardo, to name a few.

What's so special about Festa Italia, that Crivello served for so many years, even through what he called the “two years of stupid Covid”?

“I believe in the Sicilian Italian heritage. I believe in God, and I'm a Catholic,” he said, and the festival celebrates all of that and preserves his culture's history.

But while he deeply respects the history of Monterey's fishermen, after more than four decades spent dealing with seafood, what he really enjoys is a nice steak — medium rare.

## Great Lives

By ELAINE HESSER

the Peninsula, we're raising a celebratory glass of Asti Spumante to Festa Italia, which turns 89 this month. Carmel Valley resident Sebastian “Buster” Crivello has been part of it for 50 years.

Crivello came to Monterey from Sicily in 1961 at age 17, with his parents and sister Phyllis. His mother and father were descended from fishermen who cast their nets in the Mediterranean, while other members of the family had already settled here.

Crivello's first job — less than 24 hours after he got off the plane to California — was at the end of Old Fisherman's Wharf, at Rappa's restaurant, which was owned by one of his relatives. He spoke no English and was relegated to washing dishes. It was so stressful — the dishes piled up as the boss yelled at him to keep moving — that he had nightmares. “I woke my mother up!” he recalled.

The restaurant was quite busy in those days — hard as it may be to believe, Crivello said he remembers the line for a table stretching all the way to the wharf's entrance.

It was all a bit overwhelming for a young newcomer. “I told Mrs. Rappa, ‘You have to find me another job. Otherwise, I quit.’” He moved to a prep station where he filleted fish, which he found more

