

The Appalachian Teaching Project 2014

Food Immigrants: From Commercial Success to Heritage Tourism

Can traditional historical foods from Southern Italy that became commercial economic successes in North Central West Virginia be the basis for a model to promote cultural heritage tourism for the sustainability of a community?

**The Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center
on the campus of Fairmont State University
and Pierpont Community and Technical College**

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(ATP project date)
June 15, 2014 – June 30, 2015

(Date this document was submitted)
May 2015

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Final Report Narrative:

Title of Project:

Food Immigrants: From Commercial Success to Heritage Tourism

Can traditional historical foods from Southern Italy that became commercial economic successes in North Central West Virginia be the basis for a model to promote cultural heritage tourism for the sustainability of a community?

Grant Period: June 15, 2014 – June 30, 2015

Grantee Name: Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center on the campus of Fairmont State University and Pierpont Community & Technical College

Project Director: Dr. Judy P. Byers

Description of Project:

The 2014 Fairmont State University ATP project addressed the unique concept of studying Italian food immigrants and how those traditional foods brought to North Central West Virginia in the early 20th century have continued to be used in both family and commercial settings. Students identified selected food types and their Italian origins plus conducted research and inquired with current regional Italian-American businesses and organizations that promote their Italian heritage and culture through the sales or celebration of these foodways. Students traced the history of selected Italian food heritages from their origin in Southern Italy to their immigrant arrival in North Central West Virginia in the early 20th century. Students also researched how these foods have been used as successful economic endeavors and formulated a model of how historic awareness, economic success, and more specific understandings can be used for incorporating traditional foodways (along with value added concepts, such as family recipes and history, visual images that tell individual and family stories [early photographs], and celebrations attached to food) in a more creative and educational application for regional festivals, businesses, and programs promoting cultural heritage tourism.

Background:

Descendents of Italian heritage constitute one of the most important ethnic groups in West Virginia's population. Coming mostly from Italy's southern regions, especially Campania, Calabria, and Sicily, they arrived in West Virginia during the early years of the 20th century to serve the labor needs of the area's rapidly developing industrial economy. With more than 17,000 Italian immigrants in the state by 1910, they made up

30 percent of the foreign-born population in the state. Most of these southern Italian immigrants came from small hill villages, especially San Giovanni in Fiore in the Region of Calabria.

These immigrants were a very diverse group and, in many places, became a vital part of the business community. Italians in North Central West Virginia not only worked in the coal mines, but they also worked in glass and zinc, on farms and railroads, and in their own small businesses. Therefore, West Virginia Italians achieved economic progress and acceptance with determination and hard labor. In addition, raising livestock and tending gardens kept expenses low, thus, increasing their savings for their future.

Nearly a century later, West Virginians of Italian descent are still successful. Many have opened their own businesses, the most notable being those that serve traditional Italian food. As a result of the number of Italian business, festivals, and descendants in North Central West Virginia today, it became apparent that there was a need for a more unified front for promoting Italian cultural heritage tourism.

Activities:

In addition to the conference presentation, poster, and other activities, please include full details regarding the following requirements of the 2014-2015 Scope of Work:

- Activities with community partners (including partner name(s), dates and locations of meetings, topics of Focus Group Discussions, etc):

Community Partners and Central Focus of the Research Project:

The goal of this project was to provide a more unified front for Italian cultural heritage in North Central West Virginia between our chosen community partners. The project reviewed the somewhat under explored historical content (general culture and specific foodways) on the role of Italian cultural influence in North Central West Virginia and provided a working model for this specific cultural grouping to more authentically and economically interweave their cultural heritage into an educational and business mode. This same mode could be used by any other ethnic population of the region of which there are many, although the Italian population is the largest of the American ethnic groupings in North Central West Virginia.

Students partnered with six businesses, two festivals, and two individual consultants.

Businesses:

- Muriale's Italian Restaurant and Catering, Fairmont, WV (One of the most successful businesses in North Central West Virginia celebrating the owner's personal and family history and Italian cultural background through foodways, historical memorabilia exhibits, and media construct advertisements emphasizing his cultural background)
- Tutto Gelato Café, Morgantown, WV (Established in 2007, a family owned café featuring authentic Italian cuisine, beverages, and gelato)

- Minard's Spaghetti Inn, Clarksburg, WV (Established in 1937 and offering authentic Italian cuisine in the Minard family for generations)
- Oliverio's Ristorante, Clarksburg, WV (An important Italian restaurant using family recipes from Calabria)
- Oliverio's Italian Style Peppers Warehouse and Factory, Clarksburg, WV (Commercial production of specialty Italian canned foods, such as sauces and salsas; an extension of the Oliverio family who established Oliverio's Ristorante;)
- Country Club Bakery, Fairmont, WV (In business for over 70 years, the original home of the Pepperoni Roll, inspired by Italian immigrant miner's food)

Festivals:

- West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival, Clarksburg, WV (A regional festival celebrating its 36th, August 29-31, 2014, and saluting traditional Italian customs, music, arts, and foods)
- Feast of the Seven Fishes, Fairmont, WV (A one-day festival named for a traditional Italian Christmas Eve foods celebration featuring a cooking school)

Individual consultants:

- Rosalyn Queen Alonso and Mary Romino (Local experts on Italian cuisine and customs)

Meetings began during the Roads to Appalachia trip through Southern Italy (FOLK 3350 – Special Topics: Roads to Appalachia Study/Travel Abroad), which was a precursor to this research project, where student participants and a community partner experienced Italian cuisine throughout the trip, especially at the Feast of Saint John in San Giovanni in Fiore in Calabria. Community partners were then chosen based on their family heritage and ties to Southern Italy, especially Campania, Calabria, and Sicily. Rocco Muriale, owner of Muriale's Italian Restaurant and Catering, accompanied us on our trip to Southern Italy and was the initial community partner.

Number and description of planned meetings with the community partners:

Preliminary meetings began in June 2014 to establish the community partners for the research project. Starting in August and continuing through November 2014, weekly class meetings were held every Friday at the Gabor WV Folklife Center between the student participants and Dr. Judy Byers to report and collaborate on the finding and research of the project.

Businesses:

- *Muriale's Italian Restaurant and Catering* – (July and October 2014) Students conducted a focus group discussion with Rocco Muriale, owner of Muriale's Italian Restaurant and Catering, during the Road to Appalachia Study/Travel Abroad through Southern Italy in Caserta on July 1, 2014. On October 19, 2014, students interviewed Rocco at Muriale's Italian Restaurant and Catering in Fairmont, WV to gather more information about his restaurant, family history, and the success of his business.

- *Tutto Gelato Café* – (October 2, 2014) Students interviewed Sarah Straface, owner of Tutto Gelato Café, on the history of the business and her family, her inspiration for opening the business, and the future of the business. The interview was conducted at Tutto Gelato Café in Morgantown, WV.
- *Minard's Spaghetti Inn* – (October 17, 2014) Students interviewed Joe Minard and Stan Wolfe, owners of Minard's Spaghetti Inn, to collect the history of the Minard family, business, and the economic success and future of the restaurant. The interview was conducted at Minard's Spaghetti Inn in Clarksburg, WV.
- *Oliverio's Ristorante* – (October 17, 2014) Students interviewed Petrina Oliverio Bonamico, one of the owners of Oliverio's Ristorante, to learn about their history, economic success, and future. The interview was conducted at the restaurant in Clarksburg, WV.
- *Oliverio's Italian Style Peppers Warehouse and Factory* – (October 22, 2014) Students conducted a focus group discussion, which included a tour of the factory, with Diana Oliverio Mason, co-owner of Oliverio's Italian Style Peppers Warehouse and Factory, on the history of her family, the business, and the process for manufacturing the peppers. The focus group discussion was conducted at the Oliverio's Italian Style Peppers Warehouse and Factory in Clarksburg, WV.
- *Country Club Bakery* – (November 14, 2014) Chris Pallotta, owner of Country Club Bakery, provided a packet of information to the student participants on the history of Country Club Bakery and the pepperoni roll, which was first sold at Country Club Bakery in the early 20th century. Chris Pallotta provided 200 pepperoni rolls to present and distribute at the 2014 Appalachian Teaching Project Conference.

Festivals:

- *West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival*
 - (August 23, 2014) – Students attended the Italian Pasta Cook-Off, which was part of a pre-event of the West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival. Students observed a demonstration and sampling of various Italian pasta dishes.
 - (August 24, 2014) - Students attended and conducted a focus group discussion at the Larosa Cookbook Event. This was a pre-event of the West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival. Students met with local authors, cooks, and food enthusiasts who provided insight into the importance of food in the Italian-American culture. This event and focus group discussion was held at the Uptown Event Center in Clarksburg, WV.
 - (August 29, 2014) – Students attended the actual West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival.
 - (November 17, 2014) - Students met with Rose Mazza, who is on the Board of Directors for the West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival, to learn about the history of the festival, the process to run and fund the festival,

and the economic impact the West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival has on the community and surrounding area. Interview was conducted at the Frank and Jane Gabor WV Folklife Center in Fairmont, WV.

- *Feast of the Seven Fishes* – (November 7, 2014) Students conducted a focus group discussion with Kate Green of Main Street Fairmont, who organizes the Feast of the Seven Fishes, to acquire the background and history about the festival. The actual festival is held the second Saturday in December every year in Fairmont, WV. The focus group discussion was conducted at the Main Street Fairmont office in Fairmont, WV.

Individual Consultants:

- *Rosalyn Queen Alonso* – (August 24, 2014) Students interviewed Rosalyn Queen Alonso, who was in attendance at the Larosa Cookbook Event. Her book, *Arriverderci: Recipes and Customs Every Italian Girl Takes from Home*, was used throughout this research project. Rosalyn discussed some of the recipes in her book, her inspiration for writing the book, growing up in a predominately Italian community, and the importance of the Italian foodways. Interview was conducted at the Larosa Cookbook Event at the Uptown Even Center in Clarksburg, WV.
- *Mary Romino* – (November 7, 2014) Students conducted a focus group discussion with the Women’s Society in the kitchen of St. Peter the Fisherman Catholic Church in Fairmont, WV. Mary Romino, and the other home bakers of the Women’s Society, demonstrated the making of the Pita Piata, which was featured at the Feast of the Seven Fishes Festival in December 2014 in Fairmont, WV.
- Required presentations of student research to community groups other than the primary partner (include the name of the group(s), the date of the presentation(s), and the document publicity surrounding the presentation in the attachment section below):

December 5, 2014

Students presented their research project at the 2014 Appalachian Teaching Project Conference in Washington, D.C.

March 27, 2015

Students presented a poster session of their research project at the Appalachian Studies Conference held on the campus of East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee.

April 22, 2015

Students presented a poster session at the Celebration of Student Scholarship held on the campus of Fairmont State University in Fairmont, West Virginia.

(see further documentation in the attachments)

Course Number and Students:

FOLK 4400 – Directed Studies (Fall 2014)
Amanda Madello, Caitlin Norwish, Leah Yoho

FOLK 4401 – Folklore Applications (Fall 2014)
Christy Thompson (Chair)

FOLK 4998 – Undergraduate Research (Fall 2014)
Stephanie Shaffer

FOLK 3350 – Special Topics: Roads to Appalachia Study/Travel Abroad (Spring/Summer 2014)
Amanda Madello, Caitlin Norwish, Stephanie Shaffer, Christy Thompson

Note: Tiffany Martin – Graduate Assistant in the Gabor WV Folklife Center
Served as a consultant to the ATP Project since she was a former ATP undergraduate student participant

Project Outcomes:

Students:

- Identified, researched, and located local businesses, festivals, and individuals who have successfully promoted and preserved Italian cultural heritage through economic developed and tourism.
- Collected testimonies through oral history gatherings in the region. The following individuals assisted the students with their research on Italian foodways by providing information on their family history and the economic background, success, and future of their respective businesses:
 - Rocco Muriale, owner of Muriale’s Italian Restaurant and Catering
 - Sarah Straface, owner of Tutto’s Gelato Café
 - Joe Minard and Stan Wolfe, owners of Minard’s Spaghetti Inn
 - Petrina Oliverio Bonamico, co-owner of Oliverio’s Ristorante
 - Diana Oliverio Mason, co-owner of Oliverio’s Italian Style Peppers Warehouse and Factory
 - Chris Pallotta, owner of Country Club Bakery
- Collected further testimonies through oral history gathering in the region. The following individuals assisted the students with their research:
 - Rosalyn Queen Alonso, author of *Arriverderci: Recipes and Customs Every Italian Girl Takes from Home*, discussed the various Italian recipes that are used for different occasions, the importance of Italian food and customs, and growing up in a predominately Italian-American community.
 - Mary Romino demonstrated the way to prepare Pita Piata, an Italian Christmas Fruit Cake, and on the importance of food and customs for Italian-Americans.
 - Kate Green of Main Street Fairmont discussed the history of the Feast of the Seven Fishes celebration held in Fairmont, WV.

- Rose Mazza discussed the history, success, and economic impact of the West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival held in Clarksburg, WV.
- Conducted extensive research (scholarly and field research) on the history of Italian food immigrants from their origin in Southern Italy to their arrival in Appalachia's North Central West Virginia.
- Researched how these foods have been used as successful economic endeavor.
- Prepared, administered (online and in person), and analyzed a survey given to over 150 community members. The responses provided information on their views and opinions regarding Italian food heritage in our community. Survey responses generally agreed that Italian food heritage has a positive impact on our community, that it promotes heritage tourism, and has a positive effect on the culture.
- Prepared visual concepts that included a unified logo design, graphic visual components, and other tangible means of encouraging the application of historical and cultural components for economic development and cultural heritage tourism.
- Shared the research and design concepts from the project with the community partners. Community partners have a copy of the presentation and the logo, which is on display in their establishments for the public.
- Presented compiled project and poster at the Appalachian Teaching Project through the Appalachian Regional Commission's Conference in Washington, D.C. in December 2014.
- Presented poster display of project at the Appalachian Studies Association Conference at East Tennessee State University in March 2015.
- Presented compiled project and poster at the Celebration of Student Scholarship at Fairmont State University in April 2015.

Problems Encountered:

Because of the nature and scope of this project (especially the field research component), the size and time constraints became somewhat difficult to manage, which could have been avoided if this project encompassed two semester instead of one. Collaboration also became difficult between student participants throughout the research, field work, and compilation components of the project because of time constraints and other academic pressures outside the project.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

These community partners are now aware that by collaborating with each other they can be a stronger force for economic sustainability in promoting cultural heritage. For example, the Feast of the Seven Fishes, held in Fairmont, WV in December 2015, will now recognize our local community partners from this project by encouraging them to have food exhibits and presenting their food specialties. The Feast of the Seven Fishes will now be represented at the West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival, and vice versa. Our research project has also encouraged the Harrison County School Board to consider foodways as an inspiration to learn Italian within the county's public schools.

The Marion County Convention and Visitor's Bureau is using our research project to enhance cultural tourism in the area by promoting Italian foodways.

Main Street Fairmont, which is responsible for the Feast of the Seven Fishes, has been encouraged from our project to develop a food strip district, part of which will focus on the Italian food heritage.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Further collaboration could be continued between the Frank and Jane Gabor WV Folklife Center folklore students and community members to collect histories, photographs, and stories about the Italian foodways, as well as other cultural foodways.

By creating a model of how historic awareness and economic success can be used for incorporating traditional foodways in a more creative and educational application for regional festivals, businesses, and programs promoting cultural heritage tourism for community sustainability, we hope that other cultural groups, festivals, businesses, and programs can follow this model to promote their own foodways, as well as their heritage for economic development and sustainability.

Attachments (in PDF format):

Includes the following items:

- **Minutes of meetings with community partners**
 - Minutes of Meetings with Community Partners.pdf
- **Flyers, text for PSA announcements, etc.**
 - Appalachian Studies Conference 2015.pdf
 - Approved Survey.pdf
 - ARC 2014.pdf
 - ATPBrochure 12-19-14.pdf
 - Celebration of Student Scholarship.pdf
 - Gabor Folklife Center Facebook Announcement (2).pdf
 - Gabor Folklife Center Facebook Announcement.pdf
- **Photographs showing students in action**
 - Photos.pdf
- **PR such as newspaper articles, documentation of TV and radio spots, etc.**
 - FSUNow.pdf
 - Maroon&White.pdf
 - TimesWV II.pdf
 - TimesWV.pdf
- **Correspondence with community partners**
 - Feast of the Seven Fishes 6-4-14.pdf
 - Leah Nester – MCCVB – Country Club Bakery.pdf
 - Muriales 6-2-14.pdf
 - Muriales.pdf
 - Oliverios 6-2-14.pdf
 - Rosalyn Queen Alonso 8-15-14.pdf
 - Rose Mazza – WVIHF II.pdf

- Rose Mazza – WVIHF III.pdf
- Rose Mazza – WVIHF.pdf
- WVIHF 6-4-14.pdf
- WVIHF.pdf