

## Club Newsletters



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If your Italian Organization would like to help promote our culture, heritage & language through IACF educational programs, please contact Peter Apicella at 1-800-551-2101.

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## The Thomas Team: IACF's Two-Person Education Committee

It started in Collinwood, as so many good stories do, at the high school. Victoria Mandato had grown up in Collinwood, surrounded by Italian traditions and family. Daughter of Giuseppe and Giuseppina Luciano Mandato, both from Gildone, in the 1940's she was a teenager who loved her family, but had not thought much about their experiences and the heritage she was receiving. Jack Thomas had come to Collinwood from Pennsylvania with his Slovenian parents. New in the area, with no family nearby and both parents working, he had little exposure to any national traditions, and the closeness of Italian families like Vicki's came as a revelation. Other school friends included Mario Chiudioni and Bob Berardinelli, who were to play an unguessed role in their futures.

Jack and Vicki married four years after graduation in 1953, when she had a degree in education from Kent State and he had finished a stint in the Coast Guard. Then it was Jack's turn to get degrees in education and administration. They taught throughout the Cleveland public school system, with Jack becoming a principal and Superintendent of Schools in North Royalton, while Vicki was the language arts supervisor for the Euclid schools. Vicki also taught English as a Second Language in the evenings, remembering her own mother's lifelong struggle with the English tongue. Meanwhile, they raised four children, steeped in Italian traditions thanks to Vicki's mother, who spend Sundays and holidays with them. Through their children, Vicki rediscovered as an adult the richness of the heritage she had received, and Jack was confirmed in his adoption of it.

And so, when Bob Berardinelli approached them about fifteen years ago asking if they would like to help Mario with IACF's awards program, it was the perfect match. Jack was supervisor of the West Geauga schools at the time, and it was a timely move to invite that high school into the program. Since then, Jack and Vicki have served as IACF's coordinators for the



entire program -- getting the program set up at three more schools (Archbishop Hoban, Lake Catholic, and Benedictine), staying in touch with the teachers at all nine high schools and three colleges, working with other IACF board members to find clubs to sponsor the awards, collecting results from the panel of judges, making the awards at all twelve schools, and on top of all that organizing the banquet each November given to honor the teachers and judges, and to thank our fellow sponsors.

Jack and Vicki, themselves, have been honored for their own contributions to education through the Collinwood High School Hall of Fame. Jack received his award in 2002 and Vicki just last year, in 2008.

After fifteen or so years, it's not surprising that Jack and Vicki will be taking a break from this particular challenge. While they will be very much a part of the IACF board of trustees, they are stepping down as education committee chairs after this season. It has been a lot of work, but a wonderful experience for both of them. Jack says, "The IACF program has brought back all the experiences we had with our children, thanks to Vicki's family. The opportunity to bring this to other children has enriched our lives tremendously." And Vicki adds, "This was a chance to pay tribute to my parents. As a child I couldn't fully understand what my parents lived through, and the value of what they gave me. Now I have a chance to pass it on. I truly believe that education is the greatest way to benefit mankind."