



Fredericksburg-Este Association Annual Report 2023-24

Wow! We're almost 10 years old! Formally founded in March 2015, we are nearly at our first big odometer milestone.

Because we've worked hard, have many members who contribute time and talent, and share a vision to bring Italian culture to the region, we have accomplished so much!

We are grateful to the City, to the Library, and to all the organizations that help us with our program offerings, and most of all, to our members, who contribute their energies. So much talent and enthusiasm!

We began our 2023 offerings with the exciting Artist Exchange featuring Franco Rubini as our Artist Exchange honoree. This international photographer from Este shared his world vision with us via several exhibits in the area.

Artist Exchange 2023: Franco Rubini

Franco Rubini exhibited his international, black and white photography at the Visitor Center, at the Howell Branch Library in Stafford, and at the Salem Church Branch Library in Spotsylvania. In addition, area photographers led Franco on photo shoots around the region.

Franco's photographic style focuses on capturing the moment, the specific image that reflects the intimate, personal experience of a particular person at a particular time in a particular place. From small villages in Bolivia, to fishing communities on the West African Coast, to dusty Indian towns, Franco has captured the private scenes of children, of village women, of old men workers, whose very faces tell their story.

Franco was a welcoming host to all comers in these openings, as well as in the many gatherings we held in his honor so that everyone could see, talk, and warm to this incredibly talented fellow from our own sister city.

The tourist and photographic adventures were punctuated by parties at members' homes, by an Italian feast cooked by our visitors themselves, by a new-experience Nascar race in Richmond, by a memorable trip to see a FredNats Baseball game, by museum visits to Washington, and by fun and nonsense at potlucks, a reception at LibertyTown, a member gathering at the always-magnetic art house of Cathy Herndon, and side trips to artists' venues in the region. It was all climaxed with an all-member potluck cookout, complete with crabs, at Sue and Rick Henderson's. Excellent times! Thank you, everyone!!

April 20: All Sister City Potluck

Once more all the sister cities came together for our international feast at Dorothy Hart Community Center. Foods from France, Nepal, Ghana, Italy, and Germany gave a taste of the many cultural offerings. Adding color and spice to the gathering are the many folks who dressed in their country's costumes, to share in the international mood. We learn about what other sister cities are doing, and create personal associations with our like-minded sister city friends. So festive, so fun!

September-October: Este Adult Exchange

Thirteen Italian visitors arrived in early October, and we hosted them with many activities:

The Trolley Tour of our wonderful city

The Official Reception at the Downtown Library

Mayor Mary Katherine Greenlaw greeted our Este friends

Italian City Council Rep. Massimo Trevisan offered Este gifts

Mayor Greenlaw was honored with a slideshow about her Sister City

Activities during her mayoral tenure

Este Visitors and our members and hosts became acquainted

An Italian feast at Joan McLaughlin's lovely home, prepared by our visitors themselves.

The DC tour for Este visitors; later, a second D. C. visit for the sites not seen via the bus tour!

All-member event: Tapa Rio for tapas and drinks

Williamsburg day: Dining at an historic Williamsburg inn (complete with musical performances on the lute and the recorder), touring the colonial town, experiencing the costumes and historical interpreters of this Virginia treasure: a special day we worked to create for our Este friends.

All-member event: Cathy Herndon Cocktail Party!

Pizza Palooza! Planned for October 14, but cancelled because of rain in torrents! We made up for it by gathering for rock 'n roll at Colonial Tavern!

All-member event: Farewell Picnic at the Henderson home—crabs and beer and barbeque and hotdogs—an all-American send off!

We balance the programming for our adult visitors between host activities, Este guest activities, and all-member events. Este visitors get to know their hosts; the members share in the festivities; and our Italian visitors learn about our city and our country. It's a big job, but worth the effort.

October 16: National Gallery of Art trip for Canova Sculpture Exhibition

We chartered a van and spent the day learning about Canova with a National Gallery senior lecturer, who guided our group through the Canova exhibit. One more program for Este members...these gallery trips are always well received.

November 10: Carter Memorial Italian Composers Concert

Once more, St. George's served as the venue for our annual Italian-American music program, offered free to everyone as a civic contribution of our Association to the greater Fredericksburg region. This year, a two-part program was performed: one, by our own Toni Crowder performing original compositions and excerpts from Italian operatic works; two, by the Fredericksburg Concert Band Brass Quintet. Toni's performance was one of sophistication; the Brass Quintet was a bold presentation of recognizable Italian compositions. The diversity made for a lively program!

February 2, 2024: Italian culture lecture at St. George's Church

Dr. Allyson Poska, History and American Studies professor emerita at UMW, presented a fascinating talk about Women and Power in Renaissance Italy—profiling how powerful women during the period wielded command, despite their standing. Small bites, free admission, and lots of interested, engaged folks attend these lectures, one in a long-established line of offerings.

Affiliation with Sister City International

This year, all the sister cities agreed to once more join Sister City International. The City sponsored all sister cities under one membership, for a year, to assess the value of membership to our groups. Fred Blanton, the SCI representative for Virginia, spoke to a joint convening of all sister city folks, presenting a range of topics and possibilities. Mr. Blanton has long served in the wider sister city community, and is eager to work with our groups. He has raised awareness of conferences and resources to help our activities.

Sister City Joint Committee

Once or twice a year, representatives of all sister cities get together, at the request of Mayor Mary Katherine Greenlaw, to share plans, to look for ways to work together, and to connect with what's going on in the City. This group has been meeting now for several years. One such meeting resulted in the concept for us to join together in creating a fundraiser to aid Ukraine. In fall of 2022, our group raised \$24,000, which, with matching funds, resulted in a \$75,000 impact.

This committee also convened to hear about the City's plans for a new Visitor Center, and the possibility of how that might serve to promote our sister city groups.

This committee also plans for the All-Sister City Annual Potluck, which has now become a tradition.

New venue at Fredericksburg Visitor Center

The City's M.C. Morris and Brenda Martin met with our sister city committee members to learn about the remodeling of the City's Executive Plaza, and how sister city groups might benefit from the new space. Discussions about perhaps displaying some of the many international gifts might be displayed, and how possibly space might be used for meetings and receptions.

Revision of bylaws

As organizations evolve and needs change, the bylaws require adjustments. We looked at our bylaws, and have deleted some positions that are no longer relevant (historian, education). Many of our board members would like to continue beyond the two-term limit in their preferred positions, and as it has become difficult to find others to serve on the board, we decided to amend the bylaws to allow members to continue to serve in their preferred capacity. Other minor changes brought the bylaws in agreement with these updates.

Support of Lafayette Bicentennial Celebration

As a civic responsibility, we have contributed \$250 to the Fredericksburg Lafayette Bicentennial Commemoration. We join with many other historic and cultural organizations in supporting this major series of events, beginning in March 2024, and culminating in the Commemoration Weekend November 23-24.

Adult Exchange to Este April 2024

Eleven of our members are headed to Este for the Flower Festival in late April, many of whom are first-time visitors. We have been busily preparing for this visit since January, with Cathy Herndon and Bill Hatch serving as co-chairs of the Adult Exchange group.

New Board Composition

In addition to updating our bylaws, we will welcome many new board members to our leadership. Our pledge is to create cultural activities to enrich both our membership and our region by offering programs and events relating to Italian culture, and to act with fiscal integrity in our fundraising and in our expenditures.

Thank you to our Members

Once more, we are grateful to our members and friends for supporting our organization through participation, contributions, in-kind services, and volunteering for our many events and activities.

We look forward to another decade of cultural fun with an Italian accent!