

## Cooks' Exchange: An Italian dinner fit for an ambassador

CATHERINE MURRAY | For the State Journal



Gov. Scott Walker, Madison Mayor Paul Soglin, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi, community and business leaders and the proud representatives of our century-old Italian Workmen's Club welcomed Claudio Bisgniero, Italy's ambassador to the United States, for a tour of parts of Wisconsin last month.

Initially arranged by the Italian Consul General in Chicago, the Madison stop was highlighted by the ambassador speaking to UW-Madison students on campus before heading over to Porta Bella for an impressive reception and lunch served in their new and beautifully decorated Mantova Room, named for Madison's Italian sister city, Mantova.

A few hours later, after introductions, presentations and speeches were made stressing the importance of teaching the Italian language in U.S. schools as well as expanding our sister city program, the ambassador's five-hour visit ended as he departed for Milwaukee where preparations for his arrival there were being finalized at the Italian Community Center by ICC President Giuseppe Vella and others.

Giving thought to the opportunity offered each week to write about recipes and other bits of interest of what might be happening in town involving food immediately triggered a rather innocent conversation between a few readers and friends of what we might prepare and serve if an Italian dignitary happened to be a guest in one of our own homes. Living in a dairy state brought to mind award-winning cheeses that seemed pertinent to include, yet with likes and dislikes and possible dietary restrictions, we decided to keep it mostly vegetarian and settled, with great comfort, on some of our favorite recipes we'd be proud to prepare and serve to our guest.

**To begin our own personalized feast is a recipe belonging to Sandra Hunter, owner of DOLCI Italian-American Sweets and third generation member of the old Greenbush neighborhood's Bonanno family of superb cooks. She was also honored Dec. 1 to cater the early morning breakfast that began at the State Capitol with the ambassador in mind and generously included her favorite light and crispy vegan biscotti for him and others to enjoy with coffee.**

### Sweet wine biscotti

**1 cup red sweet wine**

**1 cup granulated sugar**

**1 cup canola oil**

**4 cups flour**

**2 tablespoons baking powder**

**Additional granulated sugar for rolling dough balls**

**Whisk together wine, sugar and oil until well blended. Sift flour and baking powder into a large bowl.**

**Create a center well in the flour mixture and pour in the wine mixture. Slowly start to blend the dry and wet ingredients until all are combined and the mixture begins to come together as a dough. The dough will be a bit sticky and oily but, easily able to roll and form balls. If unable to roll dough, add enough (2 tablespoons at a time) flour until dough easily forms a ball. Be aware that adding too much flour will yield a tough biscotti.**

**Roll and toss heaping tablespoon-size balls into medium bowl with sugar, then roll sugared balls into a log and place on parchment paper covered cookie sheets. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes or until firm to touch and golden brown. Remove from oven and let cool. Store biscotti in a sealed container. They will keep very well in a cool, dry place or you can freeze them and thaw for later use. For more information, DOLCI'S website: [www.dolciitaliansweets.com](http://www.dolciitaliansweets.com)**

Covering another base is what we Sicilians refer to as caponatina, aka caponata, an eggplant relish or side dish often served at room temperature that my Sicilian-born father enjoyed while growing up. When my grandmother passed away, he had to satisfy his cravings with a commercial “eggplant appetizer” available in small cans until I came across a recipe shared by Rose Troia McCormick whose husband, Roy, established Porta Bella back in 1968. This became my father’s favorite as well as mine and is featured in my first Greenbush cookbook, “A Taste of Memories from the Old ‘Bush.’”

### **Caponatina**

½ — ¾ cup olive oil  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
2 cups diced celery  
1 large eggplant, pared, sliced and cut into small cubes, about 3 cups  
1 large onion, chopped  
1 medium green pepper, chopped  
¼ cup parsley  
1 tablespoon sugar  
½ teaspoon oregano  
¼ teaspoon basil  
1 teaspoon salt  
Pepper to taste  
1 cup tomato paste  
2 large tomatoes, peeled, diced  
1 cup water  
1/3 cup red wine vinegar  
1 cup small pitted green and black olives  
Mushrooms, optional

Heat oil and saute garlic and celery. Remove and set aside. Saute eggplant, onion, green pepper, parsley, sugar, oregano, basil, salt, and pepper and cook on low heat for 10 minutes. Add tomato paste, tomatoes and remaining ingredients and cook until soft. Chill until needed.

Note: When sauteeing, never allow garlic to turn brown as it becomes bitter. Before that happens, remove from the oil and set aside, then, if desired, return it to cook along with the rest of the ingredients.

Another favorite recipe belongs to Barbara Rizzo, whose husband, David, is the IWC’s newly elected president. He describes his wife as being an outstanding cook and claims that her minestrone is healthy, delicious, and everyone’s favorite, especially when the temperatures drop.

### **Minestrone soup**

1/3 cup olive oil  
3 tablespoons butter  
2 medium onions, coarsely chopped  
3 carrots, pared and coarsely chopped  
2 potatoes, cut into ¾-inch cubes  
2 stalks celery, chopped  
½ pound green beans, cut into 1-inch pieces  
Small zucchini, cut into ¾-inch cubes  
½ pound cabbage, coarsely shredded  
28-ounce can plum tomatoes  
1 ½ cups water  
3 ½ cups beef broth  
1 ½ teaspoon basil  
½ teaspoon pepper

1 teaspoon garlic powder

¼ teaspoon rosemary

1 bay leaf

Grated Parmesan cheese, optional

Heat oil and butter in stock pot at medium heat. Add onions and saute until soft. Add carrots and potatoes and saute 5 minutes. Add celery and green beans and saute 5 minutes. Stir in zucchini and saute 3 minutes. Add cabbage and cook for 1 minute. Puree tomatoes in a food processor and add to stock pot along with water and beef broth. Stir in basil, pepper, garlic powder, rosemary and bay leaf. Heat to boiling, then simmer, covered, on low for 2 hours. Remove bay leaf. If desired, serve with grated Parmesan cheese.

Yield: about 12 cups.

Penny DePaola, wife of outgoing two-term IWC President Ross DePaola, concentrated on sweets. If there's room left for dessert, consider this delicious cheesecake to be enjoyed by vegans and non-vegans alike.

### **Vegan cheesecake**

1 lemon

2 8-ounce containers of Tofutti cream cheese (dairy free)

½ cup sugar

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Pinch of salt

1 Keebler Graham Ready Crust

Topping choices include fresh fruit, fruit sauce, chocolate sauce, etc.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. From the lemon, prepare 1 tablespoon of fresh juice and 1 teaspoon lemon zest.

Add them to a mixing bowl along with the cream cheese, sugar, vanilla and salt. Blend well. Pour into graham crust, bake for 30 minutes, then chill in the refrigerator for an hour. Decorate with topping of choice and serve.

**Recent requests:** Recipe for “chicken anglais” that Crandall’s used to serve at their Middleton drive-thru

**Note:** There have been a few questions asked by readers about the terms “salad oil” and “salad dressing” that appeared as ingredients in the Jan. 7 column. Casually referring to them as such carries us back in time when salad oil meant oils like today’s Wesson, Crisco and other similar liquid oil, and salad dressing meant, and still does, Miracle Whip.

Contact the Cooks’ Exchange in care of the Wisconsin State Journal, P.O. Box 8058, Madison, WI, 53708 or by email at [greenbush4@aol.com](mailto:greenbush4@aol.com).

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