



Courtesy of Linda Schiano

Learning Lotsa Pasta

Linda Schiano’s annual Lotsa Pasta Festa Competition features Italian-themed architecture from raw pasta. The New Jersey-based teacher and *appassionata* of Italian language and culture has seen the Colosseum, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the map of Italy, the Mona Lisa, Vesuvius, and the Ponte Rialto sculpted from raw pasta. Schiano started the Italian program 17 years ago at Manalapan-Englishtown Regional Schools after selling her family restaurant.

Her students, many of Italian descent, have placed first each year for the last five years in the Italian Teachers of New Jersey (ITANJ) Annual Heritage Day Competition. Schiano herself received a scholarship to study at the Università di Siena in 2011. Local News 12 New Jersey reported on the trays of heated cheese ravioli she made five times daily for presentations.



Courtesy of Linda Schiano

Beyond sharing her *nonni*’s pasta machine and the culture of her Neapolitan-born parents, Schiano teaches her students about influential Italian and American historians. These include Thomas Jefferson, a self-taught Italian speaker who made sure the University of Virginia offered language courses, and surgeon Filippo Mazzei, inspiration for the words “All Men Are Created Equal” on the American Declaration of Independence.

“Seeing my students happy and enjoying the class is very important to me,” Schiano says. “If they fall in love with it,” she says, “they are going to pass it on.”

— Kirsten Keppel



Courtesy of Peter Gibaldi

Premium Pride

Peter “Premium Pete” Gibaldi’s life mirrors the film *A Bronx Tale*, where his successful career almost took a dark turn. Gibaldi comes from a strictly working-class family. His grandparents immigrated to America from Castellmare di Golfo and settled in Brooklyn.

“My father worked so long, I hardly ever saw him,” he says. “He did everything he could to put food on the table for us.”

Gibaldi spent most of his adolescent years in Bensonhurst. During his youth, organized crime was thriving, and its influence shadowed him from a young age. “When I was young, I quickly became addicted to the lifestyle of being Italian American, that is, the neighborhood version,” he says.

Today, Gibaldi’s projects range from distributing his family’s 100-year-old pasta sauce recipe, to managing his own successful podcast (*The Premium Pete Show*), and his role as “Pete” alongside Armand Assante in the 2022 film, *Don Q*.

However, things weren’t always this easy for him. “If it wasn’t for my family’s love and support during the darkest times of my life, I don’t know where I’d be,” says Gibaldi. “Italian culture’s emphasis on the importance of family is what saved me.”

Since making the effort to change his own life, Gibaldi dedicates time advocating for others like him. When asked for advice, Pete responds with his personal mantra, “Never stop believing in you.” ➤

— Anthony Sciaratta



Courtesy of Peter Gibaldi

Persons of Interest