

Jim Kennelly ([00:06](#)):

Welcome to HUD radio. I'm Jim Kennelly. Today I'm joined by Matt Caranante program development specialist for the Hudson county office of cultural heritage affairs, tourism development. The office supports a range of projects, including celebration of our local history. Matt will be conducting a series of interviews on HUD, go radio, doing just that. Welcome to HUD co radio. Tell us a little bit about your work and what this series will entail.

Matt Caranante ([00:33](#)):

Thanks, Jim. Much of my focus within our office is to help the community celebrate and preserve its history and heritage. Hudson county is one of the most culturally diverse places on earth with nearly half of our residents being born outside of the United States. A big part of what has made Hudson county home to all of this culture is its history is a first stop for millions of immigrants throughout modern history. Hudson county is known as the gateway to America for good reason, beginning in the 1600's through the Ellis Island years and up until present day immigrants from every corner of the globe have made Hudson county, their first stop with millions planting their roots right here becoming an integral part to the growth and prosperity of Hudson county. The United States and beyond this series of interviews is part of a program called Hudson county and immigration.

Matt Caranante ([01:19](#)):

The story of America, I've invited a few of our community leaders to share their experiences as organizational leaders, Hudson county residents, and immigrants themselves. Each of these guests represents a different background and has a different story to share. Our hope is that you can learn something from these amazing people, regardless of your own background. I'd like to welcome Carla Truncellito Mastropierro, who is the executive director at the Italian educational and cultural center at Casa Colombo, which is located at 380 Monmouth street in Jersey city, New Jersey. Hi, Carla, thanks for being here today.

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([01:53](#)):

Thank you for being here for inviting me.

Matt Caranante ([01:57](#)):

So, please tell us more about yourself and I know your organization has a long history. So if you could tell us more about that too. Thank you.

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([02:04](#)):

Well, I started working with, the Italian education culture center in 1972 at the time, the name was Italian social service center, and I was a recruit by the pastor of holy Rosa to help him assist them the Italian immigrants, in the seventies I have to add that was the last big wave of immigration from Italy. Therefore there were lots of immigrants from Italy and that was helping assisting the, the Reverend Nicholas, the ENT SMA with the helping the target immigrants with their contingent needs, like find a work, find a home, helping with the children's school and processing them immigration papers with, because they needed the rest of the family to be reunited with them to the United States. And then for a while, then I left for, for a while and the Italian social service center continue until 19 89, 19 89.

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([03:18](#)):

They purchased it, the Italian Casa Colo, and they, the organization was incorporated Italian education and culture center. so they added the common, the competent education because we want to have Italian classes. And for, over a decade, we had, I was the coordinator with Italian classes sponsored by the Italian state department in conjunction with Italian, cancel it. They were Italian class for children and adults as well. after all Casa Colomba was built in 1936 with the purpose that of creating a school where the immigrants could send to the children to learn Italian, but going back to the history in 1989, then in 2000, what happened in 2000? Oh, yes. I'm sorry. I have to add that. in addition to the education component, we also had, we were working with immigration to workshop to help Italian immigrants to the renew DEC green card.

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro (04:34):

And we are working with Italian council, it for the various Italian laws. And we are also working with the city of justice city for the financial assistance to those in need. But in 2000, the building was evacuated by the, the tenants. Um, they were the Catholic community service and we really didn't know what to do of Casa ALO. We were in, financial, dire situation. So I came up with the idea of founding a museum for the Italian immigration. So therefore in 2002, we found we opened the Italian immigration museum and the celebration was with the 100th birthday of a lady, an Italian immigrant. So it was a beautiful celebration. And then after that in, in the 2009, we had a major renovation of the interior part of Casa Colombo. And we added the component of art because just city downtown Jersey City was becoming the art place where everybody, most of the artists were coming. So therefore we create a beautiful gallery, where to this day we have art shows on a monthly basis.

Matt Caranante (06:02):

Let's go back, to the beginning of your story. If you could tell us a little bit about where you grew up.

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro (06:09):

Well, I grew up in a small town in the region, uh, BA Carta. Basilica is south of Italy, uh, is, uh, between the hill of the booth, which is Poya, uh, on the east, south CAA and, uh, west Campania. Um, I was there until the age of 10 didn't. I was put, um, my parents, they want me to continue education. So they put me in a boardroom school where I wasn't, until the age of 18. I continued my education and I completed the degree in elementary school teacher. Um, so that was my, my life in a small, small town in Basilicata.

Matt Caranante (06:57):

Wow. And then when, um, did you first, uh, immigrate to the United States, if you could share a little bit about that experience?

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro (07:03):

Yes. I immigrated to the United States in 1970 by myself, uh, because my father was, was already here in United States and in the seventies, I was in the midst of the social revolution mm-hmm <affirmative> and I was part of that. So I'd been in a bur school in returning to small town for me was, uh, no, no, no, I couldn't take it that life anymore. Therefore I took the opportunity to come to the United States, you know, and, uh, join my father here for me was, uh, was the beginning of a new venture of a new journey. So that's the reason why I came to the United States in the seventies when I landed that Jeff came, I was stunned by the enormity. Everything was so big. The holes were so big. The cars were so big, the roads were so big. So I was overwhelmed by a sense of fear and excitement at the same time. But I

think the excitement prevailed over the fear because I said, okay, I'm gonna start my journey, this new, beautiful country.

Matt Caranante ([08:18](#)):

Yeah. And then was your father in here in Hudson county?

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([08:21](#)):

Yes, my father was in Hudson county because, um, he, uh, his brother was in Hudson county and his nephews said his brother did the paperwork for him to come. And, uh, so I joined him in Hudson county. My first destination was Bergen, and then I moved in Hudson county from Burg and union city back Norberg and Western New York Guttenberg. So I stayed in the Hudson county for over 10 years.

Matt Caranante ([08:50](#)):

Wow. And you said this was 1970, so you've been here in Hudson county. What's the math on that now? That's 52 years.

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([09:00](#)):

Yes. Yeah. Yes. And at the time Hudson county, there were all Italians. Yeah. There were all Italian stores, all Italians. Um, the people, I mean, you were working the Bergenline avenue was the place to be, you know, where you could speak freely, you could speak Italian. And I just want to, uh, point out that when I came to this country, I didn't know a word of English. And in the beginning when people, uh, were speaking to me in English, uh, uh, subconsciously have replied to them in French because that was my foreign country, my foreign language. I started in Italy. So it was, was nice. Nice. You know, it was nice in the sense that for me, that was all Italian. So I felt, you know, a little bit, I felt at home. Yeah.

Matt Caranante ([09:47](#)):

So how did you go about learning English? You were already an adult by when you came here. So well,

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([09:52](#)):

I started realized media. I was lucky in a way because my father then, uh, didn't put me, I didn't need to go to work immediately. So I start going to school in the evening school to learn the language, and then I continue my education with the bachelor and later with the master. So that's the reason why I still have an accent, which I would never lose as well. <laugh> but, uh, at least I, I learn English. I'm able to speak with everyone.

Matt Caranante ([10:22](#)):

Yeah. So we were speaking a little earlier. You have some very interesting stories from your time with ACLI, if you could please share.

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([10:31](#)):

Yes. Yes. I, you know, I went back to work with, uh, the Italian ion cause the 90, and that was, uh, the person in charge of the ACLI, which is an Italian office helping Italian semi-government office, um, helping Italian immigrants with their pension benefits from Italy, because most of the immigrants at the time, they with adults. So they all had working activities in Italy, therefore with the social security, they could benefit of some pension benefits from Italy based on the working activities done in Italy. Uh, and

yes, that was, um, that was a lot of fun. And also, uh, so many stories of, uh, sadness and, and fun at the same time. I mean, the people, these elderly people would come in and, uh, and while I was working on their, um, paperwork on their documents, they would start talking endlessly about their families, about, uh, their children about when they came here, because they found someone whom they could confide.

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([11:46](#)):

And I would tell, I will ask about the children and they will talk AB extensively about the children are proud. They were because the children, they now, they were very important people. Uh, they were big shot, they were saying, but at the same time I could sense Ave of, uh, sadness because they would say, yes, they are very important, but they don't have time for me anymore. They don't have time for us because they're too busy. So that I think, um, gave me the inspiration to create a gallery, to create an Italian heritage where all the memories, where all the objects, because as soon as I told them that I was doing the Italian heritage gallery, they all came up with the, whatever they had, that they brought from Italy. So gave them inspiration to create this Italian heritage gallery, where the memories that object could always be preserve it, celebrate it. And the history of the Italian immigration could be preserved, celebrated and, uh, passed on other generations.

Matt Caranante ([13:02](#)):

What, uh, advice do you have any, for any future immigrants that would be, uh, heading towards the United States now?

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([13:09](#)):

Well, uh, the future immigration of the current immigration of English, it's very much different. Mm-hmm, <affirmative>, we all know that, you know, most of the immigrants they come to to Italy because, uh, just want to know in the eighties and the nineties in Italy, there was an economic boom. So a lot of people didn't need to immigrate anymore. And so those who immigrated when mostly highly educated, and in the field of research and, and other, but I would tell every regardless of their, uh, status, I would tell everyone, please, uh, come to United States with an open mind. Very, I mean, United States is a beautiful country. It's the most diversified ethnic countries in the world. So you have to come with open mind, respect all the other groups, all the other ethnic groups, do whatever you need to do, work very hard. If you work very hard, you will accomplish what, uh, you want to accomplish

Matt Caranante ([14:15](#)):

A wonderful message. Um, you shared earlier a very interesting story, um, which I thought was, it was humorous. So you saw, you came to America, I believe it's Bergen line avenue. And you saw a store with, with name on it.

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([14:28](#)):

Yes. Yes. I saw

Matt Caranante ([14:29](#)):

I'd love you to share that

Carla Truncellito Mastropierro ([14:30](#)):

With us. Yes. When I saw the store of, uh, uh, mens wear and, uh, the name of us, uh Chelito I said, oh my gosh, thoughts stories, you know, just, and they were, uh, was a mens wear of my cousins. Uh, and they immediately said to me, Carla, that's you have to learn the American way. It's translators <laugh>. So, and I said, oh boy, that's too bad.

Matt Caranante ([15:00](#)):

<laugh> finally, uh, can you share, uh, how people can reach you and how they can support your organization?

Carla Truncellito Mastropiero ([15:06](#)):

Yeah. We do have a very nice website as a [www.casacolombo.org](http://www.casacolombo.org), and, the website lists all the various activities. We have a monthly activities, cultural and art. We have every month, we have a different art exhibit in the beautiful gallery that we founded in 2010. And we have also culture events every month. It's like music event, a books presentation of a workshop, a food workshop. So become a member Yemen. You can find the application to become a member on our website, come to our event at events and come to visit our Italian heritage room and at Italian New Jersey Italian village, which are right on the third floor of Casa Colombo.

Matt Caranante ([16:03](#)):

Great. Well, thank you so much for being with us, Carla. Uh, it was wonderful speaking with you.

Carla Truncellito Mastropiero ([16:07](#)):

Thank you.

Jim Kennelly ([16:08](#)):

Thanks Matt. The Hudson county and immigration, the story of America interview series is supported by a grant from the New Jersey historical commission to learn more about the Hudson county office of cultural and heritage affairs, tourism development, check out their website, visit [HUDSON.org](http://HUDSON.org). Remember you can keep up to date with county government news and announcements by following us on Twitter. Our handle is HUDco tweet. Videos of county events can be found on YouTube where our channel is HUDco TV, and we're on Instagram at HUD co Insta and on Facebook at HUD co FB. Finally, thanks as always to Hudson county, executive Tom DeGise and the board of county commissioners who support the programs and services featured on this podcast.