



# KIT

*Keeping in Touch*

MAY  
2024

The Newsletter of the Marin County Association of Retired Employees  
Member California Retired County Employees Association (CRCEA)

[www.mcareinfo.org](http://www.mcareinfo.org)

“VALUE, VOICE and VISIBILITY”

MCARE is the Voice of Current and Future MCERA Retirees

## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

by GENE PENNINGTON



We are actively recruiting a volunteer to step up and serve out the remaining few months of the vacant Sgt. At Arms Board position (an Officer). Other Board Members and volunteers have stepped forward and will manage our monthly luncheons and other events until such time as another volunteer steps forward and is willing to serve as our Sgt. At Arms for the balance of 2024.

If you are interested in serving out the remaining 8 months of the term of office, please contact me by e-mail at [President@MCAREInfo.org](mailto:President@MCAREInfo.org) or phone at (415) 254-3839.

Let’s Go Giants! Dan Hanlon is our representative for this event. He has the tickets which will be distributed when the Giants fans board their bus for the trip to the ballpark! The fans will see the SF Giants play Philadelphia on May 29, 2024. I’ll send more details to the ticket holders soon.

Summary of April 1, 2024, Board meeting:

- We approved the Treasurer’s Report for February 2024.
- The minutes of the Board meeting of January 3, 2024, and March 6, 2024, were not available. They will be submitted at the next Board meeting on May 2, 2024.
- We approved the updated flyer for distribution to new MCERA Retirees and through Pacific Group Agencies (PGA).
- We approved an updated MCARE membership application for our use and for use by PGA.
- Gene Pennington reported on the success of his participation in a Zoom meeting with new MCERA Retirees. More such meetings are planned for the rest of the year.
- Referred to the Newsletter Committee a proposal to create a new policy for publishing material in the KIT and on the website. Several suggestions were made to help the committee develop the new policy.
- Discussed the vacant Sgt. At Arms position and the duties associated with the position. It was noted that many of the tasks performed by the past Sgt. At Arms were not required by our bylaws. The only requirement for the luncheons is to supervise the collection of luncheons and/or event costs and turn monies over to the Treasurer. Some options were discussed. They will be discussed again at the next Board meeting on May 2, 2024. *(cont'd on page 2)*

## WHAT’S INSIDE...

- 02 PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE (CONT’D)
- SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
- TREASURER’S REPORT
- MCERA CONTACT INFO
- 03 NEW MCARE MEMBERS
- NEW RETIREES
- IN MEMORIAM
- WHAT IS THE MEANING OF MEMORIAL DAY?
- 04 2024 WESTERN BBQ
- 05 2024 MCARE OFFICERS ELECTION
- 06 AARP: HEART ATTACK VS. CARDIAC ARREST
- 07 BOARD OF DIRECTORS
- COMMITTEE CHAIRS
- CALENDAR OF EVENTS
- 08 REMINDERS/TO DO LIST
- 09 DIGITAL VERSION ONLY: MEMBER TRAVEL TALES
- SPLendor OF WESTERN SICILY*
- BY JERRY HASSER



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *(cont'd from page 1)*

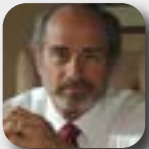
- Approved issuing debit cards to Rich Arrow, Treasurer, and Gene Pennington, President. This will reduce the number of written checks and streamline payment of luncheons, other events, and business needs.
- Set meeting dates and times for our Board of Directors meetings for 2024. All of our Board's past and current agendas, minutes, Treasurer's reports and budgets, Articles of Incorporation, current bylaws, and Policies and Procedures are available to you. Go to [MCAREInfo.org](http://MCAREInfo.org) and login. Then go to: [mcareinfo.org/Board-Content](http://mcareinfo.org/Board-Content).  
Note: You have to login first before you can go the Board Content web page.

Highlights of what is coming up.

- Tuesday, May 14, 2024 – Annual BBQ/Picnic at Stafford Lake, Area 2, Novato
- Wednesday, May 29, 2024 – SF Giants Game
- Tuesday, July 9, 2024 – Scholarship Awards Presentation/Luncheon at The Club Restaurant, San Rafael
- August 1, 2024 – Nominations open for five (5) Officers
- Tuesday, August 13, 2024 – Luncheon at Café Bellini, Petaluma
- Tuesday, September 10, 2024 – Luncheon at The Club Restaurant, San Rafael
- October 1, 2024 – MCARE election starts for five (5) Officers
- Tuesday, October 8, 2024 – Luncheon at China Village, Cotati
- Tuesday, November 12, 2024 – Election for five (5) Officers ends
- Tuesday, November 12, 2024 – Annual Membership Meeting and luncheon at The Club Restaurant, San Rafael
- Tuesday, December 10, 2024 – Annual Holiday Party at The Club Restaurant, San Rafael

## MCARE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

by KEN HOLMES



The deadline for submission of applications to the Marin County Office of Education (MCOE) was April 25, 2024. To date, the Marin County Office of Education has received nine applications.

Interviews will be conducted the week of May 13, 2024. MCOE will reach out to each applicant and coordinate an exact day/time. Interviews will be conducted by the Marin County Office of Education's Selection Committee. They are flexible regarding the requirement to be present for the interview.

This year we have four \$3,000 scholarships available. Three scholarships are named in honor of deceased members who contributed greatly to your MCARE and one scholarship is named for a member who is funding a new 4th scholarship:

MCARE Scholarship honoring Tom Hendricks  
MCARE Scholarship honoring Bob Roumiguere  
MCARE Scholarship honoring Joe Coffrini  
NEW for 2024! MCARE Scholarship honoring Michael Daly

2024 Scholarships will be awarded at our July 9 luncheon where you'll have the opportunity to meet the recipients. MCARE and the Scholarship Committee extend a genuine wish for success to all of the applicants.



## TREASURER'S REPORT

by RICH ARROW

MARCH 2024

CHECKING/PETTY CASH	\$33,714
CD/MONEY MARKET FUND	<u>51,158</u>
TOTAL BALANCE	<u>\$84,872</u>

## MCERA CONTACT INFO

Do you know who to call when you need help with your retirement benefits and pension questions? These questions should be directed to MCERA (Marin County Employees' Retirement Association) not MCARE.

**MCERA:** (415) 473-6147  
[mcerera.org/about](http://mcerera.org/about)

**Mcera**



## New MCARE Members

Jennifer Hewitt	SS - SR Fire
Philip Smith	MSMVC
William Tuikka	City of SR

## Congratulations

### NEW RETIREES

Gail Drury	Assessor-Recorder-County Clerk
Patrick Fahy	District Attorney
Nancy Henderson	BoS
Buffy Paxson	City of SR
Nancy Vernon	BoS
Michael Wells	MSMVC
Judith Williams	H&HS

## What is the meaning behind Memorial Day?

In 1868, Memorial Day was officially designated as a day to honor those fallen in service to their country during the Civil War.

According to the Library of Congress, three years after the end of the war, John A. Logan, Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, set aside May 30 for "Soldiers' Memorial Day."

Intended to remember Union and Confederate soldiers who died in the conflict, Logan decreed that the day should be for "strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land."

Over time, the Memorial Day holiday was expanded to include fallen soldiers from all American wars. In 1971, Congress declared it a national holiday, changing the observance from May 30 to the last Monday in May.

The annual holiday is also referred to as "Decoration Day" in recognition of the flowers, flags and other adornments that decorate the graves of fallen military persons.

## How is Memorial Day commemorated?

Each year, many communities across the U.S. hold parades or ceremonies to recognize veterans, active service members and other military personnel.

It's also a day for friends and family to visit the gravesites of loved ones to leave flowers or other mementos in their memory.

To pay tribute to fallen servicemen and women, a wreath is placed on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in an annual ceremony held at Arlington Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia on Memorial Day.

**In 2000, Congress signed the "The National Moment of Remembrance Act" into law. From that point forward, citizens were encouraged to pause for a moment of silence to remember those who've died in service to our country at 3 p.m. local time each and every Memorial Day.**

**If you plan to fly a flag on Memorial Day, it should be flown at half-staff from sunrise to noon, then it should be briskly raised to the top of the staff until sunset.**



## IN MEMORIAM

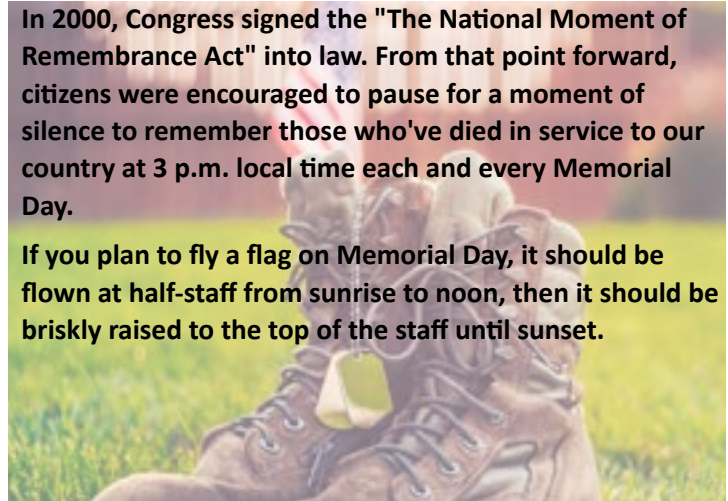
*Our Deepest Sympathy is Extended to the Friends and Families of:*

Carolyn Bryant	Probation
Ben Chin	Sheriff Coroner
Donalyn Julihn	DRO
Jerry Glenn	DPW
Ernest Lautsch	Beneficiary
Jackie Montoya	Community Development Agency
Sharron Stoelzl	City of SRan Rafael
Audry Winn	Beneficiary

A surviving spouse is eligible for MCARE membership.  
For enrollment, email: [esimonson1@verizon.net](mailto:esimonson1@verizon.net)



# MONDAY MAY 27 2024







# MCARE 2024 WESTERN BBQ PICNIC

Stafford Lake Park, Area 2  
3549 Novato Blvd, Novato

**\$30 per person**

Social hour 11:30 am • Lunch 12:30 pm

### CATERED BY

Debbie Ghiringhelli Catering

### MENU

BBQ Pork Spareribs • BBQ Chicken  
Caesar Salad • Fresh Seasonal Fruit Salad  
Stuffed Eggs • Baked Beans  
Country-Style Potato Salad  
Penne Pasta in Marinara Sauce  
Rolls & Butter  
Decaf Coffee, Iced Tea, Sparkling Water, Sodas

### RAFFLE

Support our Scholarship Program. Please bring raffle items!

### RESERVATIONS REQUIRED. DEADLINE MAY 10, 2024!

We must have an accurate head count prior to the event.

- Register online at [mcareinfo.org/event-5508047](http://mcareinfo.org/event-5508047)
  - ▶ Click on the “pay online” button to pay with a credit card or debit card.
  - ▶ Or choose “pay later” to have an invoice issued to you.
- Or print this page, fill out the form below, and mail it with your check to:

MCARE  
P. O. Box 4203  
San Rafael CA 94913

### FEATURING THE LARKDALES!

Special entertainment will be provided by [THE LARKDALES](http://www.thelarkdales.com). We explore and perform three-part harmony a cappella and accompanied vocal music that broadly could be called “Americana,” including an eclectic mix of bluegrass, country, indie, sea shanties, old-time gospel and more. We choose music that has heart and soul and joy and humor that has our audiences asking for more.



### DIRECTIONS to STAFFORD LAKE PARK

From Hwy 101 in Novato, take exit 463 for San Marin Dr. west 2.9 miles. Turn right onto Novato Blvd. and follow for 2.6 miles. The park is on the left.

## MCARE 2024 WESTERN BBQ

### RESERVATION FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my **check payable to MCARE** in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ tickets to the MCARE SUMMER BBQ May 14, 2024, at \$30.00 each.

**RESERVATION DEADLINE: May 10, 2024**

Please complete this form  
and mail with your check to:

MCARE  
P. O. Box 4203  
San Rafael CA 94913

Any questions, contact GENE PENNINGTON at  
[president@mcareinfo.org](mailto:president@mcareinfo.org) or (415) 254-3839.

## 2024 MCARE OFFICERS ELECTION

by JEANNE VILLA, MCARE Nominations & Elections Committee



Every even-numbered year, there is an MCARE membership election for MCARE's Officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Sgt. at Arms) who hold office for two-year terms. In the odd years, we elect the At Large Directors to ensure that we have continuity among the Board of Directors and to avoid a complete turnover of positions and the risk of losing historical wisdom.

MCARE is seeking members who wish to run for positions in the upcoming elections. MCARE currently has incumbent members in the positions of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer who expressed a desire to run as candidates this November, however the current Sgt. at Arms position is vacant.

Anyone may run for any position that interests them; the more involvement and ideas, the stronger the association.

Here is our timeline for the upcoming election:

- Nominations for Officers open on August 1 and close on September 15.
- Membership voting for Officers will be conducted electronically and with mail-in ballots, commencing on October 1.
- At the Annual Membership Meeting to be held on November 12 at the Club Restaurant at McInnis Park in San Rafael, members who have NOT voted by electronic or printed ballot can vote.
- Nominations also may be made by Members from the floor at the time of the Annual Membership Meeting.
- Elected Officers will be introduced at the Holiday Party held on December 10.

As the Sgt. at Arms position is currently vacant, we highly encourage members to contact us as soon as possible to indicate their interest in standing for election to this important and exciting office.

Currently, two of our four officers represent the City of San Rafael, and two represent the County of Marin. Members who retired from other agencies are encouraged to stand for election so as to have a diverse representation of our retiree agencies. (At Large Directors represent the Novato Fire District, Southern Marin Fire, and the County of Marin.)

The following agencies are currently not represented on the Board, so retirees from these agencies are particularly welcome to seek election as Officers:

LAFCO  
Marin City Community Services District  
Marin/Sonoma Mosquito & Vector Control District  
Marin County Superior Court  
Tamalpais Community Services District

As an Officer, you have an opportunity to serve your fellow MCARE members by approving the MCARE Annual Budget, developing MCARE policies, working on Board committees as needed, and attending Board meetings every other month. MCARE Board meetings are held at the Marin County Employees' Retirement Association (MCERA) offices at One McInnis Parkway, Suite 1, in San Rafael. Officers can also attend Board meetings remotely by Zoom.

Please contact Jeanne Villa, MCARE Nominations & Elections Committee Chair, at [jjv1@comcast.net](mailto:jjv1@comcast.net) or (415) 827-0237, if you wish to stand for election or would like additional information about the Officers' positions. We hope to hear from you about this important election.

### GRANDPA JOKES

submitted by MARY ANN GALLARDO

**WHAT DO YOU CALL THE WIFE OF A HIPPIE?**

ANSWER: MISSISSIPPI

**WHAT DO YOU CALL A JOKE THAT ISN'T FUNNY?**

ANSWER: A SENTENCE

**WHY DID THE SCARECROW GET PROMOTED?**

ANSWER: BECAUSE HE WAS OUT STANDING IN HIS FIELD

**HOW DOES N.A.S.A. ORGANIZE A PARTY?**

ANSWER: THEY PLANET

**WHY DON'T SCIENTISTS TRUST ATOMS?**

ANSWER: THEY MAKE UP EVERYTHING

**WHAT DID ONE OCEAN SAY TO THE OTHER?**

ANSWER: NOTHING, THEY JUST WAVED

## Heart Attack vs. Cardiac Arrest: What's the Difference?

The two are often mistaken for one another, but causes, warning signs and treatments can differ

By Rachel Nania | Published April 22, 2024

### Cardiac arrest

**What is cardiac arrest?** Cardiac arrest is when the heart suddenly stops pumping, depriving the body and brain of oxygen-rich blood.

The impact is immediate: Breathing stops and the person loses consciousness. “If somebody has a cardiac arrest, it’s not subtle. They are on the ground, and they are not responding to you,” says Gregory Katz, M.D., a cardiologist at NYU Langone and an assistant professor in the Department of Medicine at NYU Grossman School of Medicine.

**What causes cardiac arrest?** Cardiac arrest is caused by irregular heart rhythms, called arrhythmias, that cause the heart to stop working properly, says the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI).

Many health conditions that are common among older adults can disrupt the heart’s rhythm and increase the risk of cardiac arrest, including coronary heart disease, a prior heart attack, atrial fibrillation, heart inflammation, cardiomyopathy (an enlarged heart), and leaky or narrow heart valves. Still, the NHLBI says about half of cardiac arrests happen to people who did not know they had a heart problem.

Sometimes heavy alcohol use or drug use can trigger cardiac arrest. So can severe stress, a blow to the chest (this is what recently happened to NFL player Damar Hamlin) and respiratory arrest, or when a person stops breathing.

### Are there warning signs and symptoms of cardiac arrest?

Unlike many other health issues, there aren’t usually any signs or symptoms to warn an individual that cardiac arrest is imminent, though some people may experience chest pain, nausea, vomiting or shortness of breath before losing consciousness. “People may get no warning whatsoever,” Katz says.

**What should you do?** If you see someone in cardiac arrest, “the immediate thing that you do is you start chest compressions, and you call 9-1-1,” Katz says. Starting CPR — which helps keep blood flow active until emergency responders arrive — “really is the difference between somebody having a good outcome versus a tragic outcome,” he says. About 350,000 people die from cardiac arrest every year in the U.S., and less than half of people who experience cardiac arrest outside the hospital receive the right care from bystanders.

The American Heart Association says anyone can perform CPR with hands-only chest compressions (no need for mouth-to-mouth unless you’re trained and feel comfortable doing it). Push hard and fast in the center of the chest to the beat of “Stayin’ Alive” by the Bee Gees or another song that is equivalent to about 100 to 120 beats per minute. And if an automated external defibrillator (AED) is available, use it. These portable devices that can often be found in public places such as airports and malls can stimulate the heart to resume beating.

### Heart attack

**What is a heart attack?** Unlike with cardiac arrest, the heart is still pumping when a person has a heart attack; it’s just that the heart is under stress, says Mistyann-Blue Miller, M.D., a cardiologist with Cleveland Clinic in Vero Beach, Florida. And that’s because blood flow to the heart is being blocked. If this blood flow is not restored quickly, the oxygen-starved heart muscle will start to die.

**What causes a heart attack?** Most heart attacks are caused by coronary artery disease, according to the NHLBI, or plaque buildup along the walls of the arteries that supply blood to the heart. Cholesterol and other fatty substances can lead to this buildup.

A number of modifiable factors can increase your risk for coronary artery disease, including physical inactivity, unhealthy eating, smoking and being overweight, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Other risk factors include a family history of heart disease.

**Are there warning signs or symptoms of a heart attack?** Also different from cardiac arrest is that many people who have a heart attack experience symptoms. For some, they can start slowly and be mild. For others, symptoms can come on suddenly and be severe.

“I describe it to patients that it can be anything weird between your chin and your belly button,” Katz says. And those odd or uncomfortable feelings typically gets worse with physical activity. “The idea that everyone has an elephant sitting on their chest as their heart attack symptom is just not borne out in the real world,” he adds.

Heart attack symptoms can include:

- Chest pain or discomfort
- Pain or discomfort in the arms, back, shoulders, neck, jaw and stomach (above the belly button)
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat

Women tend to have more “nonspecific” heart attack symptoms that are easier to attribute to other things, such as stress, Miller says. “That can be a dull, achy feeling between the shoulder blades, maybe fatigue, decreased exercise tolerance,” she explains. “If something doesn’t feel right, definitely report that to your doctor.”

Katz says older adults are also less likely to experience the classic heart attack symptoms.

**What should you do?** If you suspect a heart attack, call 9-1-1 right away. CPR isn’t necessary unless the person isn’t breathing or you can’t find a pulse. “You really need to go to an emergency room,” Katz says, where doctors can quickly locate and address the blockage. The longer the heart goes without oxygen, the more likely a person is to experience permanent damage, even death.



# BOARD of DIRECTORS

## OFFICERS



GENE PENNINGTON  
President  
President@MCAREinfo.org



ERIC DAVIS  
Vice President  
panamadaviseric@gmail.com



RICHARD ARROW  
Treasurer  
rarrow01@yahoo.com

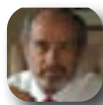


ADRIAN FRIED  
Secretary  
adriannovato@gmail.com

## AT LARGE MEMBERS



MARY ANN GALLARDO  
Immediate Past President  
gallardo.m.a@comcast.net



KEN HOLMES  
iceman14A1@gmail.com



JEANNE VILLA  
jvjv1@comcast.net



DEAN RAFFAINI  
draffa2@gmail.com

## COMMITTEE CHAIRS

### BUDGET & FINANCE

RICHARD ARROW  
rarrow01@yahoo.com

### MEMBERSHIP

EDITH SIMONSON  
esimonson1@verizon.net

### RECORDS RETENTION

ERIC DAVIS  
panamadaviseric@gmail.com

### LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

GUS GUINAN  
gusguinan65@gmail.com

### NOMINATIONS & ELECTIONS

JEANNE VILLA  
jvjv1@comcast.net

### AUDIT

GENE PENNINGTON  
President@MCAREinfo.org

### SCHOLARSHIP

KEN HOLMES  
iceman14A1@gmail.com

### KIT NEWSLETTER

LINDA MEEHAN  
KITeditor@mcareinfo.org

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Luncheons are held on the second Tuesday of each month, with the exception of January & June when there are no luncheons.



### 02 MCARE BOARD MEETING

**The Board Meeting will be held by ZOOM only.**  
Register in advance:

[mcareinfo.org/event-5558524](https://mcareinfo.org/event-5558524)

### 14 MCARE WESTERN BBQ

Stafford Lake Park, Area 2, Novato  
3549 Novato Blvd., Novato

11:30 Social Hour • 12:30 Lunch • \$30

See page 5 for menu, registration, and payment options.

Register and pay online at:

[mcareinfo.org/event-5508047](https://mcareinfo.org/event-5508047)

**REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED BY MAY 10, 2024.**



### 03 MCARE BOARD MEETING

#### IN-PERSON:

10:00 am at MCERA Offices  
One McInnis Parkway, Suite 100, San Rafael

**ZOOM:** Registration link will be in the June newsletter.

### 09 MONTHLY LUNCHEON

#### THE CLUB RESTAURANT

at McInnis Park Golf Center  
350 Smith Ranch Rd., San Rafael

11:30 Social Hour • 12:30 Lunch • \$25

Menu choices and registration link will be in the June newsletter.

**The 2024 Scholarship winners will be presented at this luncheon!**



MCARE

P. O. BOX 4203

SAN RAFAEL CA 94913

PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
San Rafael CA 94901  
Permit #17

Return Service Requested



## REMINDERS & TO DO LIST

### MCARE BOARD MEETINGS

**May 2, 2024** ZOOM only. See Page 7 for ZOOM link.

**July 3, 2024** Attend in person at 10:00 a.m. at the MCERA offices in San Rafael or by ZOOM. See details on page 7.

### MONTHLY LUNCHEON

**Tuesday, May 14**

**MCARE WESTERN BBQ**

Stafford Lake Park, Novato

Cost, menu, entertainment, directions, and registration information on page 5.



### MCARE ELECTION FOR OFFICERS

See page 5 for information about this year's election of Officers. If you retired from LAFCO, Marin City Community Services District, Marin/Sonoma Mosquito & Vector Control District, Marin County Superior Court, or Tamalpais Community Services District, please consider joining our Board of Directors!

# Savings made fun for kids in your life



**KIRBY KANGAROO CLUB**

## Visit [MarinCU.org](http://MarinCU.org)

415/499-9780

30 N. San Pedro Road #115 · San Rafael

Federally insured by NCUA

©Aurepro.com/MFN-1013.2





## MEMBER TRAVEL TALES

by GERRY HASSLER, SRPD, RET.

### SPLENDOR OF WESTERN SICILY

APRIL 2023

*photos by Jean Hassler*

Our flight from Rome gently descended over the Tyrrhenian Sea to land at Palermo's Falcone e Borsellino Airport.

We were collected by a tour company driver and sat back for about an hour as our van wound its way through heavy Saturday afternoon traffic to Hotel Federico II in central Palermo, the capital and largest city of the semi autonomous island province, where we joined other members of our small group of new friends and tour leader Davide Di Salvo. After check-in, Davide walked several of us around the nearby commercial neighborhood to locate restaurants, stores, ATMs and pharmacies, before letting us settle in with our own evening choices.

Sunday started with a morning walk in the narrow streets of the old town, first passing the huge 19th century Teatro Massimo, one of the most prominent in Europe, with local guide Laura. As we strolled, she educated us on Sicily's history, including its domination through the centuries by a series of invaders, among them Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Normans and French, all having left their imprints in culture, religion and architecture in this crossroad of the central Mediterranean. We saw lasting results of the most recent invasion. During World War II, Allied bombers and troops took the island in 1943, driving out German forces and leaving a number of buildings still in their bombed out condition.



*Teatro Massimo*



*Enthusiastic vendor in Palermo's Sunday morning market*

We continued the walking tour through the crowded and busy outdoor Capo Market, narrow lanes shared by vendors, shoppers and motor scooters, with savory aromas wafting throughout. We finished the tour with a visit to Opera dei Pupi, the only continuously operating puppet show in Italy, dating from the early 19th century. Rather than a full show, we were given a personalized demonstration by puppeteer Giovanni,



*Lesson in puppeteering*

whose family has operated the theatre for five generations – from building the marionettes to booking shows to performing them. He spoke of the history of the shows and demonstrated the superb craftsmanship that goes into the large marionettes, complete with articulating limbs and in some cases, weaponry. He then gave a short skit showing how the marionettes perform, and invited members of our group to try puppeteering.



*Pedestrian thoroughfare in old town Palermo*

Lunchtime brought a chance to try arancini, a favored informal and inexpensive handheld fried rice ball, stuffed with a variety of veggies, meats and cheeses and available in numerous small shops. We had ours under a streetside umbrella providing just enough cover from a cool drizzle. Mine was filled with ground beef and Jean's had chicken with curry and carrots – each quite tasty and filling.

When someone mentions Sicily, people often still immediately – and sadly – think of the Mafia. It's understandable, as organized crime has *(cont'd on page 10)*

## SPLENDOR OF WESTERN SICILY (cont'd from page 9)

created a great deal of human suffering in Sicily, as well as in the United States. To help expand people's knowledge and perspective, our group attended a presentation in the afternoon by two middle age men whose families' lives were, in different ways, deeply affected. Their fathers grew up as neighbors in Corleone, considered the epicenter of the Sicilian Mafia; or as called by some "La Cosa Nostra" or "our thing". One man's father became a tailor and was pressed into service for local mafia bigwigs. He eventually feared for his family's safety and moved off the island and away from Italy with them for years until convinced it was safe to return. The other man's father eventually became a prominent mafia boss in Sicily, and his family went into hiding until his capture. The sins of that father were – and are – visited upon that son, as he grew up on the island as part of a fugitive family, and now has difficulty finding work or creating a business, some two decades later.

The decline of the mafia in Sicily was precipitated by its own terrible actions, culminating in the separate assassinations in 1992 of two investigating judges – Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino. The murders were so publicly callous, including the deaths of bystanders, that they galvanized the resistance of the populace and vigor of the state to reduce the influence of organized crime. The international airport in Palermo is now named after the martyred judges; and their faces are prominently displayed as heroes around the island, which is also dotted by billboards and other signs proclaiming "no mafia". Though organized crime, whether in Sicily or anywhere else in the world is never eradicated, its prominence in Sicily is now greatly reduced and the island feels quite safe.

After that serious presentation, it was time for something completely different. Group members were collected by twos in a convoy of tuk-tuk three wheel scooters driven by wannabe Formula One race car drivers, to careen through narrow streets and alleys of the old town, missing pedestrians, vehicles, buildings and café furniture by inches, bouncing along uneven surfaces, while we made sure to keep our elbows in.

Energized by that, the group was eventually delivered to Locale restaurant for a fine dinner, and an easy amble back to the hotel.

A winding hour and a half bus ride the next cool Spring morning led to the charming village of Castelbuono, in the Madonie Mountains. We were met at the village entrance by two garbage collectors and their uniquely tasked donkeys, slightly famous for their ability to navigate the narrow lanes of the village to collect recycling materials from color coded small containers sometimes lowered from upper floor homes by residents. We followed one of them and its handler as they efficiently went about their work. That stroll led to a primary village attraction, the 14th century hilltop castle and church offering distant countryside views, and now functioning as a combination museum, gallery and performance space.



*Donkey goes about his recycling work*



*Piazza Margherita in Castelbuono*

The village is reinventing itself as a center of gastronomy, tourism and shopping, with inns, boutiques and fine food selections lining its narrow main street. Anchoring the town square of Piazza Margherita is Panettone Fiasconaro, founded in 1953 by Mario Fiasconaro and thriving today still as a family run business. Panettone is a delicious pastry with countless recipes – many of which are available online - and unique in its use of manna, the sweet white sap from local ash trees, to make creamy filling. The tasty samples we were provided seduced several of the group into purchases to enjoy and to take home.

Our appetites whetted, we continued to Michelin starred Ristorante Nangalarruni, one of thirty some dining establishments in the village. Our excellent multi course lunch included fresh ingredients and fungi based pasta; and was augmented by lively traditional music played by talented locals on guitar and accordion, and sung in full voice. Two little girls were drawn in as if by magnets from an adjacent dining room to dance along.

*(cont'd on page 11)*



**SPLENDOR OF WESTERN SICILY** (cont'd from page 10)

We left Palermo the next morning, venturing first to the nearby hill town of Monreale, which overlooks Palermo and a fertile, productive valley, with splendid views to the sea. We met an extremely knowledgeable local guide who led us through the magnificent Cattedrale di Santa Maria, which dominates the town. Of byzantine and Norman architecture, it is one of Italy's national monuments, displaying thousands of elaborate gold mosaics, dating to its construction around 1200 AD. We had just enough time for a cappuccino from a café on the piazza; and to succumb to one souvenir purchase on the way back to the bus.

An incredibly scenic drive over about an hour – the last leg up a narrow winding gravel lane in an ancient van – led to the bucolic Agriturismo Tenute Pispisa, high atop a valley filled with vineyards, wildflowers and orchards. The welcoming committee of two large friendly dogs managed to quietly wag their tails while reclining in the shade of the front porch. Inside, a sumptuous multi course lunch was complimented by fine wines whose grapes were harvested from the vines just beyond the airy light filled



*Interior of Cattedrale di Santa Maria*

dining room. After lunch, we ambled down the same lane, savoring a long distance view of the unfinished and still stunning Doric Temple of Segesta, from the fifth century BC, built by Greeks when Segesta was an important regional town.

The day's final destination was the southwest coastal city of Mazara del Vallo and our seaside Mahara Hotel. The waterfront promenade invited us to stretch our legs, and the fresh late afternoon sea breeze was a bonus. A delicious pizza at a waterfront restaurant, and an easy walk back to the hotel capped the day.

Our next morning began with a walking tour led by local guide – retired banker and sometime nightclub singer Antonio, who educated us on the city's history – settled by Phoenicians in the ninth century BC, then controlled in various intervals like so many parts of the central Mediterranean by Greeks, Romans and others until being settled by Arabs in 827 AD, whose control lasted until 1072 AD and the conquest of the area by Normans. The center of the old city became the Kasbah, and Mazara is still considered the most Arab city in Italy, with a vibrant population of Tunisian ancestry, mostly residing in the old town. Arab architectural influence is spread mostly over the narrow winding lanes of the Kasbah; and Norman influence is seen in the ruins of a fort and in some churches.

The walking tour ended with a gourmet lunch on the patio of the home of Antonio and his wife Vita, featuring homemade delights made from the olive and lemon trees of their garden; finishing with an exquisite dessert of granitas, frozen lemon ice with strawberries.

Our final day in western Sicily began with a ride along the coast to a salt museum and pans, where we learned of the process of harvesting salt from the sea, largely unchanged from ancient times to the present. We left with small jars of crunchy, flavorful salt much more interesting than what is found on supermarket shelves.

*(cont'd on page 12)*



*Ancient Greek Doric Temple near Segesta*



**SPLENDOR OF WESTERN SICILY** (cont'd from page 11)

We then took a short, small boat ride over very shallow waters to the island of Mothya, settled by Phoenicians some 2,700 years ago. We walked among ancient walls of their forts and port and could see in the shallow water remnants of an ancient stone causeway to nearby Marsala.



*Island of Mothya*

We finished the day with the fun of a cooking lesson led by the entertaining Chef Paolo at La Vela Ristorante. Our group was separated into subgroups, focusing on Pasta Alla Norma, red pesto sauce using red garlic, eggplant parmigiana, and sponge cake parfait for dessert. Our amateur efforts were deemed successful by the chef, and delicious by all of us as we enjoyed the fruits of our efforts for dinner. And yes, there was wine.

Altogether a fine experience in a beautiful and welcoming p

