

La Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto: 45 Years in the Making

1967 was the year La Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto was founded.



1967: The first pictures of the Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto at the *Ristorante Dolomiti* on St. Clair Avenue in Toronto



In the post-World War II years, there was a mass emigration of Italians searching for honest and dignified work. European countries like Switzerland, Belgium, France and Great Britain needed their skills and energy to run their industries, while Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay, United States, Australia and Canada had vast territories needing population growth.

In the 1950s, there was an exodus from regions all over Italy towards the new world, especially Canada. In those days, Canada was a very young country needing development of its infrastructure such as roads and transportation systems, factories, houses, schools and hospitals. Throughout the 1950s, the Italian emigration to Canada continued on ships such as the Andrea Doria, Vulcania, Saturnia and the S.S. Constitution mostly leaving from ports in Genoa and Naples and some from Venice. It was a long and arduous trek, but for those who made the journey, there was pride in their success, best illustrated by the 1960 Italian song *"come è bella la casetta in Canada con tanti fiori di lilla"*.

Many settled in Toronto and surrounding areas such as Niagara Falls where a hydroelectric power plant was being built. The dialects most heard on the work-site were Fondasino and Lamonese. Young families and single men found lodging and hospitality in the homes of Bellunese families in Niagara Falls who had emigrated earlier. Many Fondasini found an open door at the home of Angelina Gambarona who provided the new arrivals with a welcoming first stop in Canada; similarly, Bortolo Camigotto warmly received those from Lamon. Ida (Sebben), wife of Domenico (Milanta) Giacomini was another Bellunese who accepted many single male boarders offering them good traditional home cooking. Then there was Mary Shipp (née Bianchi) who was fluent in English and provided much needed assistance in translating from English to Italian, filling out forms and generally helping out wherever it was needed. Once the power plant was completed, the younger Bellunese took the road to the big city of Toronto to find work. Soon their hard earned dollars started to accumulate and enabled young families to buy their first home and for the bachelors to dream of buying their first car.

Immigration continued into the 1960s at a slower pace and some newcomers started arriving in jet planes landing first in Montreal and then on to Toronto.

In September of 1967, Father Mario Carlin of Sospirolo remembered that among his parishioners in Toronto were two Troian brothers from Sedico, whose sister Lina, had married Luigi Soppelsa, forming the first bridge between Belluno and Toronto. Don Carlin wanted to meet other Bellunese so a dinner was organized at the *Ristorante Dolomiti* on St. Clair Avenue; this gathering was instrumental in founding *La Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto*.

The first Club meeting took place at the home of Gino Garbin and was joined by Giovanni Corso, Franco Da Corte, Luigi Soppelsa, Guido Garbin, Luigi Troian, Guglielmo Da Costa, Carlo and Gino Brentel, Guerrino Dallo and Vittorio Zucco. The committee was full of enthusiasm and good will to unite all the Bellunese of Toronto, Niagara Falls and Hamilton under one club, in one united family organization that would bring a sense of belonging to every Bellunese, in an atmosphere of friendship, traditional *feste*, familiar music and social events, which brought much needed fun and happiness to their lives.





September 1967: The first committee of the Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto: Gino Garbin, Tarci De Cassan, Luigi Soppelsa, Armando Dal Zot, Carlo Brentel, Maurizio Fadalti, Pietro Angaran and Vittorio Zucco. Standing: Luigi Marsiglio, Cesare Curti, Guerrino Dallo and Eliseo Sartor



Guglielmo Da Costa was the first President, Carlo Brentel was vice-president and Pietro Angaran became the secretary with others as committee members. They focused their attention on ways to bring together and form new friendships and bonds among the Bellunese. The *San Silvestro* dinner was organized to bring in the "New Year". The dinner dance with a menu rich in Italian specialties familiar to the Bellunese palate was held at St. Jude's Hall on Weston Road. But, Mother Nature was not favourable that night as freezing rain fell and many thought of cancelling the *festa*. The Club persevered and the *festa* went ahead, followed by many more events in the following year.

When Guglielmo Da Costa left the Club, the presidency was passed on to Carlo Brentel who in turn was replaced by Armando Dal Zot. Carlo Brentel remained as Vice-president, Franco Da Corte was secretary, Tarcisio DeCassan was treasurer, and the committee members were Maurizio Fadalti, Giovanni Corso, Gino and Guido Garbin, Gino Brentel, Tony Pescador, Cesare Curti, Luigi and Arturo Troian, Luigi Soppelsa, Secondo Nicoletto and Luigi Andrichetti.



1971: Carlo Brentel speaks at the presentation of the *Gonfalone* with Gino Garbin and Pietro Angaran.



The mayor of Feltre, Sisto Belli, presenting the *Gonfalone*



The committee reached out to Bellunesi within Toronto and in neighbouring cities such as Niagara Falls, Hamilton and Guelph. The first social membership cards were printed with a unique design - the provincial emblem, the Tre Cime di Lavaredo, and the *Stella Alpina* with the motto "*appartenere alla Famiglia Bellunese non è obbligo, bensì privilegio*" (belonging to the Famiglia Bellunese is not an obligation, but a privilege). The cards were printed and credit must be given to Gino Garbin for his convincing manner that resulted in the growth of the membership list of the Club.

The year 1968 was full of social activities at a community centre in North York. Everyone enjoyed the food, music and dancing. Beautiful memories were created with photographs taken by Secondo Nicoletto, the Club's official photographer at the time.

Profits from those dances encouraged the Club to continue with enthusiasm, and as the Club opened up their first bank account, the financial worry of planning future events was eliminated. With pride, the committee dreamed of organizing other gatherings, reminiscent of the traditional Bellunese festivities, such as *La Crostolada*. At the first *Crostolada*, the President thanked the twenty ladies who had volunteered to make the traditional *crostoli* for over two hundred people, making the evening sensational. This was the Club's first big success and helped to consolidate and establish the Bellunesi as the first of the Veneti to officially organize themselves as a Club.

The committee looked for new ways to attract members to social gatherings and focused their attention on the November eleventh Italian feast of *San Martin*, when it was customary to roast chestnuts. And so, the planning of a new Club festa "*San Martin, Castagne e Vin*" was initiated. Armando Dal Zot took it upon himself to find the chestnuts. Franco Da Corte built a roaster using a tiny motor to give even and continuous heat, roasting the chestnuts to perfection. The operation of roasting took place in Giovanni Corso's (Nani Tano) garage. The chestnuts were excellent and satisfied over two hundred people. Young men and women, dressed in traditional Bellunese costumes, served the roasted chestnuts which were transported into the hall in a wheelbarrow specially made and decorated for the occasion. Bottles of wine placed in a half-barrel on wheels were distributed to the merry-makers by Vittorio Zucco and Michele Pescador (Tofol) who were wearing Mexican sombreros.



In September 1973, Gino Garbin and Luciano Bellus represented the Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto for the first conference of North American Immigrants held in Toronto. In July 1974, Gino Garbin participated in the first Veneto conference on immigration in Verona, Italy. In January 1975, there was a National Conference on immigration in Rome. Eliseo Sartor was elected the first consultant on immigration for Canada in 1979. In April 1985, Carlo Brentel was elected the first president of the Federation of Veneto Clubs and Associations of Toronto. It should be noted that the concept of the Veneto Federation came from Eliseo Sartor and that since 1992 Nico Angaran has been president. On July 1986, secretary Gino Garbin, represented the Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto at the 20th anniversary celebration of the immigrant association Bellunesi nel Mondo in the city of Belluno.

The Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto renewed ties with Belluno and welcomed visitors from the Associazione Bellunesi nel Mondo (ABM). The ABM is best known for publishing the now familiar giornolino, *Bellunesi nel Mondo*, which is distributed to Bellunesi around the globe. It was a way for Bellunesi to keep in touch with each other by posting pictures of *feste*, picnics and activities from Bellunese clubs all over the world, as well as personal stories of family gatherings, reunions, marriages, special anniversaries and more. Also, sadly, the *giornalino* brought news of Bellunesi who had passed away. It was a record of the lives, achievements and events of Bellunesi everywhere.

There have been many Club leaders to carry forth the work and traditions. Over the years, the Club continued to flourish under the leadership of the younger generation of Bellunesi. The past presidents Guglielmo Da Costa, Carlo Brentel, Armando Dal Zot, Gino Garbin, Eliseo Sartor, Franco Da Corte and Nico Angaran passed on the torch to the next set of presidents, Luciana Zucco, Antonella Andrighetti, John Angaran, Kevin Roberts, Tarcisio De Cassan, Steve Corso, Gerry Lumia, Renza Andrighetti, Elena Dell'Ossel and M. Theresa De Biasio. It must be recognized that the leaders could only have succeeded with the support of the committee members who volunteered their time and energy.



November 2002: Famiglia Bellunese Past Presidents (from left to right): Antonella Andrighetti, John Angaran, Gino Garbin, Tarcisio De Cassan, Luciana Zucco, Domenico Angaran, Carlo Brentel, Kevin Roberts, Armando Dal Zot





1982: The *Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto's* 15th Anniversary



1987: The *Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto's* 20th Anniversary



The annual Christmas Party (*la festa del Babbo Natale*) was added to the calendar of events for the children of Club members. For years, the party was held at the Borochoy Centre in North York and in the last couple of decades the Veneto Centre served as the festive meeting place. Some years, the Club also celebrated the arrival of *La Befana* similar to the custom in Italy. On the evening of January 5th, *La Befana* would bring gifts to the good children and would leave a lump of coal for the naughty children. At the Christmas parties, the children enjoyed making crafts and listening to Christmas stories that were

read aloud while they anxiously awaited the arrival of Santa Claus with his big red sack filled with presents. At the end of the afternoon, everyone sang Christmas carols in English and in Italian. Pizza and traditional *panettone* were served for everyone and candy canes were given to the children.

The Bellunesi continued the tradition of meeting with friends they had not seen for a while and enjoying a traditional dinner with roasted chestnuts and wine. In 1998, a magician, Arduino Sistilli, provided entertainment at the *Castagne e Vin* banquet. Mr. Sistilli, with the help of his daughter, performed many tricks and even pulled 'a rabbit out of a hat'. The *Castagne e Vin* was initially celebrated as a dinner but later became a lunch-time festa filled with good conversation, fine food and music.

Bellunesi from the Cadore Valley, Val' Agordina, Feltre, Fonzaso and the surrounding areas spoke a variety of dialects. Each could understand the other even though there was an occasional word that was not the same or pronounced differently. At times, costumes from different areas of Belluno would be worn at the *Castagne e Vin*. There was much respect and a strong bond among the families because they shared the same hardships of learning a new language and finding work in a foreign land to make a better life for their families. At the *Castagne e Vin* and *La Crostolada feste*, families found friendship and comfort in recalling and celebrating the old country traditions.

In recent years, Sunday afternoons brought Bellunesi members to the Pasta-Bingo event held at the Veneto Centre where they could socialize with friends and have some fun together. Members played several games of bingo and spent an enjoyable afternoon chatting, guessing what was in the mystery plastic bag, playing trivia games or even trying their luck at pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey. Sometimes they would tell *barzellette* (jokes) or read an Italian poem or even recite a funny story. At the end of the afternoon, there would be a light dinner of pasta, made with the excellent tomato sauce from the kitchens of the Veneto Centre, accompanied with salad, *pane*, cheese and, of course, *vino*.

Throughout the years the Famiglia Bellunese picnic was held on the first Sunday in July. Initially, it was at Valentino Park but eventually it took place at the Fogolars Country Club in Oakville. The large picnic grounds with a wading pool together with a variety of games for the young and those young at heart brought delight to everyone.

The summer picnic united Bellunesi from many parts of southern Ontario and occasionally family visitors from Italy. The traditional *bocce* tournament was held each year and the winners' names were engraved on the trophy which was proudly displayed in their homes until the next picnic. In the early days, prizes were given to the family with the best barbecue; in the first year, the prize went to Vittorino (Gambarona) Sebben and his wife Angelina (Fumol) Cambruzzi; the meat was roasted over an open-fire.

Another tradition began at the picnic, where the Club offered coffee, cake and cookies to welcome people as they arrived at the park. Over the years, some picnic games changed. The tug-of-war (tiro alla fune), the climbing of the greased pole to reach the salame and mortadella prizes at the top (*la cucagna*) and the sack races were replaced by other games. Members of all ages enjoyed the shoe toss, better known as *el tiro della savata* which became a picnic favourite. The children had fun on the swings and slides, playing in the pool and getting soaked during the water balloon contests.

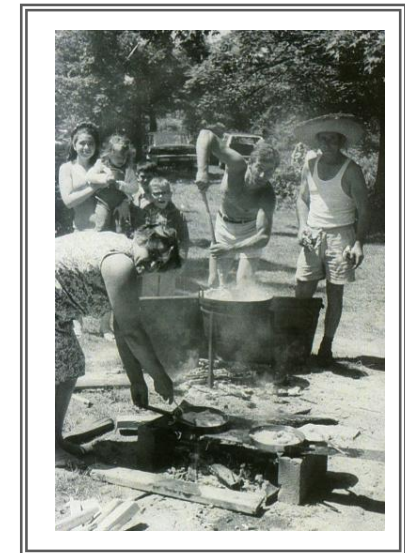


Later in the afternoon, everyone gathered for the draw for prizes, which included bicycles, cameras, electronics, garden statues, flower planters and books, each anxiously hoping their number would be called. The winners of the *bocce* tournament were announced and their picture was taken with the President. *Bocce* was one game that remained a favourite over the years. At the end of the day, everyone was tired, but there were many smiling faces as people packed up their coolers and prepared to say *arrivederci* for another year.

The Club wishes to thank all its members for their contributions in



keeping the Club picnic traditions, and in particular to Luigi Corso, John Angaran, Pietro Angaran, Domenic Ammendolia, Luciana Andrighetti and their families. They made the *polenta nella pignata* over an open fire, barbecued the *salsice* and lamb and provided the *formai*, *panini* and even *vino*. For some Bellunesi, this brought back memories of the mountains and *le malghe* where the cows were brought high in the mountains for summer feeding. While tending the cows, the men would cook *polenta* and *salsice* out in the open or in the *casere*. Cheese was made from the milk of the cows high in the mountains, hence, the love of *formai* and *formai frit* among the Bellunesi.



The hard-working and industrious Bellunesi were quick to integrate into the Canadian way of life, working as labourers and bricklayers in the construction industry, while others applied their skills as carpenters, mechanics, welders, tile setters and more. Working in Canada meant that the traditional mid-day meal was replaced by *el lonch* (lunch) with sandwiches made Italian style, with thick slices of crusty Italian bread or *panini* filled with *mortadella*, *prosciutto*, cooked vegetables and more. The soft white English bread was only eaten at breakfast as toast with jam, and to this day, the older Bellunesi still prefer their sandwiches made with the crusty Italian *filone* or *panini*!

Some Bellunesi became licenced in trades such as electricians, while others went on to start their own businesses creating employment for fellow Italians and Canadians. Many Bellunesi saw a wonderful future for themselves and their families in their adopted country of Canada. Their children and

grandchildren acquired diplomas and certificates, and others had a chance to attend college and university if they chose, something their parents could only dream of back home.

The younger generation along with the elders became valued contributing members of the Canadian workforce and society. When they returned to Italy to visit family and friends and acquaint themselves with the country of birth of their forebears, some of the children and grandchildren could only speak a limited amount of Italian or dialect and an interpreter was needed to communicate with relatives.

The older generation who returned to the country of their birth found that it too had evolved since they had left all those years ago. The old dialects were spoken less frequently by the younger generation and the use of the proper Italian language was more prevalent. The Bellunesi who left Italy over 40 years ago were still speaking in the dialect of their youth and when they returned to Italy, many of the words and phrases they used could only be recognized by the elders in the villages.

Some of the Canadian holidays are now celebrated in Italy, like Halloween in October and Santa Claus at Christmas time. In turn, the Bellunesi adopted some of the Canadian traditions, like Thanksgiving and bridal showers. The Bellunesi-Canadians have formed their own traditions in Canada by marrying the old traditions of the Dolomites and Italy with the Canadian ways, and celebrating the union in the Famiglia Bellunese.

Today, the Bellunesi feel they are a part of an integrated and successful Italian community in Toronto, which gives them an added pride in having founded the Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto forty-five years ago, a *famiglia* that carried on the traditions, foods and language to their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



Famiglia Bellunese di Toronto: La Festa di San Martin Castagne e Vin

