

New home for local Italian-American club

After about 12 years of meeting in various locations, the Flagstaff Italian-American Club settles into a firm meeting location at the new Bella Donna restaurant

By **BETSEY BRUNER**

Community Editor

As the stirring music of I Divo, the cosmopolitan quartet of pop/opera singers, played in the background, about 40 members of the Flagstaff Italian-American Club settled back in their chairs and spread sparkling white napkins in their laps.

There was cause to rejoice Wednesday night as the group met for the first time in the brand-new Bella Donna Italian restaurant in the new mall on South Woodlands Boulevard.

"I want to thank all you members, because you had the patience to stay with us," said Ralph Boyer, founder of the club, addressing the diners.

"We've been waiting since 1995 to find a home for the Italian-American Club. We finally have our own space. We're blessed. We'll take this club to higher levels of cultural expression."

WE ARE FAMILY

The club meets on the first Wednesday of every month, except in December when they gather for a big Christmas party, which will be Dec. 16 this year.

Members also participate in the local 4th of July parade every year and have a picnic with bocce ball in the park following the parade.

At their meeting, club members used a 55-person-capacity banquet room at Bella Donna, but could move to a larger room if needed.

Wednesday was only the second day

IF YOU GO...

WHAT: Italian-American Club

WHEN: Meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m.

WHERE: Bella Donna Italian restaurant, 2500 W. Woodlands Village Boulevard, Suite 5

COST: Membership fees are \$15 for individuals, \$20 for families. Meetings are exclusively for members or guests of members.

MORE INFO: Call 774-3345 or 779-2281.

of operation for the restaurant.

"We're happy to be a part of your family and being here for you; we really are a family," said Michael Sidoti, restaurant owner, who is also a member of the club. "People are still being trained. We make everything from scratch."

Sidoti previously owned a Bella Donna in Williams, but closed that restaurant to open the Flagstaff location. Bella donna means "beautiful lady" in Italian and refers to Sidoti's grandmother, Mary Sidoti.

Sidoti said his family is originally from Sicily, via Naples.

A special feature of Bella Donna will be small performances by students from the NAU School of Music.

AFFINITY FOR THINGS ITALIAN

The Italian-American Club partici-



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Betsy Bruner/Arizona Daily Sun

JEREMY SANDERS, A CART CHEF at the new Bella Donna restaurant, serves salad to members of the Italian-American Club Wednesday at their first meeting at this new location.

pates in activities throughout the year that promote the knowledge and awareness of both Italian and Italian-American cultures.

These activities almost always include lots of food and fun.

The club is affiliated with the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF), with headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Jeff Sonni, club president, has served for two years and will be picking up a second two-year service in October.

He said the club has around 100 individual members, from 65 member families.

"When we raise funds, everything we do goes to the scholarship programs

of the club," he said. "This year, we're also co-sponsoring NAU Opera students."

Members will receive a 20 percent discount off meals at Bella Donna on meeting nights and 10 percent off on non-meeting nights, he said.

The October meeting will feature a slide show and story night on Italy by members Adrian and Bob Quinn, who won the club raffle for a free airfare to Italy.

"You don't have to be Italian to join the club," said Sonni, whose family name was originally Squassoni. "You just have to have an affinity for the food, the culture, the family values, the traditions of Italy."