

Frank Monaco '63 is Chairman of the Little Italy San Antonio

A Story of Place....A Sense of History.... A Generational Legacy for Italian-Americans in San Antonio. This is the latest leadership commitment by Frank Monaco. Frank is Chairman of the Little Italy San Antonio project. This is an ambitious project by the Christopher Columbus Italian Society in what has been known as Columbus Park.

Some History: The original Italian settlers from Spezzano della Sila, Italy arrived in San Antonio at the end of the 19th century. Spezzano della Sila is located in the province of Cosenza, in the Calabria region of southern Italy. For geographical reference the region is located in the “toe” of the boot of Italy.

By 1890, they had established the Christopher Columbus Italian Society with their motto being “Union and Fraternity”. Their entrepreneurial spirit began to forge a better life for their children and grandchildren. By 1926, they built their own church, San Francesco Di Paolo, to resemble the architecture of their heritage. In 1927, Columbus Hall was constructed to compliment the church and provide a meeting place for the Christopher Columbus Italian Society. This new Columbus Park was to become the focal point of their community, a “Story of Place”.

Today and the Vision: In 2010, the Christopher Columbus Italian Society, a cultural organization, unveiled their plans for a Little Italy concept on the grounds of Columbus Park. Those plans call for developing the land behind Columbus Hall to create a small, mixed-use development reminiscent of Spezzano della Sila, again home of many of those early immigrant families.

Architecturally, Little Italy will connect to the structures already there. Several buildings, they will be oriented toward the back of the church built in 1926. To be done in phases, once shops are constructed, Italian- inspired homes will be built behind the historic church and hall. The end goal is to recreate a whole community, a park, the church, the hall, shops, residences, maybe even, a small restaurant, a deli, a place for a gelato. The development can be seen as a symbolic “Re-Birth” of the neighborhood of the Italian ancestors. A very real “Sense of History”.

Many descendants of the original settlers still reside in San Antonio and the surrounding communities and support ongoing activities of Columbus Hall and the Church. For years, the Italian community has celebrated Columbus week in October with their well-known Spaghetti Dinners at Columbus Hall, celebrating the discovery of the “New World” by Christopher Columbus. They never take their eye off that “Generational Legacy”

The most recent step in this transformation occurred in August, 21013 with a ground breaking ceremony to officially rename Columbus Park. It’s now named Piazza de Columbo. A non-profit 501.c3, they are now focused on community education and support with both private and public funding as an objective.

“The primary purpose is to honor those who founded the Christopher Columbus Italian Society in 1890. They had no money, could not speak English, but they gathered together and helped other Italian immigrants come over and establish business”, said Frank Monaco. He goes on to say, “Our idea is to bring people back here, back to the church, back to the hall, back to their roots.”

Piazza de Columbo is located in the northwest corner of downtown San Antonio, just inside the junction of I-10 and I-35. It is just three blocks north of El Mercado. There is added opportunity for it to be a destination for both shoppers and tourists. You can read more about Little Italy San Antonio at <http://www.littleitalysa.com>.