



CASA ITALIA TO SHINE SPOTLIGHT ON MAYOR MAZZULLA



Casa Italia is proud to present Stone Park Mayor Beniamino Mazzulla with a Chairman's Special Recognition Award at this year's Gala.

"The Casa has no better friend than Mayor Mazzulla," says Casa Chairman John Ferrentino. "He is fiercely devoted to his constituents and his heritage, and he serves them with equal passion and skill."

Born in Rende, Calabria, Mayor Mazzulla is the son of Luigi and Carolina Mazzulla, and the grandson of Francesco and Carmela Mazzulla and Antonio and Mary Scarlato.

He was only 6 when he and his siblings — Carmelina, Eugenio and Ivano — moved with their parents to Stone Park, a tiny western suburb that was heavily Italian with a growing Mexican population.

Like all immigrant children, young Beniamino learned English, made friends with kids of all nationalities and found a place in his new hometown.

While both of his parents worked at the Zenith factory at North and 25th, he attended Grant primary and elementary schools, Roosevelt Junior High and Proviso West High School.

After taking courses at Triton College, he settled on a career that had taken root in his youth. "I used to work in my parents' garden every year, turning over the dirt, cutting the grass," he explains. "I loved working outdoors and it sparked my interest in landscaping."

With so many neighbors, friends, employees and customers of Mexican descent, he learned to speak Spanish as fluently as he does English and Italian. His strong ties to the community transformed him from a resident and entrepreneur to an activist and political leader.

"It was a great town to grow up in but things began to change," he says. "The political party that was in power only took care of their own, and they neglected the rest of the community. Basic services were falling apart and there was a lot of injustice."

He ran for trustee in 1999, losing by only 30 votes. Set-



BENIAMINO MAZZULLA

ting his sights higher in 2001, he ran for mayor under the Neighbors in Action banner and won, retiring from landscaping to devote all of his energies to his new calling. "We made a vow that we would unify the village and that's what we did. We sponsor numerous events throughout the year that make residents feel a part of the community."

Among them are cleanup days and an annual Easter egg hunt, Memorial Day parade, Fourth of July celebration, rodeo, Halloween party and a Christmas parade that includes photos with Santa.

The mayor next focused on improving basic services like garbage pickup, street sweeping and tree trimming while steadily paving streets, rehabbing alleys, upgrading lights and replacing water mains. Then came major projects like

the beautification of North Avenue, and the construction of a community center on Mannheim Road and a new village hall on 32nd. On the economic development front, he has dedicated himself to bringing family friendly businesses to Stone Park.

"We may be a small town, but the residents are hard working and they have a lot of pride," the mayor says. "We've shown what you can do when everyone comes together for the good of the community."

According to Mayor Mazzulla, Casa Italia has been the crown jewel of that community ever since the 1930s, when the Scalabrini Fathers first unveiled it as the Sacred Heart Seminary.

"It's a beautiful property with wonderful facilities and we're all so proud of it," he enthuses. "We work hand-in-hand with the Casa to keep it the gem that it is."

Mayor Mazzulla has been married to his wife, Gabriela, for 22 years. Like his parents, they have been raising their children — Isabella (20), Dominique (19) and Ben (16) — in Stone Park. Through it all, the Casa, and the seminary before it, has been a constant.

"It was there for the community when I was growing up, while I was raising my family and throughout my tenure as mayor," he says. "At the end of the day, the Casa is a holy place and it will always have a home in Stone Park."