

Nelson Italian-Canadian Society Celebrates 50 Years

Press Release

April 24, 2022

Nelson, BC

(see related photos on page 3)

The Kootenays have a long historical connection with Italian immigrants. Over the decades, many Italians ventured to the region looking for opportunities for a better life for themselves and their families. These eager immigrants established themselves in the Kootenay communities working for the railroad, lumber mills, industry, and mines. Some also ventured into the realm of commerce, setting up storefronts to serve the recent immigrants.

In the early 1970s, several recent immigrants to Nelson began conversing about the need and desire to establish a cultural group. Trail with its larger Italian population had such organizations for several decades and the Italian-Canadian citizens of Nelson felt the desire to develop something similar.

April 11, 1972 saw the foundation of the Nelson Italian-Canadian Society – Società Italo-Canadese di Nelson (NICS). What began as a fraternal lodge to promote Italian culture in Nelson eventually grew into an organization that included fundraising efforts for community initiatives and charities.

Humble Beginnings

Albert Maida began phoning Italians in the community to see if there was interest in forming an Italian club. The response was positive. The first meeting was held at DiBella Electric with several individuals in attendance, some as young as 24 years old. Albert was elected as the founding president.

The first executive included Maida as President, Vice-presidents Frank DiBella and Gordon Correale, Secretary John Malito, and Treasurer Bill Freno. The executive was rounded out with Directors Sebastian Amenta, Armando Maglio, Gus DeVuono, Fiore Milinazzo, Cosimo Chirico, Mike DeMeo, Mike DeGirolamo, Kennedy Facchina and Pete Lisanti.

A Constitution and Bylaws were established and the task of translating the document from English into Italian was completed by Ada Porco. This allowed members who did not have full command of the English language to read it in their native tongue.

Within the early days of the Society, the founding executive had no problem signing up 86 members. Most of the members had emigrated to Canada during the 1950s and 1960s. There was a handful who were first-generation Canadians, having been born here.

The Nelson Italian Lodge as it was first known, evolved into the Società Italo-Canadese di Nelson/Nelson Italian-Canadian Society. It provided the recent immigrants with a support network to deal with a new country and language as well as a social group to maintain various aspects of Italian culture.

The Society held meetings on alternating Sundays at the Hume Hotel with regular turnouts of 70 or more members, each ready to debate the shape and direction the group would take. The keen interest of the members made getting on the executive a challenge with several people running for each position a standard affair.

The Society was initially a male-only group. It has since expanded membership to include women of Italian ancestry and spouses/partners of members in good standing. Membership peaked in 1986-87 at 120 as the children of the Italian immigrants in Nelson came of age, while the original “old guard” was still around.

The NICS is perhaps best known for its great banquets and dances. In its first year, a party at Mary Hall drew over 400 people. This first event set the standard where getting tickets to these popular events became very challenging as they sold out quickly.

The NICS Today

One of the Society’s long-held goals was to have a venue of its own to hold meetings and events. In recent years, the Society entered into a mutual agreement with the Nelson District Rod & Gun Club. The NICS invested in extensive renovations at the NDRGC Hall that resulted in a fully operable commercial kitchen and adjoining storage areas. This partnership satisfied the Society’s need for a place to meet and hold its events.

NICS annual events include the Festa del Vino/Wine Contest & Banquet, Society Members’ picnic, a bocce tournament, and Members’ Christmas Party. During the COVID pandemic, the Society expanded fundraising events to include sales of homemade Italian sausages and spaghetti sauce, Italian pizzelle cookies, and grapes and juice for winemaking.

Over the years, the Nelson Italian-Canadian Society has raised funds for and been involved in many local, national, and international initiatives and projects.

These include:

- Lakeside Pathway Project
- Gamma Probe Machine Fundraiser
- LV Rogers Scholarships
- Kootenay Lake Hospital Foundation
- Variety Club Show of Hearts
- CT Scanner Fundraiser
- Royal Canadian Legion
- Remembrance Day Wreath
- Canadian Red Cross Disaster Relief (earthquake, tsunami, flooding)
- Nelson Kidsport
- Nelson Minor Hockey

- MS Society
- Nelson Community Food Centre
- Nelson Rhythm Ropers
- Lakeside Rotary Playground
- Lakeside Bocce Courts
- Trafalgar Breakfast Program
- Our Daily Bread

Celebrating 50 years

The Society is pleased that with the recent easing of COVID restrictions, they will be able to host their 50th Anniversary Banquet on Saturday, May 7, 2022 at the Nelson District Rod & Gun Club Hall.

Membership in the Society has ebbed and flowed over the years. Recently the Society has seen a growth in membership with numerous new members joining. Members of the community who have Italian ancestry are invited to join the NICS.

For more information about the Society or to become a member, check out www.facebook.com/NelsonItalianCanadianSociety or email NICS President Paul Boscaroli at president@nelsonitaliancanadiansociety.com



ABOVE: This Nelson Daily News photo of April 11, 1972 captured the first executive of the Nelson Italian Lodge: seated from left, John Malito, Secretary; Bill Freno, Treasurer; Frank DiBella, First Vice-president; Albert Maida, President; Gus Correale, Second Vice-president; and Sebastian Amenta, Assistant secretary. Standing (L-R) are Directors, Armando Maglio, Gus DeVuno, Fiore Milinazzo, Cosimo Chirico, and Mike DeMeo. Missing are Directors Mike DeGirolamo, Kennedy Facchina, and Pete Lisanti.