



KIT

Keeping in Touch

*The Newsletter of the Marin County Association of Retired Employees
Member California Retired County Employees Association (CRCEA)*

APRIL
2024

www.mcareinfo.org

"VALUE, VOICE and VISIBILITY"

MCARE is the Voice of Current and Future MCERA Retirees

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by GENE PENNINGTON



Welcome to Spring 2024!

Thank you for your continued support for our luncheons! We returned to the Club Restaurant at McInnis Park Golf Center in San Rafael for the second time

for our March luncheon with 45 people in attendance! The feedback was again very positive.

Roberto Soriano, MCARE's Sgt. at Arms, submitted his resignation from the Board of Directors on Wednesday, March 6, 2024, and the Board accepted it, with regret. We thanked him for his many years of service to MCARE.

Other Board Members and volunteers have stepped forward and will manage our monthly luncheons and other events until such time as another volunteer is willing to serve as our Sgt. at Arms for the balance of 2024. If you are interested in serving out the remaining 8 months of the term of office, please contact me by e-mail at President@MCAREInfo.org or phone at (415) 254-3839.

Let's Go Giants! We've sold all 21 tickets! We will see the SF Giants play Philadelphia on May 29, 2024, with the game starting at 12:45. I'll send more details to the ticket holders soon.

Summary of March 6, 2024, Board meeting:

- We accepted, with regret, the resignation of Roberto Soriano as Sgt. at Arms.
- The Treasurer's Report for February 2024 was approved.
- The minutes of the Board meeting of January 3, 2024, were not available. They will be submitted at the next Board meeting on May 2, 2024.
- We updated the 5-year strategic plan and finalized a few tasks still to be assigned.
- Rich Arrow, Treasurer, reported that he transferred \$15,000 from our Bank of Marin checking account to our Luther Burbank Money Market account where it will earn a higher interest rate.
- Board of Directors meeting dates and times were set for 2024.

We need volunteers to help our MCARE Committees for 2024. If you're interested, please let me know or contact any Board Member of our Committee Chairs. Their contact information can be found on page 7 of this newsletter or at: mcareinfo.org/Contact. The Committee Chair appointments for 2024 are:

(cont'd on page 2)



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- BY JERRY HASSER



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *(cont'd from page 1)*

- Budget and Finance Committee – Richard Arrow, Chair
- Membership Committee – Edith Simonson, Chair
- Nominations and Elections Committee – Jeanne Villa, Chair
- Scholarship Committee – Ken Holmes, Chair
- KIT Newsletter Committee – Linda Meehan, Chair
- Records Retention Committee – Eric Davis, Chair
- Legislative Committee – Gus Guinan, Chair
- Audit Committee – Gene Pennington, Chair

All of our Board's past and current agendas, minutes, Treasurer's reports and budgets, Articles of Incorporation, current bylaws, and Policies and Procedures are available to you. Go to [MCAREInfo.org](https://www.mcareinfo.org) and login. Then go to: <https://www.mcareinfo.org/Board-Content>. Note: You have to login first before you can go the Board Content web page.

Highlights of what is coming up.

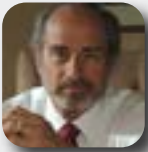
- Tuesday, April 9, 2024 – Luncheon at Mary's Pizza Shack in Rohnert Park
- Tuesday, May 14, 2024 – Annual BBQ/Picnic at Stafford Lake, Area 2, Novato
- Wednesday, May 29, 2024 – SF Giants Game
- Wednesday, July 9, 2024 – Scholarship Awards Presentation/Luncheon at The Club Restaurant, San Rafael
- August 1, 2024 – Nominations open for five (5) Officers
- Wednesday, August 13, 2024 – Luncheon at Café Bellini, Petaluma
- Wednesday, September 10, 2024 – Luncheon at The Club Restaurant, San Rafael
- October 1, 2024 – MCARE election starts for five (5) Officers
- Wednesday, October 8, 2024 – Luncheon at China Village, Cotati
- Wednesday, November 12, 2024 – Election for five (5) Officers ends
- Wednesday, November 12, 2024 – Annual Membership Meeting and luncheon at The Club Restaurant, San Rafael
- Wednesday, December 10, 2024 – Annual Holiday Party at The Club Restaurant, San Rafael

Remember, this is YOUR organization! Get involved and make a difference!

MCARE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 18, 2024

by KEN HOLMES



This year we have four \$3,000 scholarships available. The scholarships are named in honor of three deceased members who contributed greatly to your MCARE and a member who has stepped forward and is funding a new 4th scholarship:

MCARE Scholarship honoring Tom Hendricks
MCARE Scholarship honoring Bob Roumiguere
MCARE Scholarship honoring Joe Coffrini
NEW for 2024! MCARE Scholarship honoring Michael Daly

The 2024 MCARE Scholarship application is available on our website: [mcareinfo.org/Scholarship](https://www.mcareinfo.org/Scholarship). The application itself can be accessed here: [2024 MCARE Scholarship Application](#)

The deadline for submission of completed applications to the Marin County Office of Education (MCOE) is **April 18, 2024** — **no exceptions**. Transcripts and other 3rd party documents are required, so all applicants are urged to start preparing their applications ASAP. Any paperwork submitted after the deadline of April 18, 2024, will be rejected. MCOE will conduct interviews in May. Winners will be recognized at our July luncheon.

To date, the Marin County Office of Education has received only one application.

If you have a child, stepchild, or grandchild either entering or currently enrolled in college, university, or third-level or tertiary education or continuing education (vocational programs such as nursing, police or fire academies, or a trade school), **NOW IS THE TIME FOR THEM TO APPLY** for financial assistance with MCARE's generous Scholarship Program!

welcome

New MCARE Members

Teri Lane

City of SR

Congratulations

NEW RETIREES

Christopher Boden	Sheriff/Coroner
Sherry Bruce	DRO
Alicia Giudice	City of SR
Dorothy MacDougald	DRO
Alana Maykel	Sheriff/Coroner
Karon Merritt	H&HS
Margaret Olson	DRO
Pamela Roman	H&HS
Tawnya Stansell-Walsh	H&HS
Jocelyn Stortz	Community Development Agency
Kathleen Suhrke	Community Development Agency
Jennifer Vuillermet	County Counsel

IN MEMORIAM

*Our Deepest Sympathy is Extended
to the Friends and Families of:*

David Anderson	DPW
Craig Burgess	Agriculture, Weights & Measures
Rose Hall	Finance
Shirley Spencer	Beneficiary
Elizabeth H. Thompson	H&HS

A surviving spouse is eligible for MCARE membership.
For enrollment, email: esimonson1@verizon.net



TREASURER'S REPORT

by RICH ARROW

FEBRUARY 2024

CHECKING/PETTY CASH	\$31,160
CD/MONEY MARKET FUND	<u>50,655</u>
TOTAL BALANCE	<u>\$81,815</u>

Mcera Marin County Employees'
Retirement Association

COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT APRIL 2024 COLA

For most, the retirement benefit payment paid at the end of April 2024 includes a cost of living adjustment (COLA). The amount of your retiree COLA depends upon the tier from which you retired and your retirement date.

Calculating the COLA

The COLA is calculated as required in the California Government Code based on changes in the Urban Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the San Francisco Bay Area. The CPIs for the two prior calendar years are averaged and rounded to the nearest one-half percent.

The average CPIs described above represent an increase of 3.67%, which rounds to 3.5% for 2024.

COLA Maximums and COLA Bank

Each retirement tier has a maximum COLA of 2%, 3% or 4%.

If your maximum allowable COLA is less than the increase in the CPI, the difference is "banked" for possible use in a future year. If the change in the CPI is less than your maximum allowable COLA, we will make a "withdrawal" from your COLA bank, if available, in order to bring your increase up to the maximum allowable for your employer and/or tier.

COLAs by Employer and Tier

Your COLA is based on your employer and tier, and retirement date. To view your 2024 COLA, go to the [Cost of Living Adjustment](#) page on the MCERA website and click on the name of your former employer.

UPDATE YOUR MEMBER PROFILE

Please check your member profile on our website at www.MCAREInfo.org and update your e-mail address and mailing address if necessary. Many e-mail addresses are no longer valid. If you're unable to log in to the website, send Gene Pennington an email: president@MCARE.org.

MONTHLY LUNCHEONS

by ERIC DAVIS



The MCARE Luncheon on March 12 at the Club Restaurant at McInnis Park was a great success with an attendance of 45 members and guests. The luncheon was highlighted by a very informative talk about cybersecurity given by Ava Rassouli, Information Security Manager for the County of Marin, and her associates Efren Del Toro and Michael Stephens, from the Marin County Department of Information Services and Technology.

Eric Davis, MCARE Vice President, emceed the event in President Gene Pennington's absence. Eric announced the Board of Director's acceptance, with regret, of the resignation of Roberto Soriano as Sgt. At Arms, and expressed the Board's thanks to Roberto for his many years of service to MCARE in that role. In Roberto's absence, Edith Simonson, Membership Chair, handled the reception duties for the luncheon, with the assistance of At-Large Director/Scholarship Committee Chair, Ken Holmes.

Bob and Marsha McEachern were in attendance and were congratulated on their 65th Wedding Anniversary.

Reports were presented by Treasurer Richard Arrow and Membership Chair Edith Simonson.

Our next luncheon is April 9th at Mary's Pizza Shack in Rohnert Park.

APRIL 9, 2024
MARY'S PIZZA SHACK
101 Golf Course Drive, Rohnert Park
Social hour 11:30 am • Lunch 12:30 pm
\$15.00 per person



MENU

Mary's Special Fresh Garden Salad • Mary's Caesar Salad
Penne Pasta w/Marinara Sauce • Fettuccine Alfredo w/Roast Chicken & Golden Mushrooms
Gourmet Handmade Pizzas: Pepperoni • Half Cheese/Half Mushroom
Hot French Bread w/Creamy Butter
Iced Tea • Water

NOTE: No dessert. Non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages will be sold separately thru our food server only.

YOU MUST RSVP BY FRIDAY, APRIL 5th.

Two options for registration:

1. Register and pay online at: mcareinfo.org/event-5508046

Payment options:

- Pay online by credit card or choose to have an invoice sent to you
- Pay at the door

2. Contact Eric Davis, Vice President at panamaadviserc@gmail.com OR (530) 400-9899

PLEASE! Whether you pay online or at the door, you must pre-register.
The deadline for registration is Friday, April 5th.

MAY 14, 2024
MCARE
2024 WESTERN BBQ PICNIC
Stafford Lake Park, Novato
\$30 per person

SEE PAGE 5 FOR DETAILS AND REGISTRATION!





MCARE 2024 WESTERN BBQ PICNIC

Stafford Lake Park, Area 2

3549 Novato Blvd, Novato

\$30 per person

Social hour 11:30 am • Lunch 12:30 pm

CATERED BY

Debbie Ghiringhelli Catering

MENU

BBQ Pork Spareribs • BBQ Chicken

Caesar Salad • Fresh Seasonal Fruit Salad

Stuffed Eggs • Baked Beans

Country-Style Potato Salad

Penne Pasta in Marinara Sauce

Rolls & Butter

Decaf Coffee, Iced Tea, Sparkling Water, Sodas

RAFFLE

Support our Scholarship Program. Please bring raffle items!

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED. DEADLINE MAY 10, 2024!

We must have an accurate head count prior to the event.

- Register online at mcareinfo.org/event-5508047
 - ▶ Click on the "pay online" button to pay with a credit card or debit card.
 - ▶ Or choose "pay later" to have an invoice issued to you.
- Or print this page, fill out the form below, and mail it with your check to:

MCARE
P. O. Box 4203
San Rafael CA 94913

FEATURING THE LARKDALES!

Special entertainment will be provided by [THE LARKDALES](https://www.thelarkdales.com). We explore and perform three-part harmony a cappella and accompanied vocal music that broadly could be called "Americana," including an eclectic mix of bluegrass, country, indie, sea shanties, old-time gospel and more. We choose music that has heart and soul and joy and humor that has our audiences asking for more.



DIRECTIONS to STAFFORD LAKE PARK

From Hwy 101 in Novato, take exit 463 for San Marin Dr. west 2.9 miles. Turn right onto Novato Blvd. and follow for 2.6 miles. The park is on the left.

MCARE 2024 WESTERN BBQ

RESERVATION FORM

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

Enclosed is my **check payable to MCARE** in the amount of \$_____ for _____ tickets to the MCARE SUMMER BBQ May 14, 2024, at \$30.00 each.

RESERVATION DEADLINE: May 10, 2024

Please complete this form
and mail with your check to:

MCARE
P. O. Box 4203
San Rafael CA 94913

Any questions, contact ERIC DAVIS at
pamanadaviseric@gmail.com or (530) 400-9899.

MARIN TRIVIA

by MARY ANN GALLARDO



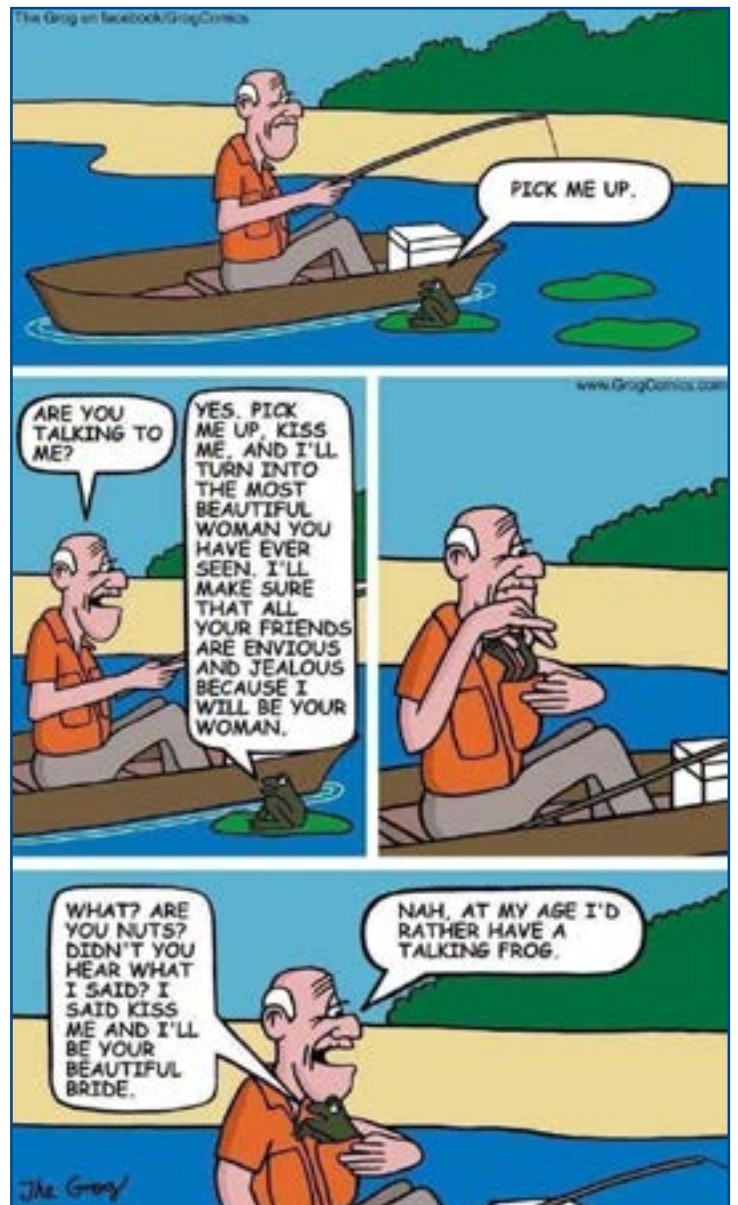
Marin Music History

On January 18, 2024, the *Marin I.J.* published an article about a recording studio nestled secretly in the forested hills of Nicasio. It was the scene of many recordings in the 80s and 90s. Bob Brown, former manager of Huey Lewis and the News, said it had state-of-the-art equipment. The artists lived in comfort and seclusion. The studio log reads like a musical Who's Who: Neil Young, Linda Rondstadt, Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, Tracy Chapman, Joe Satriani, Night Ranger, Hootie and the Blowfish, Third Eye Blind, and Aaron Neville, to name a few. Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones liked it so much he posted a letter extolling its virtues on the wall of the plush living quarters.

It's no longer a working studio; the gated property in the Santa Margarita Ranch subdivision has been a private residence for the past couple decades. It has a swimming pool, spa, sauna, solarium, basketball court, 2nd floor master bedroom/bath, and two-room guest house above the garage. It was built in the mid 70's by musician Dick Mithum, former bassist for the Sons of Champlin Band.

Here's the chance for one of you MCARE retirees to buy the property. It's for sale for \$3.2 million plus an additional \$800,000 for the adjacent 10-acre lot. May the luck of the Irish be with ye!

To read the full article, go to: marinij.com/2024/01/19/



HERE ARE SOME IDEAS FOR YOUR GARDEN FOR DAILY LIVING

PLANT THREE ROWS OF PEAS

1. Peace of mind
2. Peace of heart
3. Peace of soul

PLANT FOUR ROWS OF SQUASH

1. Squash gossip
2. Squash indifference
3. Squash grumbling
4. Squash selfishness

PLANT FOUR ROWS OF LETTUCE

1. Lettuce be faithful
2. Lettuce be kind
3. Lettuce be patient
4. Lettuce really love one another

NO GARDEN WITHOUT TURNIPS

1. Turnip for meetings
2. Turnip for service
3. Turnip to help one another

OUR GARDEN WE MUST HAVE THYME

1. Thyme for each other
2. Thyme for family
3. Thyme for friends

*Water freely with patience and cultivate with love.
There is much fruit in your garden because you reap what you sow.*

– Author unknown

BOARD of DIRECTORS

OFFICERS



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President@MCAREinfo.org



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Secretary
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AT LARGE MEMBERS



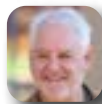
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Luncheons are held on the second Tuesday of each month, with the exception of January & June when there are no luncheons.



01 MCARE BOARD MEETING

IN-PERSON:

10:00 am at MCERA Offices
One McInnis Parkway, Suite 100, San Rafael

ZOOM: Register in advance:

mcareinfo.org/event-5668800

09 MCARE MONTHLY LUNCHEON

11:30 Social Hour • 12:30 Lunch • \$15

Mary's Pizza Shack

101 Golf Course Drive, Rohnert Park

See page 4 for menu, registration, and payment options.

Register and pay online at:

mcareinfo.org/event-5508046

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: APRIL 5, 2024



02 MCARE BOARD MEETING

IN-PERSON:

10:00 am at MCERA Offices
One McInnis Parkway, Suite 100, San Rafael

ZOOM: Register in advance:

mcareinfo.org/event-5558524

14 MCARE WESTERN BBQ

Stafford Lake Park, Area 2, Novato
3549 Novato Blvd., Novato

11:30 Social Hour • 12:30 Lunch • \$30

See page 5 for menu, registration, and payment options.

Register and pay online at:

mcareinfo.org/event-5508047

REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED BY MAY 10, 2024.





MCARE

P. O. BOX 4203

SAN RAFAEL CA 94913

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U.S. POSTAGE PAID

San Rafael CA 94901

Permit #17

Return Service Requested



REMINDERS & TO DO LIST

MONTHLY LUNCHEONS

Tuesday, April 9

Mary's Pizza Shack, Rohnert Park

Cost, menu, directions, and
registration information on page 4.

Register and pay online at:

mcareinfo.org/event-5508046



Tuesday, May 14

MCARE WESTERN BBQ

Stafford Lake Park, Novato

Cost, menu, entertainment, directions, and
registration information on page 5.

Register and pay online at:

mcareinfo.org/event-5508047



MCARE BOARD MEETINGS

April 1 and May 2, 2024

Attend in person at 10:00 a.m. at the MCERA offices in San
Rafael or by Zoom. See details and links for registration on
page 7.

Age in place with Home Equity



Apply at MarinCU.org
415/499-9780

30 N. San Pedro Road #115 - San Rafael

Subject to approval

Federally Insured
by FDIC



Member FDIC



MEMBER TRAVEL TALES

by GERRY HASSLER, SRPD, RET.

IN THE HEEL OF THE BOOT

APRIL 2023

The scenery gods were smiling as our Air Dolomiti flight from Munich to Italy passed over snowcapped Alps, with each deep, narrow valley in the range showcasing another perfect village with its own sinuous mountain stream, roads and rails.

The mountains were soon followed by the waters of the Adriatic Sea, leading to the waterfront airport at Bari, the capital of the region of Puglia, also spelled Apulia. Mainland Italy is shaped like a sensuous high heeled boot, and this region is known as the heel of that boot.

Our driver Gabriela delivered us smoothly about 45 minutes through miles of olive orchards to the town of Matera, our base for the next two nights. On arrival in the old town, or “Sassi” of Matera, we met guide Paolo Maragliulo in the small Piazza San Giovanni. Our bags were handled for us, and we strolled a few minutes farther down ancient lanes too narrow for vehicles, to reach Hotel Sassi. The unique hotel has a small cliffside reception area and breakfast room, and many of its 33 rooms, including ours, are repurposed from their original use as centuries old residential caves carved out of the limestone hill. No cookie cutter rooms here.

We settled into room 604, a spacious cave facing onto the narrow lane; a flight of outdoor steps above and across from the reception area. Down a few steps into the suite we found a king-size bed and a modern bathroom beyond. The only window was inset in the front door, and could be blocked and locked for privacy and security when desired. Fun fact about caves: At night they get really, really dark.

We joined our little group of fellow travelers for a meet and greet in a reception area conference room, enhanced with champagne – the bottle sabered by hotel manager, Francisco. Paolo then escorted us on a brief walk to the old town’s larger Piazza Vittorio Veneto and on to Piazza San Francesco to find essentials such as ATMs, pharmacies and groceries; and La Locanda restaurant for an introduction to an Italian version of happy hour, called “aperitivo”. Though it is mostly about a light drink between work and dinner, it can also inexpensively substitute for a full dinner, with a selection of small plates and shared dishes.

As we enjoyed the fare, Paolo taught us the all purpose word “allora”. Depending on how loud it is said or muttered and in what tone of voice, with a variety of expressions including eye rolls, shrugs and/or hand gestures, it can express surprise, disappointment, anger, confusion, or anxiety; such as heard from a restaurant manager when a large group of clueless tourists arrived on a busy night without a reservation.

The next morning was devoted to a walking tour of the old town, descending from our hotel at the hill’s mid level to the bottom, where a narrow street has replaced the former stream, which had devolved to an open sewer until the mid twentieth century. As we walked, Paolo provided copious information on Matera history from its founding in neolithic times, through centuries of domination from Romans, Lombards, Arabs, Byzantines, Bourbons, Normans and Spaniards, and as part of a pre-unification duchy, then finally absorbed in Italy in the 19th century.

Through the centuries, numerous cave churches were dug into the hillsides, some of which we visited to see ancient frescoes on their walls. More conventional churches, including a cathedral completed in 1270, are found throughout the town, each with its distinctive architecture, art and history. At times, Matera and nearby towns were stopovers for crusaders and pilgrims enroute to Jerusalem.

(cont'd on page 10)



Hotel Sassi, Room 604

We entered a cave which is now a small museum showing the typical furnishings and conditions of the approximate five thousand residential caves occupied by many generations, with poor sanitation and air quality, food insecurity, short life expectancy, overcrowding and high infant mortality the norms. In the early 1950s the Italian government began the removal of residents from the caves to new apartment blocks in the modern town on the plateau above the Sassi, ultimately moving about fifteen thousand people in fifteen years. Since then, most of the Sassi hillside has been owned by the government.

More recently, the government and the European Union have provided support to entrepreneurs, leading to a partial rejuvenation of the area with lodgings, retail and restaurants. This effort has been enhanced by the Sassi being designated a UNESCO heritage site in 1993; and a European Union designation of Matera as a cultural capital; resulting in greatly increased tourism and residential growth.

The unique area has also been favored for decades by film and TV producers for location shoots, including the 2021 James Bond film “No Time to Die”, using parts of Matera in the early scenes. We walked a main road on the edge of town that served in a chase scene, and the piazza where Bond’s Aston Martin sprayed machine gun fire while doing donuts. Matera is also the setting for the Italian family drama “Two Sisters”; and for the crime drama “Imma Tatarrani”. That show was doing a location shoot just steps from our hotel room one night as we returned from dinner.



Matera, Italy

Our feet and our appetites were happy to arrive at the patio of Nadí Ristorante for lunch. We started with cavatelli pasta in a creamy tomato sauce, with arugula and aged ricotta. That was followed by Bracciola – thinly sliced veal wrapped around cheese and black pepper, baked and then served in more tomato sauce.

The combination of travel across several time zones, information overload, and fine food and wine led to deep sleep overnight in our cave.

The rays of the strong sun next morning made their way across the Adriatic and forced through the louvered window slats in our cave door, illuminating the space much the same as in previous centuries, gently waking us, ready to enjoy a fine breakfast buffet with delicious cappuccinos.



Alberobello, Italy

The morning’s destination was another UNESCO site, the town of Alberobello, famous for its Trulli houses with their conically shaped dry construction stone roofs. As we walked the town’s narrow streets, Paolo told us how the town began, and that the reason the roofs were built without mortar was so they could easily be dismantled. This was desired due to the taxation system at the time imposed by Spanish rulers, which only covered completed buildings. When the locals learned that the tax man was about to visit, they hastily dismantled the roofs, then reassembled them upon the tax man’s departure. We toured the rather dark and cramped interior of one preserved compact Trullo home, watching our heads while moving between its two rooms with their limited furnishings and lack of modern fixtures. In contrast, many Trulli have been expanded, connected and modernized by residents and entrepreneurs, some as first or second homes, and some offered as vacation rentals.

(cont'd on page 11)

The fame of the unusual houses has resulted in Alberobello being a popular tourist destination, and the crowds became heavy by late morning. We had time for a quick stroll on our own and a gelato on a bench under a small shade tree before departing for a fine lunch in tiny Le Spessite restaurant at the hilltop village of Ostuni, known as the White City, for its white buildings overlooking the Adriatic.

Not far from Ostuni, in the community of Cisternino, we visited Il Frantolio d'Amico olive oil farm and factory for a tour and tasting. The organic operation has been in the same family since 1917, producing the very best quality extra virgin oil from olives hand picked, from onsite trees, including some from Roman times. A tasting of several blends convinced us how flavorful and diverse olive oil can be, and to not necessarily rely on the first one we see on a grocery shelf.

Further down the coast we strolled the seaside and marina of the town of Otranto, enjoying another gelato while gazing across the Adriatic at the snow-covered mountains of Albania, some fifty miles away.

We finished the day in the bustling small city of Lecce, checking in at Hotel Santa Chiara, a short two block walk from a Roman Amphitheatre and the central Piazza Sant Oronzo. After orienting ourselves with an easy stroll in this very flat city, we followed Paolo's recommendation and enjoyed a relaxing dinner piazza side at Antica Pizzeria da Michele.

We started the next day at the hotel's rooftop breakfast buffet overlooking the city's old quarter, watching palm trees sway in a strong breeze. After, Paolo led us on foot through the nearby blocks, pointing out many fine examples of the elaborate Baroque architectural style the city and surrounding area are known for. Standing proudly on one side of the Piazza del Duomo is one such masterpiece, the Cattedrale Maria Santissima Assuntare, or Cathedral of Lecce, with its grand portals and many chapels.

A more humble space sits near the corner of two other sides of the piazza; this belonging to the master papier maché artist Marco Epicochi. We entered his workshop on invitation, discovering that this art is nothing like little projects we did in grade school. Instead, life size and larger religious statues and icons are made this way, lasting for centuries, and light enough to carry in processions and ceremonies while looking like they were carved from wood. In mere minutes as we watched, the master created an intricate small figure, folding and shaping dampened special paper precisely over a wooden frame; creating a flowing folded formal garment, all to be intricately painted later.



Marco Epicochi, Master Papier Maché Artist

Our next and final morning in the region was spent in the small town of Galatina, a short drive from Lecce. The biggest attraction there is the fabulous 14th century Basilica di Santa Caterina d'Alessandria, with its incredibly rich and vivid frescoes covering walls and ceilings, completed by the most renowned artists of the time, brought in from other parts of Italy with their crews, with no expense spared. More humble markings were pointed out as well, scratched discreetly and faintly on some walls by pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land.

Leaving the Basilica and walking up the street, we encountered a musical group and dancer performing traditional Tantarella songs and dances, some of the moves mimicking those of tarantulas. The tradition goes back centuries in varied forms, with some moves expressing frustrations of women whose lives were constrained by old ways.

A few steps further up the street, Paolo invited us into the small shop of book binders Rita and Salvatore Congedo, who continue their work by hand, as learned from their parents. Their projects include everything from original works to restorations of historic tomes, court documents and religious items. Paolo surprised each member of the group with a blank hardbound journal handmade in the shop – a fine custom souvenir.

Finally, we waited comfortably, sipping cappuccinos in the nearby piazza while Italian Air Force fighters from the Galatina Air Base roared overhead, until our ride collected us for the next destination.

(cont'd on page 12)

MEMBER TRAVEL TALES by JERRY HASSER (cont'd from page 11)

And a fine destination it was. L' Astore Masseria is a high-end winery, olive oil producer, and five star B&B. We enjoyed a detailed tour and descriptions of both the olive oil and wine cellars, followed by a fine buffet lunch paired with vintages of white, red and rosé.



L' Astore Masseria

The combination of activities, sunshine, fine food and wine led to a drowsy ride back to Lecce. We rallied that evening for an excellent farewell dinner with Paolo in a subterranean restaurant off the main plaza.

Altogether, a great experience in this fascinating and less visited part of Italy.

Mille grazie e ciao, Paolo!

