

LITTLE ITALY DAYS COMMUNITY REPORT OCTOBER 2019

Celebrating our roots & Supporting Bloomfield businesses

BY:

Sal Richetti, Event Producer

Little Italy Days, Inc. TM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are pleased to present this comprehensive report to the community from the promoter of Little Italy Days. Its purpose is to provide transparency regarding the history and current activities of Little Italy Days. This report, along with supporting videos will be available on www.littleitalydays.com, and accessible to any individual or organization.

HISTORY

Little Italy Days was started in 2002 by the Bloomfield Business Association (BBA) as a way of promoting the local businesses. Over the years the attendance at the festival grew, gaining national recognition and being awarded “Best City Event, Best State Event and Best Food Festival. The BBA went inactive in 2008, and the festival was then promoted by the Bloomfield Development Corporation (BDC) from 2009-2011. Funds were raised by the BDC and a committee of local stakeholders was involved in the planning. In June, 2012 reduced funding left the BDC with no staff, and no one to lead the organization, planning and fundraising for Little Italy Days. Faced with the possibility of cancelling the festival and realizing the negative impact it would have on the local businesses, the committee of stakeholders decided to turn the festival over to Big Day Entertainment, a local, Pittsburgh based business owned by Sal Richetti, a local businessman and experienced producer of events. Mr. Richetti was born and raised in Bloomfield, and is a stakeholder, owning property on Gross St. in Bloomfield. He had been involved in the festival since the first year, booking the entertainment through his company. Mr. Richetti has produced the festival since 2012, and has worked diligently to keep the same goal, to increase the bottom line of the local businesses. He has consistently reached out to the local community groups as partners for the event, and regularly visits the businesses on Liberty Avenue. A letter of endorsement was sent by the committee to all Bloomfield Businesses expressing their complete support of this choice. It would also ensure that Little Italy Days would be a lasting event when organized and operated by a knowledgeable event planner.

CURRENT TEAM MEMBERS & BIOS

Mr. Richetti’s planning efforts are backed by an experienced team that has previous involvement with Little Italy Days, as well as other events around the tri-state area. Sal Richetti Events employees 4 direct full-time administrative people all year long that handle vendor booking, logistics, accounts receivable, accounts payable, permits, marketing, advertising, graphic design, and social media. Additional staff members for Little Italy Days include:

Mark Machi- Director of Operations – Mark Machi is the owner of the Exercise Warehouse Gym in Bloomfield. He has been involved in Little Italy Days since the first year and is on Liberty

Avenue from the start to the finish. He was born and raised in Bloomfield and has served on various Community Development Boards.

Guy Costa-Government Relations – Guy Costa assisted with Little Italy Days and serves as a volunteer, bringing his experience in government operations.

Karla Owens-Community Relations – Karla Owens organized and promoted the festival from 2004-2011 as a local business owner of Bloomfield Jewelry, as Mainstreet Manager for the Bloomfield Business Association, and as Executive Director of the Bloomfield Development Corporation. She assists with vendor management and logistics and serves as Community Relations for Little Italy Days.

PAST EFFORTS OF GIVING TO THE COMMUNITY

Mr. Richetti is consistently developing programs to support local businesses. The following is a list of business development strategies and their outcomes.

- *Donations have been made to St. Maria Goretti Parish and The Bloomfield Business Network
- *Donations have been made to the Columbus Day Parade and the Halloween Parade
- *Free street space is given during Little Italy Days for St. Maria Goretti Parish. (six spaces)
- *Reduced vendor fee for local businesses should they choose to be on the street; or they are able to set up on the sidewalk in front of their business for free during the festival. Station, Rocky's and others participate in this way.
- *Bloomfield Go Card – This idea was for the local Community Development Corporations to assist with promoting discount cards used at the local businesses after the festival as an incentive to visit the business district throughout the year. This concept never materialized.
- *Funding supplied to Bloomfield Development Corporation – A grant program was established in 2017, as a method of fairly distributing funds into the community. Funding was given to the BDC to clean and maintain the Island at the bridge. This project was discontinued when local community groups could not agree on who had rights to the space.
- *Every community group in Bloomfield gets stage time to announce events and programs as well as free space on the street to set up a tent for their activities. The Bloomfield Citizens Council and Bloomfield Business Network take advantage of this and are visible on the avenue for the entire festival.
- *Every community group gets their name printed in the Little Italy Days Souvenir Program Book
- *Every year community meetings are held to update the community on activities and street closings. This information is also always available on www.littleitalydays.com and social media.
- *A non-profit entity, Liberty 24 was created to support the community and the business district through Little Italy Days and other events.
- *Promotion of local businesses on KDKA 1020 live radio with host Rob Pratt and Larry Richert on live radio broadcast.

- *Promotion of local businesses on KDKA TV Pittsburgh Today Live Television - Every year three local businesses participate.
- *Dave Crawley special reports on KDKA; 2 businesses were featured
- *One month prior to festival, over 200 press releases are sent to media outlets promoting Bloomfield and the festival
- *One week prior to the festival we hold a press conference hosted by Paul Martino, from KDKA TV, and other local TV Stations, and invite community groups.
- *Social media campaign on WPXI featuring the festival and businesses of Bloomfield.
- *Opening day (Thursday), KDKA Radio host Marty Griffin did a live remote from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. in front of The Pleasure Bar, with featured local businesses, branding Bloomfield for the entire four-hour broadcast.
- *Ads are placed in the Post-Gazette promoting the festival and Bloomfield.
- *Facilitated and brought Anthony Bourdain host of national TV show Parts Unknown to Bloomfield to film an episode that aired in 2016 season
- *Promoted and paid three bands to perform on Liberty Avenue for the community to enjoy

IMPROVEMENTS

In 2015 the following changes were made:

- *Taylor Street remained opened – This lessened the traffic in the residential area
- *More efficient trash collection – The goal is to have Liberty Avenue completely cleaned and all tents out by Sunday evening. We have video to show success with these efforts.
- *Better traffic flow and signage. Over 100 detours signs are put up, and all road closures and detours are posted on [www. LittleItalyDays.com](http://www.LittleItalyDays.com). Furthermore, we do not have any control over local residents and businesses that advertise their private parking spaces for profit. Signs directing traffic to these spaces are conflicting to our traffic flow plan, and confusing for festival attendees. Any time these signs are noticed, they are removed by our staff immediately.

Additionally, the following improvements have been made over the past five years.

- *Additional seating
- *More police presence and safety measures
- *On site paramedics
- *Established emergency plans
- *Changed the ending time from 10:00pm to 9:00pm and Sunday from 7:00pm to 6:00pm
- *Free Shuttle Services – Partnership obtained with UPMC for the Luna Garage Employee parking lot with 1000 available spaces. Over 100 signs are posted publicizing free parking, along with social media promotions.
- *Partnerships with Uber and Lyft to provide alternative transportation to the festival
- *Regular meetings with City of Pittsburgh and Port Authority.

* Designated bike parking space at West Penn Lot and share the lane signs on Liberty Avenue on Thursday and Friday, through communication with Bloomfield Livable Streets.



Bicycle Parking



Share the Road Sign



Open Bike Lane



Share the Road Sign

CURRENT PARTICIPATION

During the 2019 festival, Little Italy Days staff interviewed businesses and many of them expressed support of the festival. (see youtube video). Several Bloomfield institutions are also sponsors including Highmark/Allegheny Health Network (West Penn Hospital) – Official Sponsor, UPMC, Rohrich Honda, First Commonwealth Bank, First National Bank, WesBanco, and PNC Bank. Both Highmark and UPMC have mobile units present during the festival for community outreach.



Line at Angelo's

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Bloomfield currently has four active non-profit organizations that we communicate with regularly:

Bloomfield Business Network (BBN) – *The Bloomfield Business Network is a membership based community organization that strives to promote local businesses in the Liberty Avenue, Baum Boulevard, and Main Street corridors by maintaining the community's image and offering resources to sustain the neighborhood in the present and the future. (Mission)*

Bloomfield Citizens Council (BCC) – *Represents the Citizens of Bloomfield.*

Bloomfield Development Corporation (BDC) – *Focuses mainly on community engagement with development, and other issues, and hosts meetings related to specific issues. The mission of the Bloomfield Development Corporation is to build a thriving, diverse community through equitable engagement.*

Bloomfield Livable Streets (BLS) - *advocates for infrastructural enhancements that promote accessibility and safety for all users of Bloomfield streets.*

The Bloomfield Business Network and The Bloomfield Citizens Council have given their total support to the festival organization, and Mr. Richetti keeps open communication line with all community groups throughout the year. We are always open to listening to the community and rely on the Community Groups to use their methods of notifying businesses and residents, as they do for all of their other facilitated community events.

PROCEDURES OF OTHER BLOOMFIELD EVENTS

Every year, three other events are held in Bloomfield that close Liberty Avenue; The Pittsburgh Marathon, The Halloween Parade and the Columbus Day Parade. No public meetings are requested for any of these events, nor is there any business development plan that remotely compares to the Little Italy Days Plan.

Separate from the events listed above, Little Italy Days has and can operate without closing Liberty Avenue. It is the decision of the City of Pittsburgh Public Safety to close a street and they do so only for safety purposes. Liberty Avenue is closed for only two days during the four-day festival at which time, Taylor St., Mathilda St. and Milvale Ave. are all open to cross over Liberty Avenue with crossing guards in place. This is a safer and more efficient arrangement than complete side street closures.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS and OPPORTUNITIES

*School fundraising – St. Maria Goretti school is aggressively fundraising to keep the school open. As written in the ***“Spirit of Bloomfield Magazine”***, the fundraising committee is looking forward to Little Italy Days to set up booths and raise a lot of money towards their goal. Little Italy Days is extremely important to the local school for fundraising opportunities.

*Business Recruitment Opportunities – Little Italy Days is an ideal time for the local Community Development Corporations to showcase Bloomfield. The owner of Tambellini’s Food Service has been attending the festival for 15 years and recently purchased a building on Liberty Avenue.

*Fundraising for non-profits – Free Space is provided for the local community groups to do their own fundraising. With over 100,000 attendees over a four-day period, there is a huge opportunity to fundraise for their activities. Bloomfield Business Network and Bloomfield Citizens Council take advantage of this opportunity every year.

*Little Italy Days has a parallel goal with the Bloomfield Development Corporation. On the BDC Website for the Saturday Market, it is listed that they provide free space for local Bloomfield businesses, twice per year.

****Participating businesses will receive a free vendor space at the market at up to 2 times per year. They can use the space to advertise to new potential customers, promote special events at their primary location, and connect with patrons from all over the greater Pittsburgh area in a friendly community festival setting. By attending the Market, businesses have the opportunity to grow their following by accessing a new customer base.***

This is also Little Italy Days’ viewpoint as well, and the attendance at our event is over 100,000 in four days, thereby offering local businesses a valuable revenue generating opportunity.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety is of utmost importance to the Producer and staff of Little Italy Days and every effort is made to produce a safe and family friendly event. The following points show results and efforts.

- *No crimes have been reported, including any for public drunkenness
- *City of Pittsburgh On-Site presence – Police are present roaming the festival and present at street closures. The producer complies with the City of Pittsburgh's requirements on the number of police needed during the festival.
- *In addition to on-site presence, Zone 5 police cars regularly drive through and monitor
- *Private, overnight security is provided.
- *Allegheny County Sheriffs are present at the festival.
- *City of Pittsburgh will remove any illegally parked vehicles, residents and business are encouraged to call the police if this happens
- *All festival food vendors are certified by the Allegheny County Health Department and comply with all Allegheny County Health Department requirements. In addition, the Allegheny County Health Department also performs on-site inspections.
- *Our team is trained to be aware of potential public safety hazards.



Sal Richetti with Pittsburgh Bureau of Police

2019 FESTIVAL

Little Italy Days 2019 was held August 15-18, 2019. Prior to the festival, the following changes were made to improve this year's festival:

- *Added Bloomfield businesses logos and promoted their specials on www.littleitalydays.com
Over 200,000 click thrus to the website.

- *Suggestions boxes were posted at the tent at Cedarville and Liberty, no complaints were registered
- *St Maria Goretti School raised over \$17,000 during the festival.
- *Greater number of and more visible porta johns
- *Tented rest area on Cedarville St.
- *More dumpsters
- *Hired more workers for clean-up/trash through People Ready, a staffing company. Over 80 garbage cans were placed throughout the festival and crew of 19 people were present on various shifts.
- *City of Pittsburgh Public Works does a street sweeping and flushing of Liberty Avenue, making it cleaner than it was prior to the festival and at any time during the year. (see cleaned streets video). The entire staff works diligently towards this goal and is very proud its success.
- *Placed additional crossing guards at road closures and cross streets
- *Scheduled a full line up of local entertainers, including Bob Scullion and the Mystics, Magic Moments, Randy Galiato, Earth Wind and Fire tribute band, Mojo Hand Band featuring Marty Pickur, John Lupone, opera singer, and accordion Hank Edwardo, all of whom are from Bloomfield.
- *During the event the promoter visited many Bloomfield Businesses to discuss their thoughts on the festival. A total of 68 businesses, representing 87% of the total Bloomfield Businesses expressed support for the festival and spoke about the benefits to their business. (Video is available)



Rest Area on Cedarville St.

RESPONSES TO CONCERNS FROM 2019 FESTIVAL

LACK OF ITALIAN THEME - NON-ITALIAN FOOD VENDORS (CARNIVAL ATMOSPHERE)

Little Italy Days was started in 2002 and was patterned after the Feast of San Genaro in New York City. At that time Bloomfield's business district was comprised predominately of Italian themed businesses and restaurants, and the community consisted of many Italian American residents. The goal of the festival was to bring crowds into the neighborhood that would shop the local businesses then and all year long. It was an Italian Festival because of Bloomfield's long-standing identity of ***"Pittsburgh's Little Italy"***.

Today, in 2019, the Bloomfield Business District has a large mixture of ethnic restaurants and shops. Long time Italian Restaurants such as The Pleasure Bar, Alexander's, Donatelli's, Sausalito, Caliente's and Lombardozzi's are still present, yet the remainder, which now make up the majority consist of American, Thai, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and soon to be a Korean Restaurant. Bloomfield's identity as Pittsburgh's Little Italy is somewhat diluted with the addition of these various ethnic restaurants. Demographics have changed and Pittsburgh's emergence as a high-tech city has brought in a new, diverse generation that calls Bloomfield home. Italian festivals all over the United States are faced with the challenges of securing Italian Vendors. The attendance at Little Italy Days keeps growing and the event is recognized as one of the premier events in Pittsburgh. Perhaps it's because Little Italy Days has managed to weather the changes and embrace the diversity, while still keeping its core purpose, to promote Bloomfield and increase the bottom lines of the local businesses. As diversity has entered Bloomfield, so it must for Little Italy Days. There are many others who live in and visit the community that are not of Italian Heritage but still enjoy the music, food, diversity of restaurants, and overall atmosphere. The non-Italian vendors do very well, as do the non-Italian local businesses, showing that there is a market for alternatives. Because the event is free, many families attend the event with children, and they want different food choices such as French fries and nachos. Others attend for the world class entertainment, whether it's Italian or not. Many of these would not attend, and the festival would not continue to survive if these options were not available. Little Italy Days continues to remember the roots of the community as displayed in the ***"Welcome to Bloomfield, Pittsburgh's Little Italy Sign"***, while following the progression of the business district and embracing the diversity. The festival still has a large Italian representation and includes many Italian Vendors, Italian Bocce Tournament (24 Teams), an Italian Mass and Procession, three stages of Italian Themed Entertainment, Little Miss Italy Contest, Italian Cooking Shows, Italian Dance Groups, Italian Idol Singing Competition, Italian Music and Opera, Italian Wine and Cooking Demonstrations, as well as an abundance of Italian Foods, Desserts, Italian T Shirts, Trinkets, and Crafts. The bocce tournament is a huge draw with the Italian Team, led by Mayor Peduto playing against the Irish Team, led by County Executive Rich Fitzgerald. There are many other local media and sports celebrities who attend this tournament.

Our surveys and interviews with Liberty Avenue businesses prove that Little Italy Days still significantly increases the revenue for most of the local businesses over the four-day period like no other time of the year. We do recognize that certain businesses choose to close, and many of them do for other events including the Halloween Parade, the Columbus Day Parade and the

Pittsburgh Marathon. This is not interpreted as negative to the festival, as there are other reasons for closing such as lack of staffing, vacation, family commitments or renovations.

The following Bloomfield restaurants and businesses are on record of being fully supportive – Highmark, Allegheny Health Network (Official Sponsor), UPMC, Rohrich Honda, Mini of Pittsburgh (both of whom display their vehicles at the festival), Little Lou's Bar, Spill the Wine, Paddy Cake Bakery, Rocky's, Azorean Café, Donatelli's, Lot 17, Froggy's, Station, Angelo's, Merante's, Calientes, Sausalido's, Lombardozi's, Commonwealth Press, Flower Printing, Alexander's, Tessaros, APlus Mini Mart, Howlers, The Iron Lung, Smokin Brews, and The Pleasure Bar. Caliente's had seven spaces in 2019, and most other restaurants and bars had two spaces. State Farm Insurance also took advantage of Little Italy Days attendees by bringing in their corporate headquarters to gather email addresses and potential new customers. Oriental Massage was giving free neck massages and specials for the weekend. These are examples of what all businesses can do during the festival to get more customers. Commonwealth Press, Flower Printing, Froggy's Azorean Café, Spill the Wine, Iron Lung, Smokin Brews and Fudge Farm are eight new businesses on Liberty Avenue that have been able to better promote their businesses to the many festival attendees. The following are a few quotes from Bloomfield Businesses. (These and all the information are available on the supporting videos)

Caliente – Nick Bogacz “We pay our taxes with this money” “My family depends on this”

Merante's – Maria Merante “We do one month's worth of business in four days.”

Lot 17 – Dave Namestnk – “It's great exposure”

Paddy Cake Bakery – Patrick Connolly – “Where can you have a business where 20,000 come to your front door to try your product?”

*Little Lou's Bar – Steve Lardo – “We do two weeks' worth of business in four days.”

*Azorean Café – Elsa Santos – “It's great exposure for us as a brand-new business”

*Pleasure Bar – Jamie Campau - “It's a lot of extra revenue and money we need to pay bills and payroll”

*Station – Curtis Gamble - “Over the four-day festival we really do see a substantial increase in business that helps our bottom line, especially coming out of June and July which are the slowest months of the year”

*Lombardozi's – Tony Lombardozi, Jr. “Not only do we get a lot of business that week but there is a substantial amount of new business and repeat customers throughout the year after initial contact is during Little Italy Days.”

*St. Maria Goretti Parish – raised over \$17,000 in four days. See their totals below that is copied from the “Our Faith Community News” section of the Parish Bulletin.

The Little Italy Days were not only a great success from an evangelization perspective but also as a fundraiser.

The final profit totals for the four days:

Food Sales \$10,924

***Flea Market \$ 3,987 50/50 Raffle \$ 275
Lottery Basket \$ 139
Ateleta Women Donation \$ 518
Total \$15,843
Tent Rental - \$ 475
Electric Pole - \$ 300
Net Total to School \$15,068
St. Joseph Church Donations \$ 2,158.65
Madonna della Civita \$361 (to St. Vincent de Paul)***

***Thank you once again to all the parishioners
and parents from the school that helped to make this
evangelization effort and fundraiser such a success!***

If the reasoning is that Little Italy Days should only offer Italian Vendors, then property owners in the business district should only rent their buildings to Italian Themed Businesses. It's no different from a businessman producing a festival. Liberty Avenue property owners are businessmen that profit from their tenants with no accountability to the community. Decrepit buildings like the laundromat at Pearl St., businesses such as Ace Check Cashing, and 13 vacancies on Liberty Avenue are examples of this. Along Liberty Avenue, the tree beds are overgrown and littered with garbage that Little Italy Days staff, not local stakeholders, cleaned and mulched on Sunday before the festival. Residents and community groups should press to have these building owners maintain and clean up their property all year long and force a community process for this purpose as well. The Little Italy Days team welcomes a community process and is always listening to concerns.

CORPORATE VENDORS

These types of vendors are at every festival, solely to offset the costs of producing the festival. Sponsorships are more difficult to get as boards, managers and the economic climate changes. Additionally, costs to produce an event with three stages of entertainment, (30 acts), permits, tents, tables, chairs, sound systems, paramedics, advertising, promotion, crossing guards, insurance, signage, labor, clean-up, dumpsters, porta-johns, barricades, police, shuttle buses and overnight security continue to rise.

MAKING THE EVENT SMALLER

From 2002 to 2011, Little Italy Days was operated by the local non-profit community groups, first the Bloomfield Business Association, then the Bloomfield Development Corporation. In its early years, all the organizers were business owners and would work around the clock to manage the festival. There was very little support from the local businesses with organization or fundraising. Through the community group, money was raised from grants and fundraising, but the costs increased every year. Even with many volunteers, it was a challenge to break even. Business owners and community groups do not have time, staff or knowledge to

produce or finance the festival. It is a huge project that takes many months to plan and requires a staff of over 75 workers. Additionally, Lou's Bar on Gross Street and Froggy's on Taylor Street which are at the start and the end of the festival footprint, benefit greatly from the two extra stages. All Bloomfield businesses in between benefit from the vendors needed to keep the flow of festival attendees to these areas. The current area has been the same footprint since 2014.

CONCLUSION

Over 100,000 people attended the festival and enjoyed it immensely. Many people who grew up in Bloomfield return during Little Italy Days for family reunions. We received an enormous amount of positive feedback from businesses and residents and will continue to listen to the community and produce a safe, family friendly festival that promotes Bloomfield and significantly increases revenue for the local businesses. We feel that no other event does this as diligently as Little Italy Days.

PLANS AND IDEAS FOR 2020

- *Update and rebrand by adding a slogan to the event name: Little Italy Days - Celebrating our roots and promoting Bloomfield Businesses.
- *Encourage vendors to give discounts to Bloomfield residents for their products and services
- *Italian Flags on all the vendor tents and the three stages
- *Making the main stage on Cedarville exclusively all acts Italian.
- *Producer is in talks with Duquesne Light for the possibility of Christmas Lights in Bloomfield