

## NEW YEAR'S EVE, A GRAND TRADITION

How do we welcome the New Year? Well, we do toast midnight with champagne. However, our "toasting" is done at the Holiday Inn in Cortland, New York. What is unique about that?

Picture 40 to 75 people streaming in and out of a motel room-size hospitality suite near the midnight hour, wishing each other a Happy New Year and you will have a different take on what "toasting" is. Especially when you know that this "toasting" has been going on for 27 years on New Year's Eve with basically the same people, mostly related, at the same location!

These people are locally known as the "Ciardi Clan" and I am proud to be a member by marriage of this "extended family." The "Clan" began this annual New Year celebration in 1973 and we are looking forward to another significant event at the end of this year.

Our "extended family" is pleased to share a unique tradition with your readers.

The tradition which continues to this day, was born of a need to provide a **"Security Blanket"** for a group of emerging youths; our children and grandchildren, yet to arrive.

This "extended family" includes the Voelkl, Maggio, Privitera and DiRienzo families. A common bond joins all of us, which is the 4 Ciardi sisters who were born and raised on the northwest side of the city.

Susan Ciardi Voelkl and her sisters, Mary Ciardi Maggio, Ann Ciardi Privitera and Jean Ciardi DiRienzo, are the children of Ignazio and Lena Ciardi, of Myrtle Hill Park, a short, quiet tree-lined street in Elementary School No. 30 and Jefferson High School area of Rochester.

Brothers-in-law Karl Voelkl, Tom Maggio, George Privitera and Larry DiRienzo thoroughly enjoyed our Sunday get-togethers with our growing families at our beloved in-law's home, where we stuffed ourselves with Momma Ciardi's pasta and roast chicken and Dad's potent red wine (we called it "liquid dynamite").

As our children grew into teens (read 13 through 20), we tried to devise ways of enjoying the holidays together and keeping our children safe and off the roads and out of trouble, but happy. Christmas, Easter and other annual holidays were not a big problem, but New Year's Eve was!

During the February 1973 school break, Tom and Mary Maggio and George and Ann Privitera and their children visited Greek Peak Ski Resort, south of Syracuse, and introduced their children to skiing at these "kid-friendly" ski slopes. They returned very excited about Greek Peak and Cortland, New York area. The rest of us were persuaded that here was an ideal way to spend the New Year's holidays together. I guess none of us were happy attending couples-only parties at Rochester's local bars, nightclubs and restaurants. We wanted to enjoy the holiday with our kids.

What started as a "**Security Blanket**," evolved into a "**Grand Tradition**." Our aim was to provide good clean fun activities, a great few days at a hotel with swimming pool and game room, lots of food and beverages( legal for those of age). On New Year's Eve, all 4 of us brothers-in-law served as "hall monitors" in the hotel, to make sure the youths didn't try to leave the hotel and take off in their cars for the local pubs in the Cortland area. Together, weight-wise, we totaled about 1,000 pounds. So, those kids were going nowhere with these "linebackers" in the way.

No wonder Momma Ciardi never let more than one of us sit on her sofa at one time! But let's blame it on Momma's great cooking!

Together, under Tom Maggio and George Privitera's organization and management, we reserved and occupied anywhere from 10 to 25 hotel rooms, plus hospitality suite, depending on how many of family and friends attended in any one year. Reservations were made for the next year before we left for home.

The Holiday Inn in Cortland, New York went through many management changes and hard times including utilities being shut off for non-payment one New Year's Eve weekend. But we stayed on and made our own fun. Some winters we attended when there was no snow, but that didn't phase us. We were together and that's what counted.

The usual drill upon arriving at the Inn was to quickly check in, unload food and drink, small warming ovens, hot plates, etc. for the hospitality suite, and move out to the slopes!! (Of course, some of the "older" members detoured to Turning Stone Casino before showing up at the Inn) After a great day of skiing, we would return to the Inn hungry as bears, and have our "pre-dinner" repast in the hospitality suite.

This routine of eating, skiing, eating again, continued up until New Year's Eve. That's when we prepared to dine together in the Inn's dining room where several tables were reserved for our group. After dinner, the partying began in earnest, with a local party band providing the entertainment for our "dynamite" dancers. We always filled the dance floor, and as the night wore on, many of our young ladies and gentlemen were seen dancing on tables. (We're not allowed to do that any more) Ah, such youthful exuberance! We did have so much fun and many laughs.

Later on in the early morning hours of one new year, it's rumored that several of the young folks built a snowman in the intersection of 2 motel corridors, causing other motel guests to report the goings on. Fortunately, the local constabulary was not involved due to the intercession of "Fast Talking Tom" and his conversations with the motel management.

Today, 27 years later, Sue and Karl's son David Voelkl, is nominally in charge of making all of the arrangements and doing a superb job with ample help from his cousins, Sandra Maggio Monahan, Frank Maggio, George and Steve Privitera and all their respective spouses. We hope to continue this grand tradition for many years to come.