

Community-minded Curiale honored with award

By Patricia E. Meola

SUMMIT – A long-time local resident has been honored with the Rocky Marciano award for lifetime achievement by his hometown in Italy.

Aldo Curiale of Whittredge Road, a lifetime member of the Summit Historical Society, grew up in San Bartolomeo in Galdo, part of Benevento. He arrived in the U.S. in 1970, where he joined his father and sister. Five years later, he married Irene D'Abramo of Livingston and opened a shop that has grown into Summit Millwork & Supply on Morris Avenue. Along the way, the former championship bicyclist has earned countless honors for his skills as a woodworker, and his firm's commissions have included jobs ranging from the New Jersey governor's mansion, Drumthwacket, to custom pieces that furnish the Mayor's Office at Summit City Hall. And in his spare time, this husband, father and grandfather has created a home for his own family that can only be described as a masterpiece.

Curiale said that even as a child, he knew his passions included mathematics, mechanics, geometry and classic

architecture. At an early age, he worked with his father, Nicolino, at the elder Curiale's woodworking shop in Via Orto de la Terra, and also spent time learning from his uncle, Dante Cifelli, at that man's blacksmithing operation.

"I also had a strong passion for sports," said Curiale, "particularly bicycling and soccer." Others quickly took notice of his athletic talents, and encouraged him to take up cycling. He entered his first race at age 15, on May 31, 1964, and won. A year later Curiale and his beginner level teammates were cycling on behalf of a local sports organization called U.S.S. Bartolomeo, and quickly collected wins in three "important races," he recalled.

"I trained year-round," said Curiale, "and during the snowy winters I moved my program indoors. When I couldn't do my usual daily road training, I rigged up a platform with rollers and used a stationary bicycle." With the arrival of spring, training moved outdoors, and by 5 a.m. each day he was out pedaling the

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mountainous roads, "probably about 120 kilometers each day," he said, about 70 miles. Afterwards, he reported to his father's shop for work, crafting doors, windows and furniture.

By this time part of his training included studying the races of other cyclists, and then one day Curiale entered a competition and finished in 15th place.

"My fellow club members couldn't understand that I had so much training and could not perform well in that race," he said, "and then they realized I was over-training for the races, which averaged between 90 and 120 kilometers." He took a two-week rest, he said, and after that, stopped training seven days a week. Soon after he was approached about taking part in a promotional race some distance away, and Curiale said he "went around the town square to take up a collection so I could pay someone for the gas needed to take me to the race." In the final sprint of a 1965 competition Curiale not only won the race, he was also presented with a monetary prize for reaching the summit of the mountain first.

"In addition to my gold medal," he recalled, "when we came back to San Bartolomeo that night, so many people were waiting for us, waiting to congratulate us, because word had reached town that we'd won." A photographer was on hand, and the next day's newspaper featured a picture of the victorious Curiale. After that, Curiale said, "glory and accomplishment" became a part of his athletic life. His name was always listed in race results published Monday mornings, because nearly every Sunday, he finished among the first five cyclists in competitions held throughout Italy.

The last race for the selection for the Italian championship was organized by his own club, and the chosen route was nearly identical to the one Curiale used for training. Again he was triumphant, and "won all the posts," he said, being not only the first to the top of the mountain but also first across the finish line.

Selected for the Italian Championship in Tuscany

For 1965 he was selected for the Italian Championship, and the race was held in Tuscany. A number of spectators traveled to the event from Curiale's hometown, and were there to see him take the lead with a group of about 10.

"I finished the race almost at the end of my group, but arrived as the first of the team from my region, and was the first member to cross the finish line," he said. "It was a great joy for Professor Pastore, the director of my sports group, and he was also the coach of my team. When I came back, I was promoted to a higher level of competition."

The following year featured fewer races for Curiale, as he was spending more time helping his father at the shop, but in 1967 he moved up to race at a higher level, and earned the trophy and gold medal in the first competition he entered.

A year later, in 1968, Curiale had been called to serve in the Army. In 1969 he was notified he had been assigned to Roc Monte Cavo, where he finished his service in 1970 as an assistant controller for air defense. During his time in the military, Curiale had received permission from his local sports club to join another cycling group, Grottaferrata of Rome, racing with that team during his tenure as a soldier.

All the while, Curiale continued to pursue his interests and talents in architecture and mechanics, helping his father and



SHOWING HIS SKILLS – Long-time Summit resident and lifetime historical society member Aldo Curiale demonstrated his wood-working skills to Janet L. Whitman, a former mayor of the city. Mr. Curiale's latest community contribution has been restoration of woodwork that is part of *Chemical Engine No. 1*, which has been decommissioned by the city and which will soon have a new home on the grounds of the Carter House.

learning skills from his parent, but also, he said, "often trying new methods and creating new systems to manufacture things." In 1967, he said, he designed and created innovative tilt and turn windows for a client named Mr. Grasso in Via Costa, and in 1970, after his discharge from the military, Curiale crafted all of the millwork and exterior materials for additional tilt and turn windows, he said, "the first of their kind in San Bartolomeo and maybe the first like that in all of Italy."

Firm founded after custom job in Summit

After relocating to the U.S., he worked with his father for about two years, and then honed his talents as a foreman at Colonial Woodwork in Irvington. Upon his marriage in 1975 he took two months leave for an extended wedding trip, and when he returned, the shop had closed. Soon, Curiale recalled, he was approached by Phyllis Sank and Ann Grimes and asked to make furniture for the then-Summit Child Care Centers, "and that was the start of my custom shop with my brother Mario, which we called Summit Custom Cabinet Shop, Inc.," Curiale said.

In 1976, Curiale and his wife created Custom Cabinet & Millwork, and by 1984 the firm was known as Summit Millwork & Supply, and had established its headquarters in a large Victorian home at 235 Morris Ave., where it remains. Curiale said he worked full-time until he suffered a heart attack in 2004. But while son Nick, a Summit High School graduate, runs the shop today, the elder Curiale retains the title of president and rarely lets a couple of days pass without stopping by.

Described by clients as a true craftsman, Curiale noted having his own company allowed him to accomplish what he described as his major professional ambition: To create architectural millwork that is not only historically accurate but also admired by the public, both clients and others.

His passion as an inventor continued, too. In 1982 he

collaborated with two San Bartolomeo friends, Salvatore Santarella and Michele Cincolo, to build a machine that manufactures curved cornice work on a flat surface. And in 1984, again aided by Mr. Cincolo, he designed an attachment for a shaper to manufacture molding with a radius composite. It was built for a client's special order, and resulted in a machine that not only mills straight molding but adapts to curved molding, too. During this time Curiale purchased a grinder to use in making his own specialty tools, and those efforts resulted in the 1985 founding of A. & J. Tool Specialties, which specialized in importing and distributing specialty tooling for the woodworking industry.

He was honored with the furniture industry's Daphne Award for a corner cabinet that is now in his son's possession, and in 2000 was selected to join a New Jersey delegation to a major furniture show in Italy.

His professional life has also led him down interesting avenues socially, including attending several World Cup soccer matches in 1994 as the guest of Governor Christine Todd Whitman. In addition, his resume includes several "Man of the Year" awards from Italian-American organizations.

Currently Curiale considers himself semi-retired, and spends much of his time enjoying the company of his four grandchildren. But he admits he is always on call to "spend time at the shop when someone needs my expertise. There are times they ask my advice, but really, my son runs the business, and has worked with me there since he was a child. Architects and builders come to

us, for jobs all over, including one in Portugal. I probably go to the shop maybe twice a week, but only after I'm done with my cardiac rehab exercises."

Craftsmanship evident at his own home

The firm's current focus is on homes, and Curiale said residential architectural molding remains one his passions, as is evident in his own residence. Although still a work in progress – reminiscent of the old adage about the shoemaker's children – there is not one nook or cranny in the large brick home that lacks Curiale's custom touch. The foyer features a magnificent staircase, and instead of installing spindles in the standard fashion, the craftsman has them individually angled so that as one ascends or descends, the best angle from a design point of view is always seen. Intricate inlaid floors and custom built-ins are everywhere, but so are indications that this is not simply a showcase, it is also a family's home – including playthings for grandchildren scattered throughout the first floor.

Over the years, Curiale has maintained numerous photo albums and scrapbooks of his accomplishments, in addition to volumes of letters from clients raving about his work. In sharing them, though, he is not boastful but somewhat matter-of-fact. And he does not hesitate when asked by local groups to volunteer his expertise – the latest pro bono project taken on by Summit Millwork is restoration of the wooden steering wheel from the Summit Fire Department's 1927 Chemical Engine No. 1.

"I developed many skills and my expertise over the years," Curiale said. "I have fulfilled my professional talents."