

Resiliency dominates as friends, relatives in Italy describe COVID-19 conditions

By Rich Thomaselli

It was an extraordinary week locally, nationally and internationally.

Dutchess County declared a state of emergency over the rapid spread of the coronavirus, shutting down schools for two weeks until making a further assessment by March 30.

The National Basketball Association, National Hockey League, Major League Baseball and numerous other sports leagues suspended their respective seasons – including the National Collegiate Athletic Association canceling its annual ‘March Madness’ men’s and women’s basketball tournaments.

And Italy, Spain and France have put their citizens on lockdown in an effort to halt all interaction and slow the growth of the virus.

“It’s terrible over there,” said town of Poughkeepsie resident Antonio Mazzarelli, who has family and friends in Italy. “It makes you wonder how we could have gotten to this point with the virus and really makes you wonder if it can happen here.”

Indeed it does.

So the Southern Dutchess News asked some area residents who have relatives and friends in Italy to put us in touch with them, to try gain a perspective of what the idea of a lockdown really means.

Mazzarelli is right.

It’s terrible – for now.

Italy was the first country to go into lockdown as it continues to be devastated by the virus. Michael Spirito, a friend of Wappingers resident Heather Gleason-Berry, is originally from New York himself and moved to Rome five years ago to teach English at a local Italian school.

When talk began two weeks ago that schools would be closing down, Spirito said to himself, ‘Hmmm, a week at home might not be so bad.’

“Be careful what you wish for, as they say,” Spirito said.

Soon after schools closed, businesses followed.

“The only things open here for us to warrant leaving the house is grocery stores and pharmacies. No one is working. The grocery stores are only allowing about 25 customers in at a time. You must wait outside,” Spirito said, referring to the picture he took of a long line at a grocery store. “Inside the store they have put down black tape to help you judge how close you should be to the person in front of you. It feels like we are in a war of sorts. The atmosphere is eerie and quiet. You must also remember that Italy is much different than the States. If you don’t work, you don’t get paid regardless the circumstance. This is going to affect many lives.”

Gianpasquale Cusano is Mazzarelli’s uncle. Unlike bustling big-city Rome where Spirito is, Cusano and his family live in Vitulano, a small village of about 3,000 residents in the province of Benevento Campania in southern Italy.

He, too, can only leave the house for food, health reasons and work.

“State measures have become increasingly restrictive and currently very few people are working. Most of the offices are closed,” Cusano said in an email exchange. “If you go out to shop, you must have a self-certification with you and you must respect safety distances in the shop.”

Cusano said that where he is, residents are being physically tested by the virus and the cuts in healthcare, especially the elderly.

“The greatest danger that comes from this virus is for people already physically tested by health problems, such as the elderly,” Cusano said. “The fault of this spending review is partly due to the cen-



Residents in Rome stand in line outside a grocery store, albeit with sufficient distance.

-Photo courtesy of Michael Spirito

tral Italian government in recent years, but above all due to European economic policies. Meanwhile, we find that the aid arrived for this emergency does not come from Europe, but from China (where the virus originated in the Wuhan Province).”

Another Benevento resident is Edoardo Scarinzi, an exchange student who lived in Dutchess County with Mazzarelli before moving back to Milan to continue his studies and then relocating in Benevento because of the increasing number of coronavirus cases in northern Italy, near Milan.

His university was closed three weeks ago; the lockdown was implemented about a week ago.

“Life now is very unusual,” he said. “We cannot leave our houses without a work reason or to buy food or any necessary thing or to go to the doctor. It’s not too clear if it’s permitted to go for a walk, but I think so because I’ve gone to the mountain today and nobody said anything. The police are controlling the

streets and you have to show them a declaration of what you’re going to do. If it’s not something absolutely necessary, they can put you in jail for three months – though it will never happen. More realistically, they will fine you.”

Scarinzi said he is trying to be realistic and pragmatic about the situation.

“In my opinion, this emergency will go on for a lot, probably until June,” he said.

But he’s also trying to remain upbeat, as are Spirito and Cusano.

In fact, while exchanging emails with SDN, Cusano’s young daughter asked him what he was doing. He told her that he was answering questions from an American journalist about the virus and their day-to-day lives right now. That prompted the young girl to draw a picture with a note on it. She asked her father to scan it and attach it to a reply email to the journalist.

The picture was a rainbow with the Italian words, ‘Andra Tutto Bene.’

‘Everything Will Be Fine.’



A drawing by a young Italian girl with the Italian words ‘Andra Tutto Bene,’ which translates to ‘Everything Will Be Fine’ in English.

-Courtesy drawing

D’Alessandro declares State of Emergency in East Fishkill

Town of East Fishkill Supervisor Nicholas D’Alessandro declared a State of Emergency in East Fishkill on March 16. The following are to be observed:

-All mandates of the Governor and County Executive supersede provisions herein.

-As of 8 a.m. on March 17, the Town Hall will be closed to the public. The public should call the various departments to learn how to handle their specific needs.

- All Zoning Board and Planning Board

meetings are postponed until those scheduled for May 2020.

- The Town Board meeting will be held on March 26 without the public in attendance. Public hearings will be adjourned until future dates. The agenda will be posted on the Town’s website. Comments on agenda items received by email by 4 p.m. of the meeting date and will be read into the record by the Town Clerk.

- All Senior and Recreation Programs are suspended until further notice.

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