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Special****UT**[SAVE THIS](#) [EMAIL THIS](#) [PRINT THIS](#) [MOST POPULAR](#)**OUT GOING****Diversity, Italian-style****Festivale Siciliano is a day to celebrate a rich heritage**

By Wendi Whitmore

May 18, 2006

Sicily is an island that was conquered and colonized many times in early history, creating the cultural diversity celebrated at the 13th annual Festivale Siciliano in Little Italy Sunday.

San Diego was the destination for many Sicilian immigrants at the turn of the 20th century. "Many who were tuna fisherman in Italy could work there and Little Italy was born. In the 1920s and '30s Little Italy was just that – the language was spoken there, Sicilian shops and restaurants sprang up and a great number of Sicilian families lived there," said Giovanna DiBona, entertainment director for the festival. "A lot of the immigrants felt at home here because San Diego looked so much like Sicily then."

In the 1970s the I-5 freeway came through and broke the neighborhood up, scattering Sicilian families into pockets all over San Diego. It remained that way until the early 1990s when Marco Li Mandri, working with the Little Italy Association, pulled together some food and a band or two. He wanted to bring everyone back to the old neighborhood again – at least for the day – and the first Festivale Siciliano was born.

DATEBOOK**Festivale Siciliano**

*10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday;
India Street between Date
and Beech streets, Little
Italy; Free;*

romanholidaymusic.com

or (619) 469-2206

The festival has grown to include Roman Holiday, a group of musicians and dancers that creates an interactive wedding, and a brilliantly colored flag procession that represents the many cultures of Sicily. Frank Sinatra came from a Sicilian background and will be represented by Peter Pavone in a tribute. There will be three stages running all day with entertainment, and there will be oodles of Sicilian food.

You'll also find a tribute to Sinatra's buddy, Dick Martin, as well as a performance by the Italian Dance Troupe of Balboa Park. Many Sicilians, including the busload that comes down from Los Angeles for the event, stop first for Mass at Our Lady of Rosary church, built in 1921.

"It's a big celebration for everyone, and we want everyone to come out and see how great Little Italy is now," said DiBona.

■ Wendi Whitmore is a San Diego-based writer.

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