

# Italian Americans

## Scotch Plains, New Jersey

It does not take a detective to figure out the relationship between the town of Scotch Plains and a small village in Italy called Montazzoli. In fact, it is as simple as matching the round peg in the round hole or, more to the point, matching a Del Negro with a Del Negro or a DiFrancesco with a DiFrancesco.

You see, nearly every Italian in Scotch Plains, and there are many, can trace his or her roots to Montazzoli.

Mauro Checchio said he traveled to Italy two years ago and, even though he was familiar with the history between the two towns, he was still shocked when he read the list of names on a war memorial in Montazzoli. It was if he was reading the phone book in Scotch Plains.

“There were all the same names. It really shocked me,” said Checchio, whose father came to Scotch Plains from Montazzoli in 1917.

Late yesterday afternoon, 38 Montazzolesi, including the mayor and seven councilmen, arrived at Kennedy International Airport in New York and went straight to the Scotch Plains Italian-American Hall for a welcoming party. Today, the two towns will celebrate their special bond when they exchange “Sister City” proclamations at the Scotch Plains municipal building.

“Words cannot express my joy,” said Montazzoli’s 31-year-old mayor, Juigi DeFanis, using a translator.

DeFanis initiated the sister city project when he wrote to Scotch Plains last year, suggesting a formal ceremony to honor the relationship.

It is not merely that some of the residents of Montazzoli migrated to America and settled in Scotch Plains. Rather, they came to Scotch Plains in several waves, with generation after generation making the move, to the point where the exodus drained Montazzoli of much of its population. Many also migrated to Brazil and Argentina. The town, located near the Adriatic Sea about 2 1/2 hours from Rome, had a population of 5,000 in 1950s, but is now down to around 1,500.