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WHAT IF you went for a walk in the woods today...

and found crystals, emerald green crystals on the roots of an upturned tree?*

What if it was a treasure trove of Maine tourmaline? Everyone would be excited. Truth is, gems: gem tourmaline in brilliant green is coming out of the ground in the Western Mountains of Maine right now.

The picture above was taken July 15, 2018 at the SparHawk mine.

The rings shown above are our newest creations in SparHawk mint green teal Maine tourmaline.

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*And yes, in 1820 two kids from Paris Hill, Maine found tourmaline for the first time on the roots of an upturned tree.

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HUNGRY EYE

THE ULTIMATE

Frutti di Mare

What a way to stretch out the holidays! **Families and legends** converge on the **Italian Heritage Center** to share the *ultimate* feast of Southern Italy.

BY SOFIA VOLTIN

THE FEAST OF THE Seven Fishes is seasoned with the past. On January 18, working with generations of local families, Portland's Italian Heritage Center hosts a traditional *Festa dei sette pesci*, an Italian-American dinner showcasing seven different seafood dishes. It commemorates the wait, or the *Vigilia di Natale*, for the midnight birth of the baby Jesus. Each year, a committee collaborates to form a menu of traditional dishes passed down through their families in, predominantly, Southern Italy. This year, *Portland Monthly* has been invited to eavesdrop.

"We tried one year to do a Christmas dinner [featuring dishes such as lasagna], but it didn't work. Everyone wanted the fish!" says Carmela Dalfonso Reali, president of Italian Heritage Center. Carmela's sister, Marianne Reali, was the first female president of the IHC. The sisters' maiden name is Dalfonso. Both married two brothers—the Realis.

"Our members liked it, but they said they'd rather have the fish because they don't get it otherwise," Marianne says. "These kids today, a lot of them don't make

it anymore. A main course for the dinner, and a real Italian one, is baccalà. Basically, everybody eats it for Christmas."

"Baccalà is salted, dried fish," Jim DiBiase, chairman of the Cultural Committee, says. "When it's raw, you can almost see through it.

"My father traveled to the U.S. in the early 1900s from Lettomanoppello. Most of the Italian [immigrants] were men, and they expected to return to Italy. Some of them went back yearly, some of them went back at different times...But he stayed, and most stayed, even though they'd initially intended to earn enough money and then go back. [My dad] was a stonecutter. The Italian word for it is *scalpellino*. He came to Stonington, Maine, and he worked in the quarries."

DiBiase's wife, Francesca, is a cousin of the DiMillos. "My father and mother both came from Italy. My father came in 1922, ten years before my mother. He traveled a lot. He was a very good cabinet maker, and he worked throughout the States. His name was Luigi DiMillo. [Tony] DiMillo is my cousin. They had a lot of girls. Every Sunday, their mother sent them down to my mother's house, she hadn't been in Ameri-

ca very long, to help her with the children. They would also help her learn English. All the neighbors were helpful. Weren't they nice to the immigrants back then?"

"It was all immigrant Italians on our street, and [neighbors] would come down at night and visit us, drink homemade wine. All the food would come out. The mothers would nurse the babies, we'd run under the hoses, and all the doors would be open."

Assunta F. Savage, a native of Calabria, Italy, moved to Scarborough with her husband Jess Savage 30 years ago. "My family's Christmas gift is baccalà stew. It's made of dried cod with tomato sauce, potatoes, onion, garlic and parsley. It's what we have every Christmas Eve. The recipe is from Catanzaro in Calabria, where I was born."

Gina Di Pietrantonio Ferrante, a Portlander by way of Lettomanoppello of Abruzzo, has another take on the Italian Christmas Eve dish. "Calabria is all fish, but not all of Italy is on the water. A lot of places, like my village, are on mountains, so you can only get fish a certain day of the week. If there was dried fish, then you'd use that. In my house, we ate a lot of legumes and baccalà. We had a soup with chickpeas, red

Our guests have spoken.



“The service and atmosphere, and quality of the food is top notch! LOVED the mussel appetizer!”



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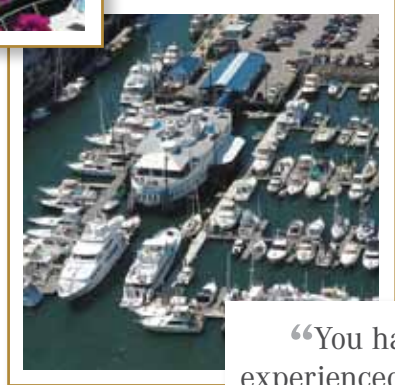
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HUNGRY EYE



From left, Barbara Pileggi and Francesca DiBiase work on red peppers. Marie Pardi presents a calamari dish by Marianne Dalfonso Reali.

sauce, and baccalà. Baccalà is very versatile because it absorbs a lot of flavors.”

Another huge favorite is “the calamari,” Marianne Reali says. Whether it’s served as a salad, fried, or stuffed, it seems every family has its take on cooking up some squid. “I have a special calamari salad recipe we make for this dinner all the time.” The taste “brings me closer to my grandparents, especially my Calabrian grandmother. I tweak it with jalapeño peppers, chi-chi beans (roasted chickpeas), and roasted peppers.”

“One dish that stands out in my memory is called Linguini Alice,” Jay Scala of East Deering says. His grandmother hails from Naples. “It’s an anchovy sauce. When

you cook it, it turns brown along with all the linguini. When we were kids, we called it dirty macaroni. We also had a baccalà salad, a shrimp sauce, and squid sauce. We loved them all, but all year we looked forward to dirty macaroni.”

These tastes of Southern Italy are presents to the New World, many stemming from the massive immigration of Italians to the United States at the turn of the last century. “A lot of these traditions started because we used whatever we had,” says Ferrante. “Call it peasant food if you like. If you go down to the roots, everything was very simple. Embellishing it with different flavors inspired the magic.”

Shared times and love of family deep-

en many a sauce. The rougher the situation, the more profound the inspiration.

“When the big immigration surge came in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Italy was impoverished,” DiBiase says. “You can’t imagine how poor it was. One of the stories from that time is that the southern Italian peasants took plaster off the walls to mix with their bread dough to make their bread last. That’s what drove the immigration. And that’s what we all mean when we say peasant food.”

Fortunately, adding plaster into bread dough didn’t stick in Italian traditions. But if you think turning a thrifty dish into a celebrated delicacy doesn’t resonate with Maine, think of lobster (once used as fertilizer!). The storied past of Italian immigration to Portland is celebrated every day in the Forest City. But especially so on the night of January 18. As DiBiase says, “It’s more than just food and the dish. It’s the thought and the tradition.” ■

Tickets are \$35 for IHC members and \$40 for non-members. 772-2500.

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