



September 9th, 2023 – Dedication of San Francesco Di Paola Statue

San Francesco Di Paola Statue Dedication

By: Sam Grecco in honor of Kathrine Grecco

Thank you all for coming out today. This is a historic moment in the Italian community. We are gathered to celebrate the blessing and dedication of the new bronze statue of San Francesco Di Paola here at Piazza Italia Park.

When the city took down the Christopher Columbus statue we had an empty pedestal looking at us. At the end of a church meeting in July '22, someone asked what statue can replace the Christopher Columbus statue? Julius Germano replied that the only statue that could represent the Italian community would be San Francesco. I loved this idea and took the bull by the horns and made it my mission to replace the empty pedestal with San Francesco. I called my good friend Henry Cisneros to help me navigate through this approval process with the City of San Antonio. After talking with Henry, I formed a committee in Oct of



2022 and within a week we had our first meeting. The committee members that helped make this happen are Sam Guido, Linda Kohnen, Paola Cristadoro, Father Carlos, Julius Germano, Tony Magaro, Mario Rubio, Henry Cisneros & myself. Thank you all very much for your time and energy!

We all know the red tape you have to go through at the City to get an approval. Knowing that there was only 1 other religious statue on public property we were concerned. This should have been harder but everything went smoothly and we had approval in 6 months from the City Council. I had many meetings with the city and I was surprised that I was never ever met with a negative response. During the very first meeting with the City, I did shock them when they asked me how long it would take to make the statue? And I answered, that I had already ordered it and would be ready in 6 months!



I commissioned the famous Italian Artist Antonio Caruso to make 2 statues. One for the San Francesco di Paola Sanctuary in Paola, Italy and the other for here at our Piazza Italia Park. I told the artist that I wanted the statue to represent one of San Francesco's most famous miracles and he captured the essence of the Saint beautifully and his story in the design. For those who do not know the history of the design let me tell you this short story...

San Francesco di Paola approached a ferry captain and asked if the captain would be kind and willing to transport him and two monks to Messina Sicily for charity because they had no money. The captain said "no". The Saint then spread his mantle on the waves of the strait and sailed the 4 miles to the Messina without difficulty. The ferryman shouted to the Saint to come back but he didn't. He then said to the two monks, "Get on the ferry, we will follow him". Over the



centuries, this image has become the most famous scene representing the Patron Saint of the Region of Calabria in Southern Italy. This statue also represents all the immigrants crossing the ocean to come to the United States.

Sadly, the artist had hoped to be here with us today but his health would not permit him to fly.

In May of this year, my family and friends traveled to Paola, Italy for the blessing and dedication of the other statue. During this trip I experienced 2 special blessings.

One was that the statue was casted at the foundry on March 27, 2023. This happens to be the exact Birthday of San Francesco. The foundry had no idea that it was the same day as the Saints birthday when they cast it!

The second blessing was when Father Francesco from the Sanctuary in Italy approved accepting the statue and he told



me that the statue would be placed in a museum on the second floor. However, when Father saw the picture of the casting of the statue he changed his mind and relocated it to the front of the Sanctuary for all to see when they enter! These felt like Divine Interventions.

Then in San Antonio, I had another wonderful blessing when the City gave the approval for the statue with no negative responses. Who is behind these blessings? Was it San Francesco, my wife and all our Italian ancestors who have passed away? Think about how all of this came to be so easily in such a short time frame!

As you all know by now this Saint is near and dear to me and my family. I am thrilled to be donating this statue in honor of my childhood sweetheart and loving wife of 61 years Kathrine “Kathy” Greco.