

Dolfi Family



he Dolfi name originated in the northern Italian province of Tuscany at about 1100 A.D. The earliest record of the name is found on a family crest which hangs on the wall of a medieval church dating from about 1100 A.D. in the small Tuscan town of Montangnana. The Dolfi's were among the original families who settled the mountain town and have remained a strong family name there for the past 800 years.

Carl Dolfi was born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, on May 21, 1912, of immigrant Italian parents, Rudolfo and Narcissa Dolfi. At the age of four, his family returned to Italy to improve his father's health. He grew up there and was educated there with his six brothers and one sister. He did not return to America until 1928.

Life back in America was not always easy for a sixteen year old who neither understood English nor had a job. But Carl, being resourceful and eager to learn, found work in the coal mines of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. He eventually made his way to Saginaw in 1929, where he worked for the Eaton Manufacturing Co., first as machine operator, then as a machine repairman.

When work during the depression years was slow and there were layoffs, Carl painted houses. It was at one of the house painting jobs in 1934 that he met the girl on Townline Road who would become his wife five years later. Belinda Janni and Carl raised three daughters in that same farmhouse: Mary Ann Dolfi Cheney, an elementary school teacher who died in 1968; Barbara Joan Dolfi Pace, a retired Clio School Parent Educator; and Louise Billie Dolfi Rau, an interior designer at Oscar Rau Furniture of Frankenmuth.

Carl always dreamed of owning his own business. In 1953, he converted a weekend, roadside fruit and vegetable stand on the corner of Dixie Highway and Townline Road to a full-line grocery store called Dolfi's Food Market.

He and his family worked together to build this business. Carl worked evenings in the store after his job at Eaton's. His three daughters worked there after school, weekends, and in the summer. Belinda, Carl's wife, worked at the store all of the time. It was there that the family values of hard work, honesty, fair play, and teamwork were learned and put into practice. The small grocery store helped put Carl and Belinda's children through college and finance Carl's first trip back to Italy in 1960 to visit his sister and brothers.

Carl sold the grocery store to his brother-in-law, Bill Janni, and retired from the Eaton Corporation in 1971 after 40 years of working there. Then T.W. Johnston hired Carl part-time at the Frankenmuth IGA and promised that if he worked at the IGA for forty years, he could then retire for good. Carl continued to work Monday and Wednesday evenings at the IGA just to stay busy and keep in contact with people of all ages. He finally retired in late 1994 at the age of 82.

Carl always loved geography, history, gardening, and building things. In his spare time, he built doll houses for the miniature department of Rau's Country Store. He was an avid gardener and boasted the only collection of home grown fig trees in Birch Run Township.

On May 11, 1994, Carl received the Frankenmuth Rotary Paul Harris Fellow Award. Carl was chosen for this honor because, throughout his life, he demonstrated the fresh and positive strength of the human spirit. Carl supported international harmony and lived his life demonstrating his belief in it.

