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## World Series team from Italy welcomed by Downriver Italian-Americans

There's no place like home. And there's no food like home cooking.

Members of the native Italian baseball team taking part in the Junior League World Series in Taylor received a heroes' welcome Wednesday night by the Downriver Italian-American Club in Wyandotte.

The 14 players and three-member coaching staff received a standing ovation as they marched into the Biddle Avenue hall with the Italian flag. They sat at the head table, where they ate a traditional Italian pasta dinner that included spaghetti, penne and meatballs.

They shook hands with many fellow Italians living in the area. They talked about life back in Italy and they posed for photos.

Coach Marcello Massa addressed the crowd in both Italian and English. Massa said the team was moved by the reception and urged those present to support them in the stands at Taylor's Heritage Park.

"We came here to play an American sport," Massa said. "We're here to learn, but we want to show we are able to be satisfactory, too. We will play hard to give satisfaction."

Massa also is president of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Little League in the northeastern most part of Italy. He said he accompanied the players, Manager Diego Minin and Coach Sergio Furlan because he understood English better than others.

The team from Italy won the championship of the region that encompasses Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The regional tournament was held in Kutno, Poland.

World Series volunteer Sam Pizzo of Taylor alerted club member Florence Coleman that the Italian team would be in town and Coleman informed club President Frank Giannotti, who was raised in Bonefro, Campo Basso, in the Italian region of Molise.

"We were amazed how they were able to grasp the championship from that whole area," said Giannotti, a retired electrical engineer who lives in Riverview.

Giannotti and other club members, including former Taylor resident Tony Lumia, were at the field for Italy's series-opening game against Saipan.

"We had our Italian flags," he said. "We rooted for them. As a matter of fact, they hit the first home run and we were rooting for them all along."

The club invited the team to its monthly pasta meal, which is held the third Wednesday of each month. Coincidentally, Italy was not scheduled to play on Wednesday.

During the ceremony that preceded the meal, Massa presented a shield from his league to Giannotti, who said it was important to "honor our Italian friends who are here to win the title."

"This was very, very special for us," Giannotti said. "This was the first time for us meeting an Italian team – in America or in our neighborhood. It was so nice to have them with us. We bring our culture to our neighborhood here. We always welcome our nationality."

*For more on the Downriver Italian-American Club, visit [www.diac.us](http://www.diac.us) or call (734) 285-4044.*

*-- Dave Gorgon*

*Photos coming soon.*

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