

# MR. SICILY

by Louis R. Carlozo

Some Italian Americans lead through their given profession, while others excel through the service they offer to others. You'll also find people in either one of those camps who try something creative and hit the mark. But rarely will all those hallmarks of success converge in one person quite like they do in Alfred M. Zappala.

The Lawrence, Mass., native established himself in the legal field on multiple fronts. He was the co-founder and managing partner of Struffolino & Zappala, a firm that concentrated in civil and criminal litigation, small business advising and corporate start-ups, along with bankruptcy, domestic relations, wills and trusts, and tort matters. He also was a founding trustee of the Massachusetts School of Law in Andover, Mass., and the founder of MTS Bar Review, a firm that prepared hundreds of law school graduates to pass the Massachusetts bar exam.

Yet for all those noteworthy accomplishments, Zappala's endeavors outside of his law career truly set him apart from his peers. With Sicily as his ancestral homeland, Zappala has set up part-time residence there, getting involved with the local populace in a big way. He heads up The Sicilian Project, an effort that helps Sicilian students become English-proficient so as to expand their opportunities. (Right now, unemployment for Sicily's 18- to 24-year-olds stands at a staggering 54 percent.)

Meanwhile, Zappala has released three books based on his Sicilian experiences — "The Reverse Immigrant," "Gaetano's Trunk" and "Fighhiu Beddu" — and conducts tours of that fabled island. As of this writing, he's putting the

finishing touches on a fourth book, slated for a fall release. Fra Noi caught up with Zappala to talk about his career, creative endeavors and his incredible efforts on behalf of Sicily's young adults.

**Fra Noi: Tell us about your Italian ancestry as it relates to Sicily.**

Alfred Zappala: I'm 100 percent Sicilian, and both sets of my grandparents come from the same town. They hailed



from Trecastagni, a village on the slopes of Mt. Etna. Both grandfathers didn't know each other in this town and it only had 4,000 or 5,000 people. But they met in America. Isn't that bizarre? [Laughs.]

People left in a big migration at the beginning of the 20th century, and my grandfather Gaetano Torrisi was a heroic guy. He came to the shores of America with \$12 in his pocket — the equivalent of \$263 today — and all his possessions were in a steamer trunk. He had no support network whatsoever and ended up doing pretty good as a tradesman. My grandfather Alfio Zappala was a humble man. He worked for Prince Macaroni Company and made pasta. He was a gentle man, and I have great memories of him.

**FN: What was it like growing up with that kind of Italian influence?**

AZ: My house was bilingual; we spoke English and Sicilian — not Italian, but Sicilian — and it never really left me.



## ▲ ALFRED ZAPPALA

An esteemed lawyer and educator, he made a pilgrimage to the land of his ancestors, and that has made all the difference in the world.

In Lawrence, Mass., everybody settled into one specific part of town, and as our generation matured and moved up, people started moving to the suburbs. Except my suburb now is Sicily: I moved back! [Laughs.]

**FN: You've had some success writing books about Sicily. Can you help give readers a taste of how you're approaching the narrative with your latest?**

AZ: I go on road trips; I take a traveling companion with me and against the backdrop of certain areas, I write about the history. I do it with humor; I juxtapose Sicily today versus when my generation was growing up. This new book will be my fourth on Sicily. People who can't get there live vicariously through me, and people seem to like the way I write. It should come out right around Thanksgiving.

**FN: There's a very interesting story behind why you took up a dual residence in Sicily. Would you mind sharing that?**

AZ: I became a dual citizen about 15 years ago. In 1996, my father was dying and on his deathbed, he asked me to do him a favor and go to Sicily. He'd made a promise to his father, when he was dying, to go back to the church in his an-

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