

Committee focuses on Italian studies

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For Matt Melucci, it was all about the Italian. The Italian people. Italian history. And especially the Italian language.

By May of 2012, when he passed away from cancer, the former Madison County Circuit Clerk had spent much of his 68 years steeped in more than 2,000 years of Italian culture.

To honor that legacy, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville announced a partnership recently between the Matt Melucci Italian Studies Committee and the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, part of the school's College of Arts and Sciences.

One of its goals is to raise funds to support activities involving the study of the Italian language and culture. The money will also help students in study abroad programs, and will bring lecturers and international presentations to the campus.

In a news release from the university, Philip Rarick, the committee's chairman and a retired Illinois Supreme Court Justice, said that the committee established the fund with a deep sense of gratitude for Melucci's legacy.

"We know that Matt would be honored that his dream and hard work towards promoting Italian language, culture and SIUE students interested in studying internationally will carry on."

While it was his professional and political career – he spent two decades as Madison County Clerk and a couple of stints as chairman of the Madison County Democratic Party – that gained him prominence, he was also known for helping build a sense of community for those of Italian lineage. He was also passionate about promoting the Italian language, which he saw as a gateway to understanding Italy's people and culture.

Melucci was president of the Italian-American Club of Southwestern Illinois and served as an advisor to the Italian Cultural Association of Southern Illinois.

He also promoted the teaching of Italian at SIUE.

"Foreign languages help open new professional doors to SIUE majors not only nationally, but also internationally," said Dr. Joao Sedycias, chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature. "The Matt Melucci Fund will help us introduce Italian language and culture to SIUE students who aspire to reach into the global marketplace."

Contributions may be made to the SIUE Foundation-Matt Melucci Italian Studies Fund, B. Bernard Birger Hall, 30 N. Circle Dr., Edwardsville, IL 62026. The SIUE Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions are tax-deductible.