

## SENECA FALLS SMS LODGE



Between 1884 and the early 1900's, there was a large migration of families from Italy to the United States. Many came seeking better lives for themselves and their families, finding employment in the woolen mills and industrial plants of Seneca Falls, NY.

Leaving their homeland and embarking on a new life with little more than a suitcase full of clothes and a few bucks in their pockets was a monumental task. In

America, many had no contacts much less a job or a place to stay. Seeing the plight of many of their countrymen and seeking a solution to this problem, a group of established Italian immigrants met at the home of John Salotti on Center Street resulting in the formation of the Societa di Mutuo Soccorso on November 4, 1904. More commonly known as the S.M.S. (Society of Mutual Help), the society was established to help the newly arrived Italian immigrants assimilate into their new lives in America. Through its members, the S.M.S. found them jobs, put them up in their homes, helped them build or buy homes, and at the appropriate time assisted in bringing their families here to join them. While many were friends or relatives of members, any immigrant who arrived here knew that they could contact the S.M.S. and receive help.

As the immigrant children grew up in Seneca Falls, a large part of their new culture revolved around athletics. To assist, the S.M.S also began its involvement with the sports in which they or their children participated, sponsoring baseball, softball, bowling, and bocce teams. Many of the children or relatives of S.M.S. members became outstanding high school athletes, including many members of the 1939 and 1946 undefeated, untied, and unscored upon Mynderse football teams, as well as six members of the inaugural class and 16 subsequent members of the Mynderse Academy Athletic Hall of Fame, including three this evening.

By the early 50's, the movement toward organized youth sports was sweeping America and the S.M.S. led the drive locally. Many members were involved in organizing, coaching, and volunteering with the creation of the Grasshopper Baseball Program (pre-Little League), Little League, and the Junior Football League. In addition, many were instrumental in establishing and coaching basketball, football, and baseball programs at St. Patrick's (later St. John Bosco) with many of these sports lasting until the school's closing in 2007.

In 1958, a committee led by Angelo Suffredini, Aldo "Ollie" Beatini, Angelo Bonafiglia, John Pannucci, and others organized the first S.M.S. Sports Banquet. A purpose of the banquet was to bring NFL players to Seneca Falls, allowing members' and community children to meet

their heroes and encourage their participation in athletics. The first speaker was Jim Brown, Syracuse All-American and Hall of Fame running back for the Cleveland Browns. Other famous speakers included Sam Huff and Andy Robustelli of the New York Giants, and Rocky Bleier and Jack Hamm of the Pittsburgh Steelers. The members of this committee were also instrumental in establishing a sports banquet at St. Patrick's that featured famous baseball players such as Hank Aaron, Carl Yastrzemski, Joe Torre, Lou Piniella, Willie Randolph, and Dave Giusti. Attendance for Piniella and Randolph numbered close to 900.

Starting in 1961, the S.M.S. began presenting an award for the Outstanding Male Athlete at Mynderse Academy. The first winner was junior Leslie Robinson, All Finger Lakes in football, basketball and baseball. When Beatini passed away in 1965, the committee renamed the award "The Aldo 'Ollie' Beatini Outstanding Athlete Award". Soon after Title IX was enacted in 1972, the S.M.S. added an award for the Outstanding Female Athlete at Mynderse Academy. These awards are given at the school sponsored Athletic Awards Recognition Ceremony. The 2018 Aldo Beatini Outstanding Athlete Award winners are Hannah Brown-Trice and Keegan Baker.

Largely through the influence of Angelo "Suff" Suffredini, the S.M.S. began hosting fundraising dinners in the 1960's as well as end of the year banquets for any Mynderse team needing a venue to conduct its event. The S.M.S. facility, cooking, and other services were usually donated. In addition, for the past 50 years, the S.M.S. has been a financial resource for the Mynderse Academy Athletic Department, primarily due to the relationship formed by Suff and former MA athletic director, Dom Paradise, and carried over to subsequent athletic directors. When there was an expense that was not provided for by the school's athletic budget—if there was a deserving athlete who wished to attend a sports camp but could not afford it, if a team needed an extra set of practice jerseys, or whatever was needed, Suff would come to the S.M.S. which would rarely, if ever, refuse to help.

For almost 100 years, the S.M.S. has supported the athletes and teams at Mynderse Academy. When S.M.S members' children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren succeeded in athletics at Mynderse and/or college, Mynderse Academy and Seneca Falls often receive special recognition. The men who put this organization together back in 1904 are looking down on us tonight with smiles on their faces knowing that 114 years later, we are still living up to the name they gave us--"Society of Mutual Help."

The members of the Societa di Mutuo Soccorso are deeply honored to receive this recognition tonight and continue to be a resource to the student-athletes of Mynderse Academy. We, and the past and present athletes of Mynderse, owe a very special debt of gratitude to Angelo Suffredini. Suff, without your leadership, these athletes would not have reaped the benefits of your endeavors over the past 60 years and the members of the S.M.S. would not be privileged to be honored tonight.

Thank You!! from the bottom of our hearts.