

2018 President's Inaugural to Be Held in St. Louis

Our Hosts: Tony and John Favazza

Editors note: MRA's 2018 President's Inaugural will be held at Rose of the Hill in St. Louis. Our hosts, Tony and John Favazza, are third generation entrepreneurs in the St. Louis food business. Theirs is an interesting story.

On New Year's Day in 1892, our nation opened Ellis Island. During its peak years of operation, from 1900 to 1914, some 5,000 to 10,000 people passed through the immigration station each day with dreams of a future in America.

Among the group arriving at Ellis Island on the 25th day of March 1908 was Onofrio Favazza, a young man from Sicily traveling steerage on the steamship San Giovanni, all of 18 years, with \$20 in his pocket, headed for a new life in St. Louis. Onofrio's grandsons, Tony and John Favazza, own and operate Favazza's Restaurant and Rose of the Hill – a premier banquet and event facility. Both establishments are part of St. Louis's historic Italian neighborhood known as "The Hill."

Onofrio raised his children in St. Louis's now-forgotten downtown Italian neighborhood, near the present-day Edward Jones Dome. He worked in the produce business, providing a stable middle-class life for his wife and six children before he died suddenly following an illness during the height of the Great Depression.

Tony and John's father, Vito, or "Flee" as he was known, owned and operated a variety of food and beverage related businesses during his life, exposing his children to a broad range of entrepreneurial possibilities and providing a significant influence on his sons.

A little more than 40 years after Onofrio died, Tony Favazza was a young college graduate with a finance degree and real estate development dreams when he convinced his parents to buy a little tavern on the corner of Southwest and Marconi, in the Hill neighborhood of St. Louis. Tony thought the building would be worth more as a restaurant than a bar, so he worked to transform the building from a tavern to a restaurant. The designer wanted to sandblast a large letter 'F' in the front windows to match the restaurant's name. Tony reminded the designer that he was hoping to sell the building in the near-future, and instead opted for a more generic rose, his mother's favorite flower.

Throughout their nearly 40 years in business, there has been a lot of hard work and considerable luck as well. An early break came when Tony was able to hire two chefs who had previously worked at St. Louis's premier fine-dining restaurant, Tony's. Combining their training with lessons from the family kitchen, Tony took control of the



John (L) and Tony Favazza

food. By the late 1970s, John had finished school and was ready to start working full-time in the front-of-the-house, charming customers while serving Tony's creations from the kitchen.

It was a good match, to say the least. John eventually utilized his people skills in a more substantial role, spearheading catering and banquet sales. Tony continued to amaze from the kitchen and maintain the financial health of the business. If there were profits to reinvest, Tony knew where to put them. Favazza's expanded aggressively in 1990, more than doubling the size of the dining room and the kitchen. In 1998, the family purchased the old Ruggeri's building on the Hill and transformed it into the Rose of the Hill, a premiere banquet facility just a few blocks from Favazza's.

Most recently, in 2010, Favazza's built and opened its patio, just west of the original tavern that started it all.

Today, Favazza's is the largest restaurant on the Hill, and the Rose of the Hill is the largest banquet facility on the Hill. Known for great food, a family-friendly atmosphere, and reasonable prices, Favazza's is an anchor for the Hill community and St. Louis city as a whole. The combined businesses employ nearly 100 people. The brothers are particularly proud of their low employee turnover. In an industry where people often seem to come and go so quickly, Tony and John have numerous employees that have been with them 10, 20 and even 30-plus years.

MRA's Greater St. Louis chapter named Tony and John Favazza their 2016 Restaurateurs of the Year. We know Onofrio and Flee would be proud.

