

Alumna's language school grew from desire to explore background

Janna Widdifield January 07, 2008



Carrie Gengo Di Domenico runs an Italian summer camp and preschool.

Although she grew up in an Italian-American family, Carolina “Carrie” Gengo Di Domenico (BA mass communications ’85) says she never learned Italian from her immigrant grandparents because they insisted only English be spoken at home.

“I was very aware that I came from an Italian family, and I was also very aware that there was something missing,” Gengo Di Domenico says. “I used to joke when I was 7 or 8 that ‘one day I’m going to learn Italian and I’m going to teach everyone else in the family.’”

Today, her childhood *annuncio* [announcement] is a reality at *La Piazza di Carolina* — an Italian language school for children and adults that she established in 2005 in the basement of her home in Crestwood, New York.

Gengo Di Domenico began taking Italian in her junior year and says it was “basically my first exposure to formally learning the language.” After DU, she pursued a master’s degree in Italian and traveled to Italy at every opportunity.

Gengo Di Domenico has taught Italian for 12 years in every possible environment — colleges

and universities, elementary and high schools, private lessons and in small groups in her home. But it wasn't until she was laid off from her "dream job" of teaching kindergartners and first-graders that her own school was born.

With a curriculum already in hand and a knack for teaching, Gengo Di Domenico started an Italian summer camp for toddlers. That first summer, she had 10 kids playing and learning in her backyard and basement. Today, she has about 45 students (children and adults) enrolled in language classes, cooking workshops and a five-day-a-week preschool.

"I found a niche because no one in this area was offering Italian to children," she says.

Gengo Di Domenico employs one full-time and one part-time teacher, and most of the classes are taught out of her remodeled basement. She hopes to open a storefront eventually.

As for Gengo Di Domenico's own daughters, Giuliana (7) and Gabriella (4), there's no way their mom will refuse to speak to them in Italian. In fact, her daughters are learning English, Italian and Spanish since her husband, Donald, is a Spanish teacher. Brava, Carolina.