

The San Gennaro Feast is Approaching ... Or is it Two of Them?

Patrizia Orioli (September 12, 2011)



The 85th Annual Feast of San Gennaro, New York City's longest-running, biggest and most revered religious outdoor festival in the United States, will be held Thursday, September 15, through Sunday, September 25, 2011, on the streets of historic Little Italy--the lower Manhattan neighborhood which served as the first home in America for hundreds of thousands of Italian immigrants in the early part of the 20th century. This year however, there also are those who want to celebrate San Gennaro their own way by respecting tradition but progressing with our ever changing times. In the northernmost block of the San Gennaro Feast (at Mulberry Street between Prince and Houston Streets) an innovative cultural and interactive program has been devised.

"The September version of the twice-yearly celebration of the patron saint of Naples, San Gennaro, is nearly upon us. In Italy the main event occurs on September 19, the feast day of San Gennaro, when the faithful gather in the Cathedral of Naples to witness the liquefaction of the saint's blood," journalist Michelle Fabio writes in her column of the British magazine [Italy Mag.](#) [2]



“San Gennaro was the Bishop of Benevento when he was beheaded during Diocletian’s persecution of Christians in 305 A.D. Some of the martyr’s blood was collected by a woman, and it was taken to Naples along with San Gennaro’s skeleton. Just eight years later, the first miracle of the liquefaction of San Gennaro’s blood, which is normally a solid mass, was recorded. The saint is associated with protecting the city from eruptions of Mount Vesuvius as well as other tragedies.”

Now the miracle happens a few times a year, but the first Saturday in May and September 19 are particularly special days for Neapolitans. “Following a boisterous procession through the streets of Spaccanapoli, the historical center of Naples, the silver bust of San Gennaro is placed next to the altar in the Cathedral. The ampoule containing the saint’s blood is shown to those in attendance—religious and political officials as well as hundreds of spectators. Then, after anywhere from moments to more than an hour of intense prayer by the “zie” (aunts) of San Gennaro, women seated in the front row of the church, the blood begins bubbling and changes into a liquid. The church bells ring wildly, the faithful cheer and gather to kiss the ampoule, and Naples is believed to be safe for awhile at least—if the blood fails to liquefy, it is seen as a bad omen for the city. In fact, before the 1980 earthquake that left 2000 dead, the miracle of San Gennaro’s blood had failed to occur.”

Italian communities in the United States have brought the celebrations of San Gennaro's feast along with other cultural and religious traditions. In New York City the Feast of San Gennaro began in September 1926 when newly arrived immigrants from Naples congregated along Mulberry Street in the Little Italy neighborhood, to continue the tradition they had followed in Italy.

[Wikipedia](#) [3] explains that “The immigrant families on Mulberry Street who started it all were Nappi, Vitale, Montanini and Tisi. Each one of them had a café on Mulberry Street, between Grand and Hester Streets. They strung lengths of colored light bulbs across the street from building fire escapes and brought their business out onto the sidewalk. They erected a small chapel in the street to house the image of their patron Saint. They invited all to partake of their wares, asking only that the devoted pin a small offering to the ribbon streamers that are hung from the statue's apron. This money was then distributed to the needy poor of the neighborhood. In that way they felt they could do charitable works and also pay homage to their patron Saint.”

Through the decades the festival expanded and is now an 11-day street fair beginning on the second Thursday in September in the Little Italy area of Manhattan as an annual celebration of Italian culture and the Italian-American community. Centered on Mulberry Street, which is closed to traffic for the occasion, the festival generally features parades, street vendors, food stands featuring sausages, zeppole and other Italian-American specialties, and games.

The Grand Procession is held starting at 2 p.m on the last Saturday of the feast, immediately after a celebratory Mass at the [Church of the Most Precious Blood](#) [4]. This is a Roman Catholic candlelit procession in which the statue of San Gennaro is carried from its permanent home in the Most Precious Blood Church through the streets of Little Italy.

Presented annually since 1996 by [Figli di San Gennaro, Inc. \(Children of San Gennaro\)](#) [5], a not-for-profit community organization dedicated to keeping alive the spirit and faith of the early Italian immigrants, this year’s Feast (the 85th) is expected once again to attract more than one-million people from the four corners of the globe to the streets of Little Italy to participate in the annual Salute to the Patron Saint of Naples.

The 11-day event will feature religious processions and colorful parades, free musical entertainment every day, a wide variety of ethnic food delicacies, charming restaurants and cafes and even a world-famous cannoli-eating competition! Couples who may have met at the Feast and eventually got married are invited to attend the feast's 85th birthday celebration and talk about what it has meant to them!

There also are those who want to celebrate San Gennaro their own way by respecting tradition but



progressing with our ever changing times.

The [Two Bridges Neighborhood Council](#) [6] (“Two Bridges”), in collaboration with the [Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral](#) [7], will embellish Manhattan's annual San Gennaro feast with innovative cultural and interactive programming at Mulberry Street between Prince and Houston Streets - the most northern final block of the San Gennaro Feast.

Two Bridges took the opportunity of the annual feast to establish the San Gennaro Gateway North location as a possible destination point, the first in a plan for the development of a series of “gateways” to facilitate visitor and tourist access points to the Chinatown-Little Italy Historic District. It is also considered as an experiment to explore a pedestrian way on a street that includes such landmark structures as the [Puck Building](#) [8] and the Basilica of St. Patrick's campus.

Their program includes: performances staged on the grand steps of the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, featuring jazz numbers by notable Italian musicians like Bucky Pizzarelli, Gene Bertoncini, Piers Lawrence, the Tre Bella group, the Anabella Lenzu Dance Company and Liz Miele. Bocce tournaments on both weekends of the feast, including “In Bocca Al Lupo” (a.k.a. Cornhole), hosted by the [NYC Social Sports Club](#) [9] with free play sessions all day during the week. Having special relevance to the Patron Saint of Naples, a special parish [Red Cross](#) [10] Blood Drive. The unveiling of a hanging sculptural piece suspended between the historic landmarks of the Puck Building and the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral Designed by [SOFTlab](#) [11]. A special chorale concert of Italian Renaissance music by [AmorArtis](#) [12], the Basilica's choir-in residence with the Basilica Schola. A theatrical reading of the 1911 immigrant tragedy at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in the Cathedral proper. An exhibit at St. Michael's Russian Catholic Church of imperial vestments worn during the coronation liturgy of Czar Nicholas.

The San Gennaro Gateway North aims to establish the idea of Houston and Mulberry Streets as one in a series of future gateways into the historic district, and at the same time, promote the annual San Gennaro Feast through lively cultural programming that will represent a re-imagining of the future feast within the milieu of the traditional feast –at least on this street.

Figli di San Gennaro program:

Thursday, September 15 (Opening Day)

2 to 3 PM - 10th Annual Cannoli Eating Competition

The Performance Stage at the northwest corner of Grand and Mott Streets will be the site of this eating competition, sanctioned by The International Federation of Competitive Eaters, to determine who can eat the most cannoli within a given six-minute period? The winner will receive a Championship Belt and will be recognized as The World's Champion Cannoli Eater. Trophies will be awarded to the 2nd and 3rd Place finishers.

6 to 7 PM - Blessing of the Stands

Parish Priests from Most Precious Blood Church will walk through the streets of the Feast blessing all the restaurants, cafes, shops and vendors so that they will all have a successful Feast.

Saturday, September 17

2 - 4 PM: 85th Birthday Party for Little Italy's Feast of San Gennaro

Little Italy's Feast of San Gennaro will celebrate its 85th birthday with a gala birthday celebration that will take place between 2 and 4 PM on Grand Street between Mulberry and Mott Streets.



Highlights of the party will include a performance of traditional Italian music and folk songs plus the unveiling of a large 6' birthday cake on a 3' base, weighing 2,000 pounds designed and created by Little Italy's world famous Ferrara's Bakery. 100,000 slices of the cake will be distributed to members of the public on a first-come, first-served basis on Saturday afternoon during the party. Construction of the cake will take two days and will take place in public view in front of Ferrara's Bakery on Grand Street starting Thursday afternoon, September 15. The cake will be constructed inside a see-through, temperature- controlled plastic bubble inside a special candy garden display.

Sunday, September 18

10 AM – 4 PM – Feast of San Gennaro Blood Drive in association with the American Red Cross.

Figli di San Gennaro, organizers of the Annual Feast of San Gennaro in Little Italy, will hold a day-long Blood Drive, in association with the American Red Cross, at St. Patrick's Basilica Youth Center, 268 Mulberry Street (between Houston and Prince Streets). Those interested in donating blood can call 1-800- RED CROSS or visit www.redcrossblood.org [13] to schedule a donation time. The drive is sponsored by Figli di San Gennaro and The Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral. There will be refreshments and giveaways all day long.

Parades/Processions

There will be two Processions, each featuring the Statue of San Gennaro. Each one will begin at Most Precious Blood Church -- The Religious Procession (Monday, September 19) will start from the Patio entrance of the church on Mulberry Street, and the Grand Procession (Saturday, September 24) will begin at the Baxter Street entrance to the church. Both Processions will proceed north on Mulberry to Houston, then move south on Mott to Grand, where they will turn right on Grand to Baxter Street.

The Parades are scheduled as follows:

Monday, September 19 (Official Feast Day)

5PM --

A Celebratory High Mass in honor of San Gennaro in Most Precious Blood Church, the National Sanctuary of San Gennaro.

6 PM --

A Religious Procession in which the Statue of San Gennaro is carried through the streets of the Feast.

Saturday, September 24 (Grand Procession)

2PM - A colorful parade with floats, marching bands, musical entertainers and the Statue of San Gennaro through the streets of Little Italy

Two Bridges Neighborhood Council ("Two Bridges") and the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral program:

LIVE MUSICAL PERFORMANCES

Located at 260 Mulberry Street, on the steps of the Basilica

Thurs 9/15

5:30pm - Tre Bella

7pm - Bucky Pizzarelli & Jack Wilkins

Fri 9/16



7pm - Gene Bertoncini & Roni Ben Hur

Sat 9/17

6:30pm - LuLu LoLo Performing Artist

8pm - Theatrical Reading of "Labor of Love"

Inside Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral

Sun 9/18

2pm - Vic Juris & Sheryl Bailey

7pm - Liz Miele hosts Michela Musolino, Lorraine Ferro, JoAnn Robertozzi, Anthony Tolve, Deb Longino, Dimitri Minucci, Jennifer Carvo

Tues 9/20

7pm - Liz Miele hosts Jimmy Alva, Tre Bella, Allison Scola, Jennifer Carvo, Allison Tartalia

Thurs 9/22

7:30pm - The Allison Scola Project with traditional Sicilian Dances

Fri 9/23

7pm - Paul Bollenback & Ron Affif

Sat 9/24

8pm - Piers Lawrence & Reuben Wilson & Greg Bandy

Sun 9/25

6pm - Vinnie Guiles on Accordion

7pm - Anabella Lenzu Dance Company with Traditional Dances of Italy

AMERICAN RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE

September 18, 11am - 4pm

Located at 268 Mulberry Street with St. Patrick's Youth Center

BOCCE & "IN BOCCA AL LUPO" TOURNAMENTS + OPEN PLAY

Daily 12noon - 10pm

Located on Mulberry Street near Prince Street



AMOR ARTIS CLOSING CONCERT

September 25 @ 4pm

Located within the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, Mott / Prince Streets

IMPERIAL VESTMENTS DISPLAY

Daily

Located at 266 Mulberry Street within St. Michael's Russian Catholic Church

THE GATEWAY NORTH

Daily

Tents courtesy of the Festival of Ideas for the New City

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- [2] <http://www.italymag.co.uk>
- [3] <http://www.wikipedia.org>
- [4] <http://www.mostpreciousbloodchurch.net>
- [5] <http://www.sangennaro.org/index.htm>
- [6] <http://www.twobridges.org>
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